FLORENCE AND TUSCANY

TRAVEL GUIDE

Complete edition

Book One

&

Book Two

George Esperidis B.

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INTRODUCTION

If you are holding this book – **a complete and perhaps most unusual guide to Florence and Tuscany** – most likely you are a professional traveller who approaches the planning of their trip fundamentally and is looking not only for vivid impressions but also for new, interesting knowledge. In this case, you have made the right choice.

My name is George Esperidis, and I am an art historian, a traveller, and simply a person who fell in love with Italy. In my guide, "All Shades of Tuscany," we will embark on an exciting journey through one of the most beautiful cities in Europe, an important centre of the Renaissance and the “trendsetter of cultural fashion” (Florence), as well as the land of wine, cheese, and architectural masterpieces (Tuscany). We will travel through 22 centuries, visit the homes of Dante, Petrarch, and the powerful Medici, and discover what real Tuscans eat and why they consider themselves Italians only as a second priority. Our path will take us through Lucca, Pisa, San Gimignano, Siena, and Arezzo – the most beautiful, significant, and unforgettable cities of Tuscany, also known as the “Cities of Art.”

In addition to fascinating stories about these places and their inhabitants, in my guide, you will find:

- The best cafes, restaurants, taverns, and bars (with the most up-to-date information)
- Useful tips on choosing the right areas to stay so that nothing will interfere with your full enjoyment of Tuscany
- Advice on buying transport tickets and many other details often overlooked in other guides but so important for any traveller

This book combines guides to Florence and Pistoia and to the main "Cities of Art" of Tuscany: Lucca, Pisa, San Gimignano, Siena, and Arezzo. It is important to note that I have not included time for visiting all the museums, as this is a very personal matter. For some, the Uffizi

Gallery, for example, could be enough to "get lost" for a whole week (if not for the persistent security guards who escort everyone out before closing time). Others might want to visit several museums but see only the main exhibits. Therefore, leaving the planning of the museum tours to my readers, I have highlighted only the most important collections and exhibitions of individual museums. I also feel obliged to point out that all information in this guide is accurate and intended for entertainment purposes.

Thank you for choosing this guide. Have a nice holiday in the heart of Italy!

Yours sincerely,

George Esperidis.

A FEW WORDS ABOUT TUSCANY: THE COUNTRY OF MEAT, WINE, AND ARCHITECTURAL MASTERPIECES



Perhaps it was here that ancient Roman culture first took root: in this picturesque, hilly land washed by the waters of the Tyrrhenian Sea. More accurately, it was not entirely ancient Roman but Etruscan culture – the very foundation upon which the far more famous ancient Roman culture would rise. The origins of the Etruscans remain a mystery, but it is well known that their civilisation was quite advanced. From the Etruscans, the future ancient Romans would adopt the art of gladiatorial combat, chariot racing, and funeral rites. The memory of the Etruscans survives today in local toponymy:

“Tuscany” is derived from the Latin “Tuscia” (“land of the Tusci”), which is what the ancient Romans called their predecessors in these parts. The Tyrrhenian Sea also took its name from this enigmatic people: The ancient Greeks referred to the Etruscans as “Tyrrhenoi” or “Tyrrhenians.”

In any case, today Tuscany is inhabited by Tuscans – yes, first and foremost, the locals consider themselves Tuscans, Florentines, Pisans, and so on, calling themselves Italians only as part of a collective identity. In Italy, as in the United Kingdom, a vast number of small states existed in a relatively small territory for a long time, uniting into a single entity only in 1861. For the centuries preceding this date, during which the Italian peninsula was divided by numerous state borders, a wide variety of Italian dialects developed: Tuscan (the basis for the literary Italian language), Venetian, Neapolitan, Sicilian, and many more. These dialects persist to this day and play an important role in the national self-identification of the residents of different regions in Italy. (Yes, it is a bit more complex than pizza, pasta, and Chianti.)

Tuscany covers an area of 22,994 square kilometres (8,878 square miles) and has a population of around 3.7 million. The region is one of the largest wine-producing centres in Europe. Only in Tuscany does a centuries-old, uninterrupted family tradition of winemaking exist: The Antinori and Frescobaldi families have been producing wines for the past 700 years. Incidentally, the pioneers of winemaking in Tuscany were most likely the Etruscans. Their amphorae, in which local wines were exported to the southern part of the peninsula, date back to the 8th and 7th centuries BC.

As the birthplace of the Italian Renaissance, Tuscany is renowned for its so-called “cities of art”: Florence, Siena, Lucca, Arezzo, Pisa, and San Gimignano. In Tuscany, three major schools of painting – the Luccan, Sienese, and Florentine – emerged and flourished. Also, in Tuscany, great figures such as Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo Buonarroti, Dante Alighieri, Giotto di Bondone, and many others were born, grew up, and earned their immortal fame.

However, Tuscany can seduce more than the mind; its cuisine is highly intriguing and distinctive. One well-known dish is the Florentine steak – bistecca alla fiorentina – prepared from the T-bone of a young bull or

heifer. It is traditionally served with cannellini beans, olive oil, and a cabbage salad and accompanied by a glass of Chianti Classico – arguably the most famous of Tuscany's red wines. Another well-known appetizer is crostini toscani – thin slices of toasted bread or flatbread served with chicken pâté, either coarse or smooth, depending on the chef's style. And, of course, one of the most famous Tuscan appetizers is taglieri toscani – a plate of assorted cheeses and cured meats, usually featuring sheep's cheese, the most common type in Tuscany.

As for main courses, I strongly recommend trying Pasta con Ragu di Cinghiale – pasta with wild boar ragù. If you are travelling through Tuscany in the autumn or early winter, you must also try Pasta con Tartufo – a famous local pasta with the freshest truffles. And, of course, your visit to Siena would not be complete without Pici Caccio Pepe – a type of pasta made from thick spaghetti with cheese and pepper. This dish is specific to Sienese regional cuisine.

Now that our appetites are whetted, let us embark on the long-awaited journey to the green hills, fairy-tale fortress towns, and winding rivers of one of the most beautiful regions of Italy: Tuscany.



WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO VISIT TUSCANY AND FLORENCE?

The best times to travel are likely spring (from April to the end of May) or autumn (from October to mid or late November). During these periods, Florence, as well as other cities in Tuscany, has fewer tourists, so you won't have to endure long queues to enter city museums or wait endlessly for a table at a restaurant just to have a proper meal instead of dining on the steps of a city staircase. Additionally, spring and autumn in Tuscany offer the most pleasant weather: the heat has either not yet arrived or has begun to wane, making walks through the stone-paved streets of the region's ancient cities less exhausting due to the absence of oppressive heat. You also won't need to constantly carry an umbrella, as Tuscany experiences heavy rains frequently in winter.

In spring, all of Tuscany is adorned with the lush bloom of the most fragrant herbs and plants, transforming its already enchanting landscapes into something truly extraordinary. However, if you have allergies to flower pollen, then autumn would be the ideal time for you to explore this land of wine, meat, and architectural masterpieces.

WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO DO AND TAKE INTO ACCOUNT BEFORE TRAVELING?

The most important part of any journey is its planning and organization. Tuscany is a favorite destination for tourists, and insufficient attention to early booking of hotels, tickets, or car rentals can ruin your entire vacation, which, of course, we will not allow.

Even if you plan to travel in autumn or spring—before the official tourist season begins or after it ends—it is worth booking tickets to the main museums of Florence and renting a car in advance for trips to Pisa, Lucca, and other wonderful Tuscan cities.

Tickets and tours to most of Florence's most popular museums—the Uffizi Gallery, the Accademia Gallery, the Palatine Gallery, and so on—can be booked online on the Italy Museum website in the Florence section (we will certainly discuss the main museums of Florence in detail). On this same website, you can also find a hotel, if you do not prefer to rent an apartment on a daily basis.

If you plan to rent a car, keep in mind that there are areas in Tuscan cities with traffic restrictions. These areas are marked as "zona a Traffico Limitato" (ZTL). In Florence, for example, Piazza del Duomo, Via Tornabuoni, and Piazza Pitti are entirely pedestrian zones. Entering these squares and streets by vehicle (except for taxis, fire trucks, and ambulances) is subject to a hefty fine.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF FLORENCE – THE CITY OF ETERNAL RENAISSANCE.



Once, on the banks of the Arno River, the eternal forces of good and evil merged to create a city of astonishing contradictions, where bloody tyrants donated millions to the creation of the greatest works of art, where the Renaissance, the son of great antiquity, took its first breath, and where time itself retreated, halting its relentless grind. This city is Florence.

Strolling—no, not strolling, but slowly drifting through these ancient streets between churches and palazzos, from square to square, among the stones bathed in gentle sunlight the color of fresh bread crust, it might seem to you as though this city has always been here. But, of course, that is not the case, at least not on a cosmic scale. The founding of Florence is usually dated to 59 BC, and the circumstances of this event are ambiguous. According to some accounts, the city originally began as a village for military veterans. During the late Roman Republic, when

army service became the domain of professionals rather than conscripts, all who completed their term received a plot of land, a pension, Roman citizenship, and were freed from all obligations. According to other accounts, the famous Gaius Julius Caesar ordered the construction of Florence as an outpost to counter the garrison of the rebellious Lucius Sergius Catilina, located six kilometers (3.12 miles) from this spot, who was attempting to seize consular power in the Republic by military means. What can be stated with certainty is that the founding of Florence was closely tied to the military, as many years later, having become a full-fledged Roman city, it was officially dedicated to the God of War—Mars.

There is no consensus on the origin of the city's name either. According to the poetic version, it indicates the time of its founding, which fell on the "Floralia"—festivals dedicated to the ancient Roman Goddess of Spring, Flora, held annually from April 28 to May 3. According to the logical version, "Florence" is nothing other than a modified Latin word "Fluentia," literally meaning "flow," thus pointing to the city's location at the confluence of the Arno and Mugnone rivers. I don't know about you, but I much prefer the first theory.

Either way, the first reliable information about the life of the settlement dates back only to 123 AD—when the first stone bridge over the Arno River was built. By that time, Florence already had all the essential attributes of a Roman city: baths, aqueducts, a forum, an amphitheater, and, of course, a river port, which facilitated trade with Pisa.

By the end of the 3rd century AD, the city had become an important center. Emperor Diocletian stationed the headquarters of a legion commander responsible for the entire region of Tuscia, which is known today as Tuscany. This name derives from the ancient people who inhabited these lands before the arrival of the Latins—the Etruscans. The origin of the Etruscans remains a subject of debate, but it is known for certain that the Latins adopted many things from them that we associate with Ancient Rome: the art of gladiatorial combat and chariot racing. The toponym "Etruria," directly pointing to the ancient inhabitants of these lands, will appear again on our journey, so I advise you, my dear companion, to keep it in mind.

Christianity, which later fused with ancient art to produce the countless masterpieces of the Italian Renaissance, came to Florence at the very beginning of the 4th century, brought by merchants from the East (Greece and Syria). By then, the city was already an important trading

center on the Apennine Peninsula, with a population of about 15,000 people (while the capital of the Empire, Rome, had about 750,000 inhabitants). The first Christian church in Florence appeared at that time, outside the city's fortress walls, and in 313 AD, the first Florentine bishop—Felix (translated from Latin as "Happy")—was mentioned.



Giorgio Vasari - The Founding of Florence

It seems that the new religious teaching spread rather slowly among the city's inhabitants. The decisive event in the "Christianization" of Florence was the invasion by Germanic barbarian Ostrogoths led by Radagaisus (not to be confused with Radagast the Brown from "The Hobbit," who has nothing to do with this) in 405-406 AD. The main roles

in the defense of the Florentine fortress were played by Emperor Honorius's general, Flavius Stilicho (himself a former Vandal), who brought 15,000 soldiers from Liguria, and the Christian bishop Zenobius, who gathered the townspeople for a large prayer service. The salvation of Florence from Radagaisus's Ostrogoths was attributed to Zenobius's prayers rather than Stilicho's military skills. It is believed that this event led the few remaining pagan inhabitants, "struck by the power of the Christian God," to convert, making Florence a wholly Christian city. Mars was deposed as the city's patron deity and replaced by John the Baptist (though this may have occurred somewhat later). One of the city's first churches, Santa Reparata, was erected and dedicated to the early Christian martyr Reparata of Caesarea, whose memory was celebrated on the day of the Ostrogoths' repulsion from Florence. She, alongside John the Baptist, became one of the city's heavenly patrons. Today, the famous cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore stands on the site of Santa Reparata, but remnants of the ancient church, including a beautiful mosaic floor, can still be seen in the areas beneath Florence's main architectural masterpiece.

Dark times came for Florence, as for all of Italy, after 476 AD, when the commander of the Roman mercenary army, Odoacer, forced the last Western Roman Emperor, Romulus Augustulus, to abdicate and declared himself the first King of Italy and viceroy of the Eastern Roman Emperor Zeno. The unified Roman Empire had been divided into Western and Eastern Empires in 395 AD, after the death of Emperor Theodosius I. While no radical changes occurred in the lives of the Romans under Odoacer's rule (contrary to the common belief in the "catastrophe of Ancient Rome," old institutions of power were preserved, and relative peace and prosperity reigned after 473 AD), Florence was ravaged in the mid-6th century during the so-called "Gothic Wars." These wars were sparked by the Eastern Roman Empire's (Byzantium's) attempt to reclaim control over the lands of Italy, which were then held by the rebellious Ostrogoths, whose main territories were located here in Tuscany. These wars lasted about 20 years, during which Florence was captured by the Byzantines (541 AD), reclaimed and burned by the Ostrogoths (550 AD), and recaptured by the Greeks in the same year. According to Byzantine sources, the army of Greek general Narses found the city completely destroyed and depopulated after the Ostrogoths, but these accounts are not confirmed by archaeological evidence. Moreover, a beautifully preserved structure from that period,



Pope Nicolas II

the Torre della Pagliazza on Piazza Sant'Elisabetta, is considered by many researchers to be the oldest building in the city, remaining intact since its construction and which we will discuss further later on.However, after defeating the Ostrogoths, the Greeks could not hold Italy for long. In 568, another Germanic tribe, the Lombards (yes, the Germans didn't let Italy live in peace), invaded the northeastern part of Italy. Under their rule, Florence fell into complete decline, as the new rulers took control of the crucial trade routes connecting Florence with nearby cities like Altopascio and Fucecchio, and most importantly, Rome. Due to the decline in trade and consequently in production, this period became the true "dark ages" for Florence. A "light" began to appear only at the beginning of the 9th century, despite ancient manuscripts often linking the "revival" of Florence to the legendary unifier of the West, Charlemagne, who stayed in the city in 781 and 786 after the Franks (who, oddly enough, were also of Germanic origin) conquered the Lombard Kingdom of Italy. Indeed, during Charlemagne's time, there were some changes in the life of Florence, and the memory of his presence at the laying of the first stone of the future church of Santi Apostoli is preserved in a marble plaque in front of it. However, the city truly flourished only under Charlemagne's grandson, Lothair I, in 825-854. During his reign, the Imperial School of Rhetoric, Law, and Liberal Arts was established in Florence, and the city became the capital of a province (county) within the Kingdom of Italy.

The true golden age of Florence came in the 11th century, laying a strong foundation for its future transformation into one of the capitals of the Italian Renaissance. At that time, Tuscany, as well as Modena, Ferrara, Mantua, Brescia, and Reggio (almost all of northern Italy), were ruled by the House of Canossa, a family of Lombard origin. It was during the



Matilda of Tuscany

reign of the Margraves from the House of Canossa that a Florentine bishop, Gerard of Burgundy, was elected Pope for the first time, taking the name Nicholas II (yes, in those days, the election of a Pope could be and was influenced by various ruling houses).

The Margraves of Canossa, who controlled almost all of northern Italy, played a key role in the late 11th century conflict between the Emperors of the Holy Roman Empire and the Roman Popes for supreme power in the Empire. One manifestation of this conflict was the right to appoint abbots and bishops in the Imperial principalities, known as the right of investiture, hence the conflict's name—the "Investiture Controversy." The last representative of the House of Canossa, Margravine Matilda, played a crucial role in the struggle between Pope Gregory VII and Emperor Henry IV. She lived in Florence with her large personal guard, ensuring relative peace in the city during those turbulent times when half of its inhabitants supported the pontiff and the other half the monarch. The coat of arms of the House of Canossa depicted a dog standing on its hind legs, gnawing a bone, and the family's motto read: "When the dog finishes the bone, the House of Canossa will end." The dog finished the bone on July 24, 1115, when Margravine Matilda died, bequeathing all her vast possessions to the Catholic Church, having no heirs.

These holdings, of course, included Florence. Following this "transfer of ownership," the city found itself effectively without direct governance, as the Catholic Church at that time had other priorities besides managing Florence. This situation spurred the Florentines to establish local self-government, leading to the formation of the future Florentine Republic. Just ten years after Margravine Matilda's death, the city was first documented to have consuls at its head: Burellus, Florenzitus,

Broccardus, and Servolus. It is also likely that a council known as "Bonomini" or "Good Men" was established, consisting of 150 members elected four times a year by the citizens of Florence, to whom the consuls were accountable.

During this period in the mid-12th century, the political scene saw the emergence of families destined to make their names legendary through their patronage of the artists, sculptors, and architects of the Renaissance: the Buondelmonti, Gherardini, Scolari, Strozzi, Brunelleschi, and many others.

Soon, the wealthiest and most influential families of Florence began to form alliances—"coteries"—which effectively took over the city's governance in the latter half of the 12th century. Naturally, the rivalry among these "coteries" led to a brief but bloody civil war. This conflict became the catalyst for the abolition of the consul system, which proved ineffective when several powerful families sought to eliminate each other. In place of the consuls, the citizens established the position of "podestà," an elected city manager chosen by the city council. The podestà had to be from another city (to avoid any local familial influences), possess knightly rank, and have expertise in law and military affairs, effectively limiting candidates to the nobility. The podestà was responsible for representing supreme authority in diplomatic, civil, and judicial matters, though real power remained with the city's oligarchic council.

By the early 13th century, the old noble families had to share power with new families of wealthy merchants and craftsmen, forming a new class of urban elite that played a significant role in city governance. This strengthening of the mercantile and artisan classes likely contributed to the swift economic prosperity of the Florentine Republic. By the 1170s, it took only three years to construct a new city wall, indicating not only Florence's wealth but also its level of technical advancement at the time.

Note the elegant twist in history before the Renaissance begins to dawn: just like in ancient Athens, monarchy disappears in Florence, and power first passes to a limited group of oligarchs. Then, after a long struggle among the classes, it "flows" to the majority of Florentine citizens, giving birth to democracy or, in Latin terms, a republic. Thus, Florence becomes a second ancient Athens, making it unsurprising that this city would become the center of the Renaissance, just as Athens was the center of ancient culture, for art thrives on freedom.

This period of freedom, known in the city's history as the "People's Government," began in the mid-13th century after the Florentines expelled the imperial vicar Frederick of Antioch and the families supporting him, who had established the German Emperor's complete control over Florence shortly before. After expelling the vicar, the citizens created a new system of governance. Alongside the podestà and his two assisting consuls, they introduced the post of "captain of the people." This position, countering the podestà who represented the nobility's interests, advocated for the "middle class"—the craftsmen and merchants organized into "guilds," a prototype of unions. This new system proved so effective that within two years of its establishment, Florence became one of the fastest-growing Italian cities and introduced its gold coin, the florin, which would become the principal currency in Mediterranean trade.

Of course, perpetual peace was slow to arrive in the city: the clashes between supporters of the Roman Popes and the Holy Roman Emperors prevented Florence from enjoying tranquility for a long time. For example, the conflict between the radical Guelphs (uncompromising supporters of the Pope, known as "Black Guelphs") and the "liberal" ("White") Guelphs, who were willing to ally with the Ghibellines—the supporters of the Emperor—resulted in the exile of the great Dante and the father of Francesco Petrarch. They, along with other "White Guelphs," were expelled from Florence when the "Blacks" seized power in the city in 1302.

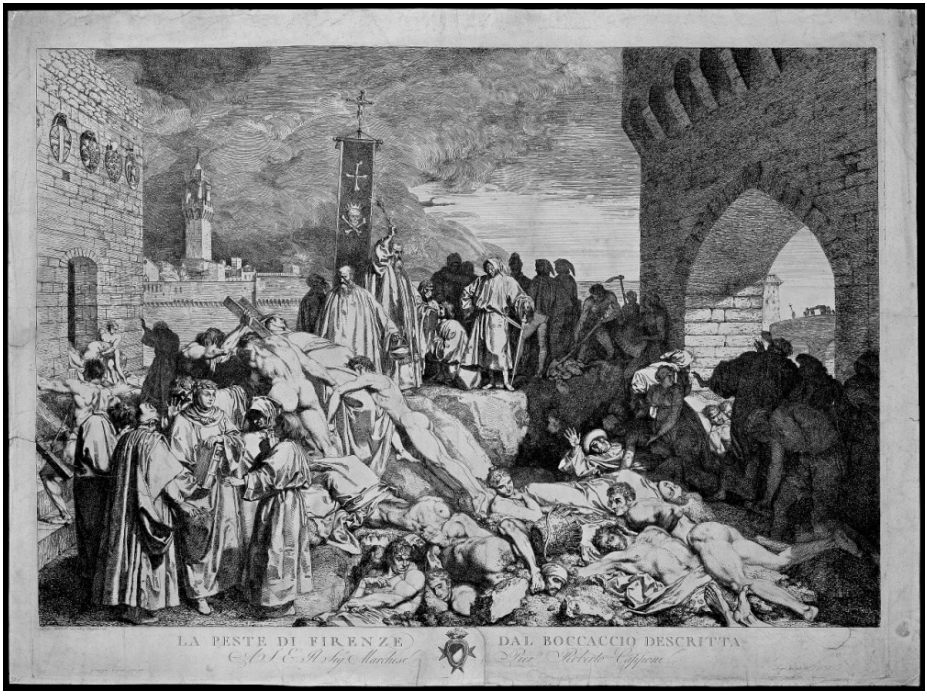
However, political strife did not hinder the city's prosperity. Shortly before the expulsion of Dante and the "White Guelphs" from Florence, the construction of the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore began. More precisely, the preparatory work started: the ancient church of Santa Reparata, which had become hopelessly dilapidated, was dismantled down to its foundation to make way for a new cathedral. This cathedral was intended to surpass even the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, which at that time was the largest Christian church in the world, and to dedicate it to the "Holy Virgin Mary with the Flower of the Lily" ("Fiore" referring to the iris flower or "Heraldic Lily," symbolizing the Immaculate Conception and the emblem of Florence).

The outbreak of the plague in 1347, which claimed the lives of about 60% of Europe's population within five years, had a profound impact on Renaissance art. In Florence, from March to October 1348, about 96,000 people out of the 120,000 living in the city before the epidemic died from

the plague. It was during this time that the future "fathers of the Renaissance" began to ponder the possibility that God had abandoned humanity, as even the Papal Curia could not find an explanation for such a horrific catastrophe. This led to the rise of humanism, a philosophy declaring that the purpose of human existence might not only lie in the worship and understanding of God but also in the improvement and knowledge of oneself, for unlike humans, God is infinite.

One of the victims of the plague in Avignon (a city in the south of France) was Laure de Noves, the beloved of the Florentine Francesco Petrarch. Petrarch celebrated her memory for ten years in his sonnets, which comprised one of the most significant collections in the history of Italian literature, "Il Canzoniere."

Another victim of the epidemic was the sculptor Andrea Pisano, who, along with Giotto, worked on the decoration of the famous campanile of the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore. Giotto himself died eleven years before the epidemic, having completed only the first tier of his famous campanile, which was finally finished in the early 15th century.



Boccaccio's "The Plague of Florence in 1348,"



Petrarch's Laura, after Giorgione.

In the late 13th century, specifically in 1292, extremely important reforms were carried out in the Florentine Republic, leading to the formation of the "Second Democracy" and the complete removal of the hereditary aristocracy from the city's governance. The author of these reforms was Giano della Bella, a member of the wool merchants' guild. Della Bella was perhaps one of the first to realize that power lay not with those of noble birth but with those who were wealthier. It was during this period that the office of the "Gonfalonier of Justice" was established. Gonfaloniers were city standard-bearers (named after the rectangular banner called a gonfalon). The Gonfalonier headed the Signoria (Priory), the city government, which included representatives from the craft guilds. The Gonfalonier was chosen by lot from among the members of Florence's senior guilds and served for a term of only two months. This short term balanced the broad powers (legislative initiative, military command, convening councils) he held and helped prevent new attempts at power usurpation in the Republic.

Ironically, it was through the position of Gonfalonier that the Medici family came to power. This banking family, which rose through issuing loans to ruling houses and later to royal dynasties, eventually intermarried with the Habsburgs and Bourbons, and managed to ascend to the Papal Throne (with Medici Popes Leo X, Pius IV, Clement VII, and Leo XI). In 1530, after their expulsion from Florence, the Medici, with the support of Emperor Charles V, captured the city after a ten-month siege, and then the last Gonfalonier of Justice, Alessandro de' Medici, was proclaimed the first Duke of Florence.

The Medici tyranny, marked by the excesses of the Inquisition and the transformation of Florence into the capital of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, lasted 173 years. Despite the despotic rule of the dukes, their



Ferdinando I de' Medici

capital remained one of Europe's most important cultural centers. It was at the court of the renowned patron of musicians, Grand Duke Ferdinando I, in the late 16th century, that the first operas in history were staged.The relative liberalization in Florence's life, which by then had little resemblance to its former republican governance, only occurred in the early 18th century under the rule of Grand Duke Gian Gastone. Ironically, it was under his reign that the Medici lineage came to an end. After his death, Florence, along with all of Tuscany, was transferred to Francis III, former Duke of Lorraine, who renounced his rights to Lorraine upon marrying Archduchess Maria Theresa, the only daughter and heir of Emperor Charles VI of Austria. In those times, states were considered private property of ruling houses, and no one bothered to ask the Florentines for their opinion on the "transfer" of their country to another ruler. The marriage with the heir to the Austrian throne required Francis III to renounce the Lorrainian throne and cede his country to France (again, without consulting the inhabitants of Lorraine). The Grand Duchy of Tuscany, in terms of area and value, seemed a fair exchange for Lorraine, especially since the Medici dynasty had conveniently ended.

Thus, the Habsburg-Lorraine house ruled Tuscany until the unification of Italy in 1860-1861, with a brief interruption during the Napoleonic Wars: in 1801, after the annexation by France of several small duchies and principalities in Northern Italy previously belonging to the Bourbons, Napoleon Bonaparte "gifted" them the Grand Duchy of Tuscany as "compensation" for their recent losses and transformed Florence into the capital of the Kingdom of Etruria (again, without consulting the Florentines). Etruria lasted only a short time: by 1807, it



The first King of Italy,
Vittorio Emanuele II.
Photo portrait from 1861

was annexed by the French Empire, and in 1815, the Habsburgs returned to Tuscany.
The revolutionary wave of 1848, which swept through all of Europe, shook Italy and became its first major step towards unifying the many small duchies, principalities, and kingdoms into a single country. In Florence, as well as in Modena and Venice, where the power was in the hands of the Austrian Habsburg-Lorraine house, revolutionary sentiments were especially strong and primarily expressed in hatred for the Austrian rulers, who firmly upheld medieval traditions. For the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Leopold II, the 1848 revolution resulted in a temporary loss of power, which he managed to restore only by "granting" a constitution and convening a parliament. However, by 1852, Leopold had repealed his constitution and concluded a concordat with the Papal Throne, granting the Catholic clergy extraordinarily broad powers in his country (a move opposed by many Florentines). Ultimately, Leopold II was forced to abdicate in 1859 when a mass uprising erupted in Florence. This led to the complete and final overthrow of the Habsburgs in Tuscany and the incorporation of the central part of the Apennine Peninsula into the Kingdom of Italy in 1861.Shortly after, in 1864, the first King of Italy, Victor Emmanuel II, ordered the transfer of the country's capital from Turin to Florence. Rome would not become the capital of Italy until 1871, when the Papal State, of which Rome was the capital, was abolished. The transfer of the capital was driven by the fact that Turin was dangerously close to the border with France and Austria, where a new war was brewing. To accommodate the city to the status of the government center of the new state, architect Giuseppe Poggi was commissioned to expand the city. Between 1865 and 1871, under his

guidance, the ancient walls of Florence were demolished, and in their place, ring boulevards inspired by the contemporaneous reconstruction of Paris by Baron Haussmann were created, culminating in Piazzale Michelangelo. Additionally, a gasometer was installed in Florence, regulating the pressure of "city gas" that lit the streets. Thanks to a state loan project that raised about 30,000,000 Italian lire, Poggi's project was realized in five years. However, the transfer of the capital from Florence to Rome immediately after the annexation of the Papal State in 1871 halted the city's development.

Despite everything, the 19th century brought a new "renaissance" to Florence—both economically and socially. The city's population doubled after 1861, and even the earthquake on May 18, 1895, which caused significant damage to city monuments, did not hinder Florence's rapid recovery. The city became an unofficial capital of European culture, attracting young artists, sculptors, writers, and patrons from all over Europe. In 1907, the French Institute of Florence was established, followed by the British Institute in 1917, both of which continue to study Franco-Italian and Anglo-Italian cultural relations, respectively.

After Mussolini's overthrow in 1943, Florence was occupied by German troops who conducted mass executions of members of the Italian anti-fascist resistance and sympathetic Florentines. The city remained under Nazi control until August 1944, when it was liberated through fierce battles involving an uprising within Florence and the advance of the 2nd New Zealand Division into Tuscany. Many of its neighborhoods were destroyed but were meticulously restored in the following years.

Today, Florence remains as significant a cultural and economic center of Italy as it was centuries ago. The city's importance to European and world culture is immeasurable, attracting art enthusiasts and tourists from around the globe. And now, my dear traveler, we shall not delay our own exhilarating rendezvous with her any longer—the magnificent lily of the Apennines, the one and only Florence.



Odoardo Borrani . Rendezvous at the Uffizi. 1878.

FLORENCE. LONG-AWAITED DATE.



PIAZZA DELLA SIGNORIA

Yes, this is it—the famous Piazza della Signoria—the starting point for the history of Florence and all of Tuscany. The oldest and still the most important square in the city, it was the center of settlement even in Roman times when a theater, baths, and a textile dyeing workshop were established here (the lineage of the renowned Florentine manufactories of the Renaissance traces back to these establishments). If you step onto this square early on a weekday morning, especially in spring or mid-autumn, when the sun has just risen above the horizon and has not yet gently tickled the black nose of the brave Marzocco, firmly holding the Florentine lily at the Palazzo Vecchio, you will feel as if time has frozen around you. Do not hurry; let this time embrace you, surround you, and immerse you in itself.

You will hear the echoes of 1497 when a bonfire was lit in this square, known as the "Bonfire of the Vanities," where luxurious dresses, mirrors in splendid frames, non-theological books, dice, and playing cards were burned, and Botticelli himself threw two of his paintings into the flames. All these items were confiscated from the Florentines by order of Girolamo Savonarola, a church reformer and an unyielding opponent of Pope Alexander VI (the infamous Borgia) and the Medici clan, which already ruled Tuscany at that time. Savonarola, coming from an old Paduan family, was known from childhood for his piety and Christian virtue, as well as his inclination toward asceticism, which fully manifested in him after an unhappy love affair with a girl from the Florentine Strozzi family. Then, having become completely disillusioned with worldly life, Girolamo entered a monastery and dedicated himself to fighting the excesses and sins in which the Catholic Church was mired at that time.



Pope Alexander VI was condemned by Savonarola for his excessive nepotism (Borgia granted cardinalships and noble titles to all his relatives and friends) and for the moral decay at his court in Rome (the



Girolamo Savonarola

dominance of courtesans and the alleged cohabitation of the Pope with his own daughter). The ruler of Florence and the Tuscan aristocrats were chastised for their "pagan humanism" and "total depravity," where the Florentines allowed themselves to read and analyze ancient pagan philosophers instead of the Bible and theological texts, placing man above God.

Ultimately, Savonarola managed to become the de facto ruler of Florence when the French King Charles VIII's troops entered Tuscany, expelling Piero di Lorenzo de' Medici, who had inherited power in the republic from his father, Lorenzo the Magnificent. It was then that the radical republican Girolamo Savonarola initiated the "purge of luxury": "The rich appropriate the wages of the common people, all income, and taxes," he said. "Any excess is a mortal sin, as it costs the lives of the poor."

Savonarola first reformed the tax system in Florence, which, under the Medici, was, to put it bluntly, quite unfair, and established a maximum income tax rate of 10%. The preacher then proclaimed Jesus Christ as the "lord and king of Florence," and himself as His chosen one. In his addresses to the people, delivered in this very square, Savonarola called for the burning of sodomites at the stake, the cutting out of the tongues of blasphemers, singing only psalms, and reading nothing but the Bible. Of course, historical records do not confirm such widespread repressions in Florence during Savonarola's "dictatorship" (only one person was burned at the stake on charges of sodomy, and most punishments were fines or whippings). However, it is clear that he managed to instill fear in the city's inhabitants, as within just a few months of his rise to power, all songs ceased, and carnivals were no longer held in the city.

Eventually, the French left Florence, and Pope Alexander VI (as was expected) excommunicated Savonarola and threatened to

excommunicate all of Florence and anyone "who would listen to the mad preacher or speak with him." Despite this, the Republic's government hesitated to act against Savonarola, who, in response to his excommunication, called for a General Council to depose the Pope. However, his letter with this appeal, sent to King Charles VIII of France (at that time one of the most powerful monarchs in Europe), was intercepted by Borgia's agents.

On March 25, 1498, in the Basilica of Santa Croce, just a short distance from here at the end of Borgo dei Greci, Franciscan friar Francesco di Puglia, during a sermon, challenged anyone who considered Savonarola's excommunication unlawful to undergo a "trial by fire." The essence of this trial was that the participants would walk into a fire, and if God favored one of them, it was presumed He would save the righteous one. Apparently, Brother Francesco did not expect anyone to take up the challenge, because when the Dominican friar Domenico da Pescia volunteered for the trial by fire, Puglia declared that he would only enter the fire with Savonarola. The latter accepted the challenge, and on the appointed day, he arrived at the Piazza della Signoria where the fire was being prepared. However, as Savonarola and Pescia awaited Francesco di Puglia, who was hiding in the Palazzo Vecchio, it began to rain, making it impossible to light the fire. Thus, the "victory" in the dispute was awarded to Savonarola.



Nevertheless, supporters of the exiled Medici and the Pope had already sentenced the preacher to death. The day after the failed "trial by fire," Girolamo Savonarola was captured by an enraged mob that besieged his San Marco monastery and was taken to the Palazzo Vecchio for interrogation. He and two of his fellow Dominican friars were subjected to brutal interrogations and torture conducted by a commission of 17 men appointed by the Pope. Ultimately, Savonarola confessed that all his prophecies regarding the Pope and the Church were false, and he was condemned to death for heresy. He spent his final days in a cell above the Signoria meeting room in the Palazzo Vecchio, directly under the building's bell tower. On May 23, 1498, Savonarola, along with Dominicans Domenico Buonvicini and Silvestro Maruffi, were hanged in this square before a large crowd, and their bodies were subsequently burned. This act cemented the Medici's return to power in Florence. Today, a round memorial plaque marks the spot where Savonarola and his companions' bodies were burned. You can find it in front of the Neptune Fountain



PALAZZO VECCHIO



Of course, the most famous building in Piazza della Signoria, and indeed in all of Florence, is the Palazzo Vecchio—the "Old Palace." While it is called "Old" now, it was once quite "New," and during the rule of Cosimo I de' Medici, it was known as the "Ducal Palace." However, after the Tuscan ruler moved his residence across the Arno River to the Pitti Palace in 1565, this architectural masterpiece acquired its current name.

Construction of the palace began in 1299, following the suppression of another revolt by an influential family, the Uberti, who sought to seize power in the city. The Florentine craft guilds (or guilds) decreed the confiscation of all the family's property, including the Palazzo dei Fanti and the Palazzo dell'Esecutore di Giustizia (Palace of the Executor of Justice), two palaces located on the site of the current Palazzo Vecchio. To ensure the safety of the Republic's government in the event of another coup attempt, the guilds commissioned the architect Arnolfo di Cambio to design a new palace for the Signoria's meetings. Di Cambio was already renowned for his work on the Basilica of Santa Croce and the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore (the lower part of the facade of which

he adorned with sculptures that have not survived to this day). In his design for the new palace, di Cambio incorporated the old tower of the Foraboschi family, which was slightly extended and integrated into the building's ensemble in 1310 as a bell tower and later (from 1353) as a clock tower. This explains the tower's slightly offset position, as it predates the Palazzo itself.
The tower has held some notable prisoners over the years, including the famous banker Cosimo de' Medici the Elder (who laid the foundations of his family's influence and power in the city but was imprisoned for a time for attempting to conquer the neighboring Republic of Lucca) and the fervent Girolamo Savonarola, whom we have already encountered.
Incidentally, it was during Savonarola's time—a radical republican—that the palace gained one of Florence's main attractions, the Salone dei Cinquecento ("Hall of the Five Hundred").



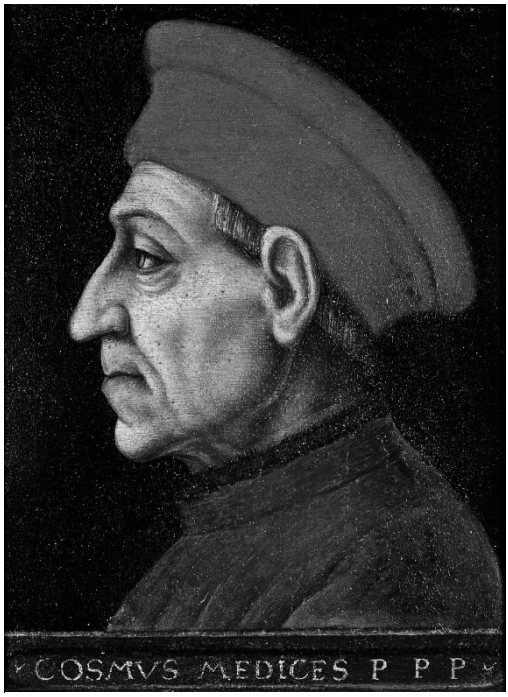
This architectural masterpiece in the Mannerist style (in my opinion, somewhat overly ornate), measuring 52 meters (170.7 feet) in length, 23 meters (75 feet) in width, and 18 meters (59 feet) in height, was intended for the meetings of the Great Council of the Republic, which comprised 500 members (hence the hall's name). Besides its size, the hall is notable for having been worked on by Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo, the only project on which these two great masters collaborated



Gualtieri VI di Brienne Portrait by Luigi Rubio, 1834.

simultaneously. Truth be told, nothing of their frescoes in the "Hall of the Five Hundred" remains: Michelangelo was summoned by Pope Julius II to work on the famous Sistine Chapel, having only made a few sketches for the hall's frescoes, while da Vinci, though he began the painting, was unable to complete it. His fresco, "The Battle of Anghiari," depicting the Florentine army battling the Duke of Milan's forces on June 29, 1440, was to be Leonardo's most monumental work (6.6 x 17.4 m (21.7 x 57 ft)). However, due to da Vinci's unsuccessful experiments with primers and paint mixtures, the fresco began to deteriorate even before its completion, causing delays that led the Republic's Council to demand either the immediate completion of the painting or the return of the money paid. At the same time, da Vinci was invited to work in Milan, then under French rule, leaving his fresco in the "Hall of the Five Hundred" unfinished. Only between 1555-1572, during the renovation of the hall commissioned by Duke Cosimo I de' Medici and carried out by Giorgio Vasari (whose frescoes adorn the hall today), was Leonardo's work presumably covered or removed. Nonetheless, some hypotheses suggest that Vasari did not destroy the work of the already renowned genius but concealed it under his "Battle of Marciano," located on the east wall of the hall, which you will find to your right if you face the podium.

But let's return to the broader history of the building. Palazzo Vecchio began serving as the residence of the Signoria and the seat of the Gonfaloniere of Justice as early as 1302, although its exterior and interior appearance continued to evolve over time. For example, in 1342-1343, the Palazzo was expanded towards Via del Ninna, making it resemble a fortress. This period marks the brief rule of Gualtieri VI di Brienne, better known as the Duke of Athens—a title inherited from his



Portrait of Cosimo de' Medici. Workshop of Bronzino? 1565-1569.

crusader ancestors who once conquered the ancient homeland of democracy and established a feudal duchy there.

The fortification and expansion of the Florentine ruler's residence began under di Brienne, who was particularly unpopular among the populace, openly disregarding the interests of the merchant class and earning a reputation as a notorious despot. Despite his harsh tax policies helping Florence recover from a severe crisis, just ten months into his rule, the threat of physical harm loomed over di Brienne, prompting him to leave the city.

However, the most significant milestones in the history of Palazzo Vecchio are inextricably linked with the Medici family. The "prudent tyrant" Cosimo de' Medici the Elder, who came to lead the Florentine Republic thanks to his immense wealth and the influence it brought, was, despite his ruthless elimination of political opponents and nepotism (awarding state positions to family members), a great patriot and patron of the arts, literature, and architecture. During his time, the Palazzo Vecchio saw the creation of the First Courtyard—one of the building's three courtyards, which you enter through the main gates on Piazza della Signoria. The initial design of the courtyard was by Michelozzo di Bartolomeo Michelozzi (who Cosimo the Elder also commissioned to decorate the "Hall of Two Hundred," another meeting hall in Palazzo Vecchio), but most of the courtyard's current decorations were added under Duke Cosimo I, the great-great-grandnephew of Cosimo de' Medici the Elder. For instance, on the occasion of his son Francesco de' Medici's marriage to Archduchess Joanna of Austria (daughter of Emperor Ferdinand I of Habsburg), Vasari was tasked with adorning the

courtyard walls with views of Austrian cities (Graz, Innsbruck, Linz, Vienna, Bratislava (Pozsony), Prague, Hall in Tirol, Freiburg im Breisgau, and Konstanz).

But it wasn't just elegant stuccoes, monumental colonnades, marble sculptures, and striking frescoes that adorned Palazzo Vecchio under the Medici. In 1478, a different, more dreadful "decoration" appeared on the windows of this palace—an addition that, paradoxically, was quite in keeping with the spirit of the time—a time of flourishing arts, sciences, and humanism. In April 1478, thick ropes were hanging from the windows of Palazzo Vecchio—once a symbol of the Republic and Florentine democracy—bearing the bodies of Francesco and Jacopo de' Pazzi, Archbishop Francesco Salviati of Pisa, and on December 20, 1479, the merchant Bernardo di Baroncelli. All these individuals were implicated in a conspiracy against the Medici family, particularly Lorenzo "the Magnificent," who had inherited power in the Republic following the death of his father, Piero "the Unfortunate" (son of Cosimo the Elder). Naturally, the hereditary ruler of the Republic could not avoid being considered a tyrant, and Lorenzo de' Medici was undoubtedly one, but he also continued the traditions of his grandfather, actively supporting the arts and sciences, and was himself a poet (it was at Lorenzo's court that the great Botticelli began his rise, for example). The Pazzi are often described as supporters of democratic freedoms who were destroyed by the Medici, with the participants of that failed conspiracy advocating for their revival. However, as is often the case, the true reasons for the discord between the Pazzi and the Medici were far more mundane. In 1474, Lorenzo de' Medici appointed his son-in-law, Rinaldo Orsini, to the archbishopric of Florence, neglecting to consult the Florentines themselves (who were required to give consent for the appointment of a new archbishop). Moreover, the Pazzi family had hoped to see their relative, Francesco Salviati, in this position—Francesco, instead, was given the bishopric of Pisa. Lorenzo de' Medici's less-than-diplomatic actions did not stop there: he had recently fallen out with Pope Sixtus IV, one of the main clients of the Medici Bank, who regularly took loans from it. The cause of their dispute was the town of Imola—a small but strategically located town on the main trade route connecting Florence and Venice. Lorenzo de' Medici had hoped to buy Imola from Duke Galeazzo Maria Sforza of Milan for a colossal sum of 100,000 gold florins, but at the last moment, Galeazzo Maria sold Imola to the Pope for only 40,000. Lorenzo, as the chief banker of the Holy

See, refused to facilitate the transaction, prompting Pope Sixtus IV to turn to the Pazzi Bank. Soon, a conspiracy emerged to overthrow the Medici clan, led by Francesco de' Pazzi, his uncle Jacopo, their relative Francesco Salviati (Bishop of Pisa), merchant Bernardo Bandini, the likely illegitimate son of Pope Sixtus IV, Girolamo Riario (who became the ruler of Imola), and several others. The Pope, although he wrote to the Pazzi that he "could not sanction murder," emphasized that "the Holy See was interested in removing the Medici dynasty from power in Florence" and would "generously reward those who facilitated this." Furthermore, by 2004, it was revealed that Federico da Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino, was also involved in the conspiracy against the Medici: an encoded letter addressed to the Pazzi was found in the Ubaldini family archives, in which he declared his readiness to station 600 of his soldiers outside Florence and occupy the city at the right moment to prevent a counter-coup by the Medici.



Lorenzo the Magnificent with Florence in the background. Portrait by Girolamo Macchietti, 16th century.

The Pazzi planned to eliminate the city's ruler Lorenzo and his brother Giuliano, then occupy Palazzo Vecchio and declare the restoration of the Republic, convene a provisional government, and expel all Medici supporters from the city. Thus, on April 26, 1478, during the Great Mass at Santa Maria del Fiore for Easter, the Pazzi's men attacked the Florentine ruler Lorenzo de' Medici and his brother Giuliano. Francesco Pazzi himself attacked Giuliano with a dagger, inflicting 19 wounds in a frenzy and, in the heat of the attack, accidentally wounding himself. Lorenzo managed to fend off his attackers and take refuge in the cathedral's sacristy. Meanwhile, Francesco Salviati and his men were supposed to capture Palazzo Vecchio (then called Palazzo della



The Hanged Bernardo dei Baroncelli. Sketch by Leonardo da Vinci.

Signoria), but they were thwarted by Cesare Petrucci—a longtime Medici supporter who had recently been appointed Gonfaloniere of Justice (effectively appointed by Lorenzo). Additionally, to the Pazzi's surprise, the Florentines themselves did not support the uprising; instead, they fiercely defended the Medici family and administered justice against the Pazzi supporters. As a result, Francesco Salviati was captured along with Francesco de' Pazzi on the same day. Both conspirators were sentenced to hanging and, to the cheers of the public, were executed from the windows of Palazzo Vecchio on Piazza della Signoria on April 26, 1478. Later that same day, Jacopo de' Pazzi was caught and hanged alongside them: he had tried to escape the city but was overtaken by Medici supporters and, after torture and attempted lynching by the Florentines, was executed. The merchant Bernardo de' Bandini dei Baroncelli, who, along with Francesco Pazzi, had murdered Giuliano de' Medici, also fled but, unlike Jacopo, managed to make it to Constantinople, hoping to seek refuge with the Ottoman Sultan. However, the Sultan ordered Bandini's arrest and return to Florence. Thus, he too was hanged from a window of Palazzo Vecchio—dressed in Turkish clothes and sultan's chains. This was how 26-year-old Leonardo da Vinci saw him on Piazza della Signoria, making a small sketch in his diary—the only remnant of this Florentine merchant.

In total, following the failure of the Pazzi conspiracy, about 80 people were executed on suspicion of involvement: the Medici made no effort to prevent the Florentines from lynching members and relatives of the Pazzi right in the streets. Once the turmoil had subsided, Lorenzo issued a decree confiscating all property and assets of the Pazzi family, forbidding family members and close relatives from holding any public offices, and even banning them from using the Pazzi name. The family was subjected to the ancient Roman practice of *Damnatio Memoriae*—"Damnation of Memory"—whereby the name of the Pazzi was erased from all documents and records, their coats of arms were chiseled off buildings, and so forth. Only after Lorenzo de' Medici's death in 1494 were those family members not directly involved in the conspiracy allowed to return to Florence and reclaim their confiscated property, though they never regained their former influence and wealth.

Sometimes, as I stroll through the winding streets of Florence, passing by the Pazzi Palace at Via del Proconsolo 10, I wonder: what if Cosimo de' Medici the Elder had been executed back in 1433 after the failed attempt to conquer Lucca? At that time, almost the entire Florentine society was opposed to the Medici family. And what if, on Easter Sunday 1478, in the cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, Francesco de' Pazzi had attacked Lorenzo first, rather than Giuliano? It is quite possible that the tyranny of the Medici could have ended, but who could guarantee that another ambitious banking family wouldn't have taken their place? And would Florence be the Florence we know today if, beneath the surface of its extraordinary frescoes, there were not the blood of the Medici family's enemies?

But let us return to Palazzo Vecchio. Before you enter, pay attention to the alternating colored coats of arms beneath the cornice arches: all of them were added to the facade around the same time that Michelozzo di Bartolomeo Michelozzi was working on the decoration of the palace, commissioned by Cosimo de' Medici the Elder in the 15th century. Of course, all these coats of arms are directly related to Florence. The first shield on the left depicts a red cross on a white field. This is the so-called "La Croce del Popolo"—"The Cross of the People"—symbolizing civic freedom and popular governance. Next is a red fleur-de-lis on a silver field, the emblem of the Florentine Guelphs (supporters of the Pope during the Investiture Controversy), which was established as the official emblem of the Florentine Republic after the expulsion of the Guelphs' opponents—the Ghibellines (whose emblem, a white fleur-de-lis on a

crimson field, is located a little further on). Following this is a divided shield, white and red, symbolizing the union of the cities of Fiesole and Florence. The town of Fiesole, now a municipality within the Florence metropolitan area, was founded more than 300 years before Florence, and its proximity to Dante's city was always perceived by the Florentines as that of a mother and daughter. Next is a shield with two golden keys on a red background, representing the Papal States, indicating Florence's submission to the Pope. Immediately following is a blue shield with the golden inscription "Libertas"—"Freedom"—symbolizing Florence's complete independence from anyone. The next coat of arms, preceding the Ghibelline emblem, features a red eagle holding a green dragon in its claws, representing the Guelph party, which, in any case, ultimately triumphed over the Florentine Ghibellines. It is not hard to guess which side of the conflict each animal symbolizes on this emblem. The last two coats of arms are related to the patrons and protectors of Florence—the French House of Anjou: the first is the coat of arms of Duke Charles of Calabria (1298–1328) and King Robert of Naples (1278–1343), and the second is the coat of arms of King Louis I of Hungary (1342–1382).

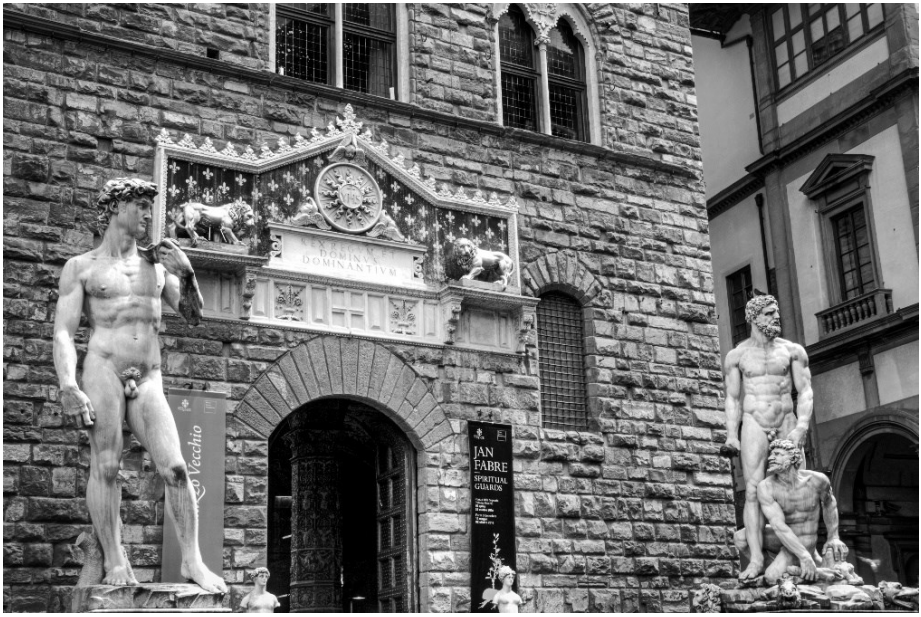


Slowly lowering our gaze from the cornice of the Palazzo to the main entrance, we encounter a striking frons, an elegant marble composition

adorned with heraldic lilies and lions. The inscriptions decorating it, though executed in 1528 and restored in 1851, hark back to the philosophy of Girolamo Savonarola, who in 1494 proclaimed Jesus Christ as the “King and Lord of Florence.” In the central part, we see the monogram of the Savior: "IHS" ("Jesus Hominum Salvator" – "Jesus, Savior of Men"), and below it, His "title": "Rex Regum et Dominus Dominantium" ("King of Kings and Lord of Lords"). Symbolically, these inscriptions were concealed from public view for over 300 years beneath a panel bearing the coat of arms of the Grand Dukes of Tuscany – the Medici and the Habsburgs.



SCULPTURES IN PIAZZA DELLA SIGNORIA



After this frons, our attention is entirely captured by the "guardians" of the Palazzo Vecchio – two of the most prominent sculptures on Piazza della Signoria, which have been in dialogue with each other for nearly half a millennium. They converse in a language understood by only a few of the thousands who pass through Piazza della Signoria every day. The first sculpture – Michelangelo's world-renowned "David" – is, of course, a copy. It is an extraordinarily precise and excellent replica of the original, which is deservedly housed in its own room at the Accademia Gallery. This copy was installed here in 1910, nearly 40 years after the original "David" was moved under the museum dome to protect it from the elements. But let us momentarily set aside formalities, especially since this copy is almost indistinguishable from Michelangelo's masterpiece.

What do you see when you look at this sculpture? On a literal level, you see the Old Testament hero, the future King of Judah, the conqueror of the giant Goliath. Here he is, the handsome youth who chose not to don armor before facing the Philistines, slinging a leather sling over his shoulder and holding the fateful stone in his right hand. But doesn’t it

seem that something is off about this hand? While David's entire body displays calm and confidence, his hand, with its bulging veins, is large, rough, even somewhat disproportionate, and intensely tense. If you stare at this hand for a while, it may even seem that it does not belong to David, and perhaps this impression will not be misleading.

If you have ever visited the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican and seen Michelangelo's incredible frescoes on its ceiling and walls, you must remember two figures from the many depicted there: the figure of Jesus executing the Last Judgment and the figure of Adam receiving life from the Lord. Michelangelo began work on these frescoes almost immediately after completing his "David" and leaving Florence again (the great creator had also worked in Rome before "David," on the famous "Vatican Pietà").

What if I told you that these three figures – David, Adam, and Jesus – were connected by Michelangelo into a single message? It may sound a bit strange, but look closely at their hands. The raised, tense, veined hand of Jesus, who is executing the Last Judgment, is raised in a gesture typically used by ancient orators (e.g., Raphael's "School of Athens") to indicate dialogue. In addition, in Byzantine iconographic tradition, this gesture symbolizes blessing (which we see on many Byzantine icons of Christ). Adam's gesture, reaching out to the Lord who grants him life, can be interpreted as accepting a blessing, while David's lowered hand can be seen as a gesture of humility. Thus, each of these three hands points to the figure of the Lord, emphasizing His unseen (or quite visible, in the case of the Sistine Chapel frescoes) presence in each of the stories depicted by Michelangelo. David, defeating Goliath by slinging a stone with his right hand, opened the way for the advance of the Israelite armies against the Philistines and predetermined the expulsion of the latter from the land of Israel.

There is also an underlying context to this sculpture: this colossal figure was commissioned by the Republic in 1501 during the revival of Florentine democracy when the Medici family was in exile and all power was once again in the hands of elected officials. In this sense, the youthful David, casting his determined gaze at the titan Goliath, symbolized the long-awaited revival of civic freedoms, the laying of the foundation for a new state, the liberation of Florence from long-standing tyranny, and a new dawn of democracy. He embodies the young society of Florence, unafraid to challenge the "monster" represented by the Medici clan.



Statue of Judith with the head of Holofernes

It is all the more intriguing that Michelangelo's "David" was meant to be balanced by a sculpture of Hercules slaying the fire-breathing giant Cacus, the son of the ancient Roman god Vulcan – unlike "David," a completely opaque allusion to the political events of early 16th-century Florence. Indeed, this is the composition we see today: it is with a fearless and slightly contemptuous gaze that David faces it. However, this sculpture was not created by Michelangelo: he received the commission for it in 1508, but the suitable block of marble could not be found, causing Buonarroti to turn to other projects. In the meantime, the Medici family regained control of Florence in 1512, ending the period of "Second Democracy." It was then, in 1523, that the new ruler of the city, Cardinal Giulio de' Medici (who became Pope Clement VII that same year and transferred power to his brother, Ippolito de' Medici), commissioned the sculpture from Baccio Bandinelli (1493-1560). It took Bandinelli nine years to complete the work (from 1527 to 1530, the Medici were again expelled from Florence, along with Bandinelli, causing the project to be halted). Upon completion, the sculpture, under the unchallenged rule of the Medici, came to symbolize the opposite phenomenon: Hercules was seen here as the embodiment of brute force and power overcoming the "chaos of lawlessness" represented by the monstrous offspring of Vulcan (according to legend, Cacus stole four cows and four bulls from Hercules while he slept – another intriguing metaphor). Almost immediately after

its completion, the sculpture provoked a storm of criticism: it was deemed ugly, crude, and vague in both composition and plasticity. Indeed, much of the criticism directed at the sculpture was, in fact, criticism of the Medici family (and the first Florentine duke Alessandro de' Medici even imprisoned those who made particularly scathing comments about the sculpture). However, it cannot be denied that Bandinelli, trying to emulate Michelangelo, was deeply enraged by his competitor's talent. Thus, unlike Michelangelo, who signed his work only once, Bandinelli placed a deliberately prominent inscription on the pedestal of "Hercules and Cacus" to indicate his authorship.



As for the other sculptures on the square, they are far from random. For example, to the left of "David" stands the bronze statue of Judith beheading Holofernes – another Old Testament scene telling the story of the pious Jewish widow who saves her city from the Assyrian invaders by decapitating their proud and debauched general, Holofernes, who had desired to share a bed with Judith. The symbolism of this sculpture, created by Donatello on the commission of Cosimo de' Medici the Elder, is quite apparent: Florence, standing against numerous external enemies (Milan, France, and others), is depicted as the pious Judith, who, through faith and love for her homeland, overcomes any and all enemies.



The equestrian statue of Cosimo I de' Medici

Originally, this sculpture was housed in the Palazzo Vecchio, but during Savonarola's rule, it was moved to the square for public display, after which the composition began to be interpreted as a symbol of the "victory over the tyranny of the Medici." In subsequent years, the sculpture was moved around the square: to the inner courtyard of the Palazzo Vecchio and to the Loggia dei Lanzi, until in 1919 it was installed on the left side of the palace. In 1988, the original Donatello work was returned to the Palazzo Vecchio, and a precise copy was placed in its place on the square.

We must not forget the copy of Donatello's Marzocco either. This famous symbol of Florence – the vigilant guardian of the city, holding a shield with the Florentine lily in its paw, whose nickname literally means "Little Mars" – is a noteworthy figure. The original sculpture, which is now displayed in the Donatello Hall of the Bargello Museum, was commissioned by the Republic's government in 1420. It was intended to adorn the apartments of Pope Martin V, who, during his visit to Florence, stayed at the Monastery of Santa Maria Novella. In 1812, the sculpture was moved to Piazza della Signoria, but by 1885, it was replaced with a copy, and Donatello's work was transferred to the museum.

The Marzocco, as a symbol of Florence, has a quite lengthy history and its connection to the god of war, Mars, is not incidental: according to ancient Roman astrology, Mars governs the zodiac sign of Leo, and it is possible that the first stone lion guardian appeared in the city as early as the 14th century at the entrance to the Ponte Vecchio. In 1333, after a flood destroyed the ancient statue of Mars that had stood there since time immemorial, the townspeople decided to replace it with "Little Mars."

Another significant sculptural composition on the square is the "Fountain of Neptune," which we previously mentioned when discussing

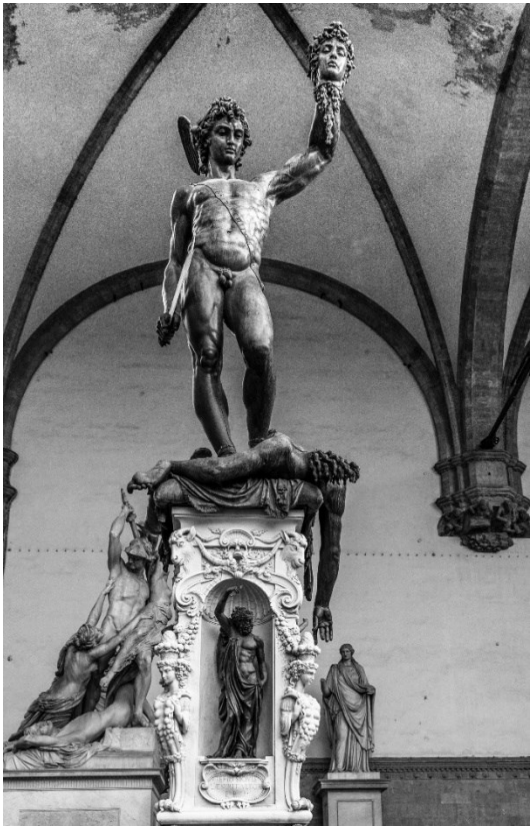
Girolamo Savonarola (the spot where Savonarola was executed is located next to the fountain). This fountain was commissioned by the Grand Duke Cosimo I de' Medici, whom we already know, and it, along with the First Courtyard of the Palazzo Vecchio, was ordered to commemorate the marriage of his son, Ferdinand, to the Austrian Archduchess Joanna in 1559. The project was designed by the same Baccio Bandinelli, but it was executed by his student, Bartolomeo Ammannati, who also emulated Michelangelo's style and is perhaps best known for the Jesuit College building in Rome.



Giambologna, Abduction of a Sabine Woman, 1581-83.

The addition of the equestrian statue of Cosimo I de' Medici by Jean de Boullogne (or, as he is colloquially known in Florence, Giambologna) in 1594 brought an unexpected context: the two sculptures could now be interpreted as symbols of the expansionist ambitions of the first Grand Duke of Tuscany (Cosimo I) on land and at sea. The statue was commissioned by Ferdinand I, the "grateful son" of Cosimo. The pedestal of the statue features bas-reliefs depicting scenes from the life of the deceased ruler: his triumphant entry into the defeated Siena and the coronation of Cosimo as the Grand Duke of Tuscany in Rome.

Another work by Giambologna on the Piazza della Signoria—the "Rape of the Sabine Women" (1582) in the Loggia dei Lanzi—has far less meaning than it might initially appear. The block of marble chosen by Giambologna for this composition was the largest ever brought to Florence, and the sculptor's intention was simply to demonstrate his virtuosity in working with stone, which he undoubtedly achieved: "The Rape of the Sabine Women" became the first sculpture in the history of European art that should be viewed from multiple angles. The subject



depicted in marble recounts a scene from the mythological history of Rome. According to legend, in ancient times the city was inhabited only by men, and to remedy this, the founder and King of Rome, Romulus, organized a grand festival, inviting neighboring Latin and Sabine families. In the midst of the celebration, the Romans seized their guests and abducted all the women. Enraged, the Sabines and Latins waged a brutal and lengthy war, which only ceased when the Sabine women, now accustomed to their Roman husbands, intervened during one of the battles, pleading for peace and persuading both sides to reconcile. According to legend, this led to the formation of a new kingdom where Romans, Latins, and Sabines lived in harmony under Romulus's rule.

Of course, we must not forget the masterpiece by Benvenuto Cellini—*Perseus with the Head of Medusa*. This exquisite work of art depicts the ancient Greek hero Perseus, son of Zeus and the Argive princess Danaë, who set out on a mission from King Polydectes to obtain the head of Medusa, the Gorgon whose gaze could turn anyone to stone. It is important to note that Medusa, once a beautiful maiden with long, lovely hair, was violently pursued by the sea god Poseidon. In an attempt to escape Poseidon's advances, Medusa fled to a temple of Athena, where Poseidon found and assaulted her. And, of course, it was not Poseidon—the brother of Zeus and Hades—who was punished for this monstrous crime, but the unfortunate Medusa, who was blamed by the gods for "desecrating the temple of Athena." As a result, Athena herself disfigured Medusa, turning her once-beautiful face into a hideous visage

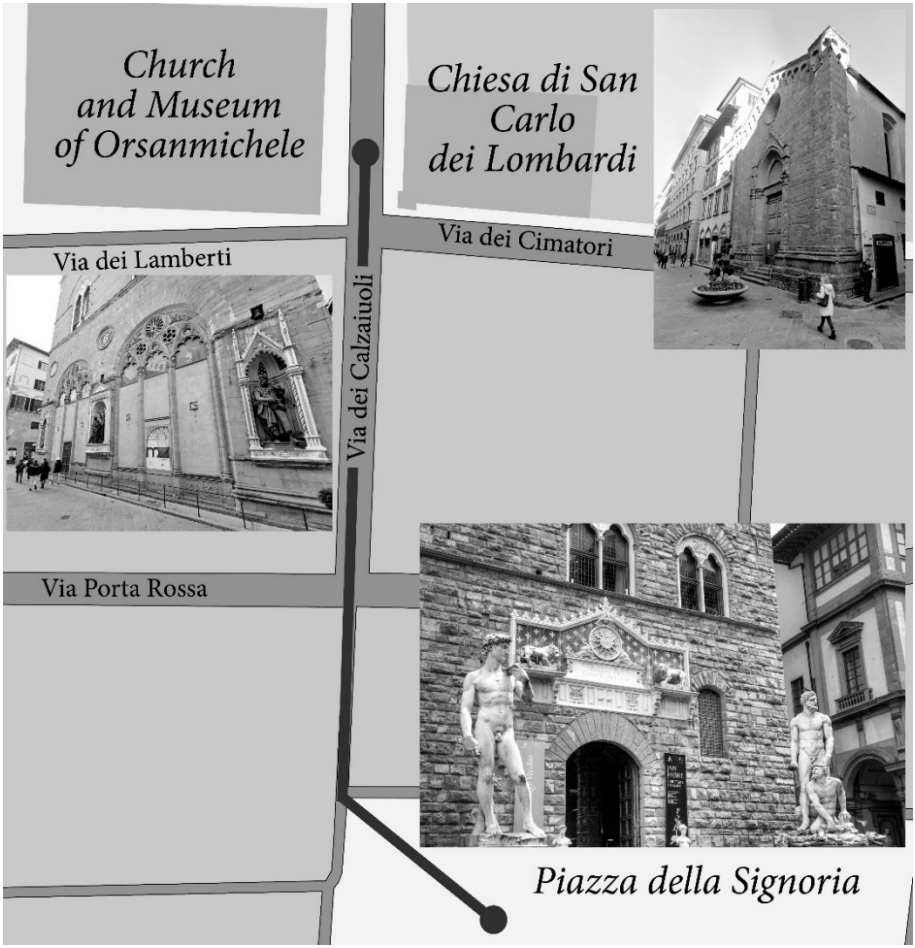
and her lovely hair into serpents. Ultimately, it was Athena, along with Hermes and Hephaestus, who aided Perseus in beheading the tormented Medusa: they provided him with a shield that allowed him to view Medusa's reflection and avoid her direct gaze while approaching her.



Now that you are aware of the backstory behind Cellini's depicted scene, consider the context of its creation. It was the year 1530: after yet another three-year exile during which democracy had been briefly restored in Florence, the Medici, with the support of Emperor Charles V, returned to the city. Pope Clement VII (Julius Medici) transformed Florence into a duchy and elevated his illegitimate son, Alessandro, to the throne. Thus, any attempts to restore popular sovereignty in the city came to an end, and soon almost all of Tuscany was under the control of the all-powerful banking family. In 1545, Alessandro's distant relative and heir, Cosimo I, commissioned Benvenuto Cellini to create this sculpture, intended to affirm the triumph of the valiant and beautiful demigod Perseus—symbolizing order and divine will (as Athena herself guided his hand in the battle with Medusa, akin to Michelangelo's *David*)—over the chaos and madness of the republic's past embodied by the Gorgon. The idea for this composition came from Cosimo I himself, as Cellini noted in his memoirs. Art became a means for the Medici to legitimize their tyranny, a tool to promote the notion of the unnecessity and danger

of freedom: they enforced this celestial beauty, created by artists under their patronage, with iron and blood throughout Tuscany.
In addition to these sculptures, the Loggia dei Lanzi houses other remarkable, though lesser-known, and somewhat later works by Giambologna, such as *Hercules and the Centaur* (1599), and *The Rape of Polyxena* by Pio Fedi (1865). There are also several ancient statues of women, among which we identify only Agrippina the Younger (sister of Caligula), Marciana (sister of Trajan), Matidia (mother-in-law of Hadrian), and Tusnelda (the wife of the Cheruscan leader Arminius, who achieved a famous victory over the Romans in the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest in AD 9). Another relatively ancient piece is *Menelaus with the Body of Patroclus*, depicting heroes from Homeric epics. It was made in the 1st century AD from an earlier original and restored in the 16th century under the commission of Cosimo I, who purchased it in Rome. Dating to the 1st century AD is also the right of the two *Medici Lions* at the entrance to the Loggia dei Lanzi. The second lion was made in imitation of the ancient one by the sculptor Flaminio Vacca in 1600, commissioned by Grand Duke Ferdinand I of Tuscany. The lion holding a sphere symbolizes a vigilant, tireless guardian: should it loosen its grip even slightly, the sphere will roll away and shatter. Moreover, these lions resonate well with the earlier (or rather, later) depiction of the *Marzocco* by Donatello.

ORSANMICHELE CHURCH AND MUSEUM



It is time to leave Piazza della Signoria, no matter how difficult it may be to part with the masterpieces of sculpture in the Loggia dei Lanzi or to leave the Hall of the Five Hundred in Palazzo Vecchio. Awaiting us is via dei Calzaiuoli, which has a delightful surprise in store: after crossing two intersections (with Via della Condotta and Via dei Lamberti/Via dei Cimatori), we will find ourselves between two churches, one of which will undoubtedly surpass the other. To your left will be Orsanmichele, towering majestically, and to your right will be the relatively modest San Carlo dei Lombardi. The latter is a typical

example of 14th-century Florentine Gothic, despised by both Giotto and Brunelleschi. It was erected in memory of the expulsion of the Duke of Athens from the city (as we discussed in detail earlier). Notably, one of the architects who worked on this church, Benci di Cione Dami—a member of the renowned Florentine family that produced four notable masters—oversaw the construction of the Loggia dei Lanzi in 1382 and the reconstruction of Orsanmichele in 1361 and 1369. This church, which was alternately dedicated to Saint Anne and Saint Michael, was originally built in 1349. After being handed over to the Compagnia di San Carlo dei Lombardi—a national guild of Lombard merchants and craftsmen residing in Florence—the church was renamed in honor of Saint Charles Borromeo (1538–1584), the leader of the Catholic Counter-Reformation.

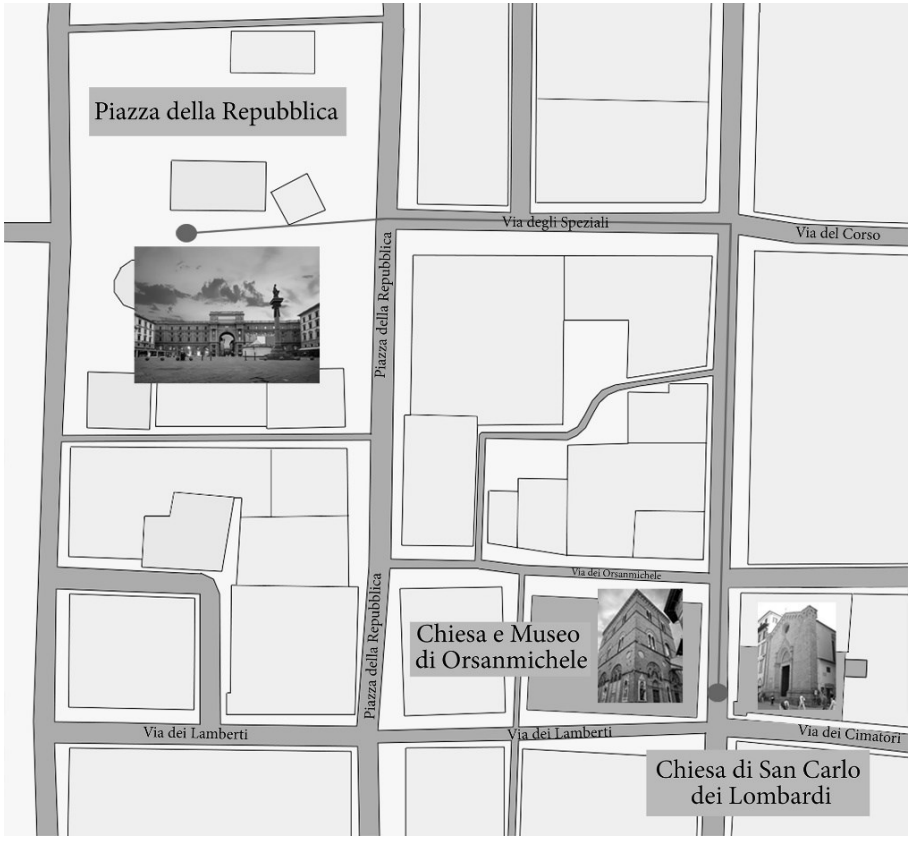
On the site of Orsanmichele once stood a convent with extensive gardens and orchards, and the name of the church reflects its origins: "Or. San Michele"—the "Oratory of Saint Michael"—can also be read as "San Michele in Orto," meaning "Saint Michael in the Garden." This name originally belonged to a small 8th-century church, on the site of which a large grain market—known as the "Loggia del Grano" (from the Italian word "grano," meaning grain)—began construction in 1240. This market succeeded the old city bazaar, from which the name of this part of Florence, Mercato Vecchio, derives, occupying the area of the ancient Roman forum. Indeed, the Loggia del Grano is what you see before you. Yes, this building was not originally intended as a church: the lower open colonnade housed bakeries, while the upper floors (to protect against theft and moisture) served as granaries. The special "grain chutes"—channels within the columns through which grain was poured down from the granaries—are still beautifully preserved in the interior of the current Orsanmichele church. On one of the pilasters of the arcade’s lower floor, there once stood a revered miraculous image of the Virgin Mary, probably transferred from an older monastery or church. To manage the donations made by Florentines in honor of this image, the Compagnia dei Laudesi, or the Company of Orsanmichele, was established. This company was frequently criticized by Franciscan and Dominican monks for "collaborating with idolatry." The headquarters of this company, at the corner of via de' Calzaiuoli 21 and via dei Lamberti 1, still stands, and you can still discern various emblems of the organization on its facades. Although the company began to decline in the mid-14th century, it continued to exist until 1752.

As for Orsanmichele itself, its transformation into a church was, in a way, prompted by a fire on July 10, 1304, which caused severe damage to the "Grain Loggia." Following this disaster, a decision was made to reconstruct it such that each of the city's guilds would "take responsibility for a column of the Loggia and create a figure of their patron saint within it, and on the saints' feast days, the craftsmen would make donations in their honor, from which the Compagnia di San Michele d'Orto would distribute aid to the poor." In reality, work did not commence until thirty years later, and the project continued until 1406, when the crown-like pinnacle of the building was completed. Like San Carlo dei Lombardi, the history of Orsanmichele is also linked to the expulsion of the despotic ruler Gualtieri VI di Brienne, Duke of Athens, from Florence: since the trade and craft guilds were long considered the main "pillars" of democracy in the Republic, their actions led to the tyrant's overthrow and banishment from the city in 1343. On July 26 of the same year, the feast day of Saint Anne, it was decided to adorn Orsanmichele with banners bearing the guilds' coats of arms and to display them annually on this day in honor of Florence's merchants and craftsmen.



All the statues you see today on the facades of Orsanmichele are replicas of the original works by the great masters of their time (Donatello, Ghiberti, Nanni di Banco, and others). There are fourteen statues in total, each depicting the patron saint of one of the fourteen Florentine guilds (butchers, armorers, shoemakers, etc.). Additionally, among the magnificent Gothic vaults of the ground floor, four tondi (medallions made of glazed terracotta or majolica) depicting the guilds' coats of arms have been preserved: those of the silk merchants (two putti holding a shield with gates depicted), the doctors and apothecaries (Madonna with Child), the butchers (putti holding a shield with a goat depicted), and the stone and wood workers (an axe). Inside the church, the luxurious tabernacle (from the Latin "tabernaculum"—booth, tent) is a reminder of the "Black Death" epidemic that struck Florence in 1348. When the plague arrived, desperate Florentines seeking salvation began to make donations to Orsanmichele in penance and to atone for their sins, hoping to escape divine retribution, which they perceived as the cause of the horrific epidemic. Ultimately, the parish accumulated 350,000 florins—the annual budget of the Republic—and this entire sum was used in 1349 to commission the tabernacle from the renowned master Andrea Orcagna, who spent ten years on this stunning work.

PIAZZA DELLA REPUBBLICA



If you turn off via dei Calzaiuoli onto via degli Speziali, you will soon arrive at Piazza della Repubblica—third in importance, after Piazza del Duomo and Piazza della Signoria, among the squares of Florence. Long ago, it was known as the Market Square because it housed the city's main marketplace, extending up to the area of Orsanmichele. This market, in turn, was established on the site of the ancient Roman forum—a classical center of any city in Ancient Rome. The forum housed the principal administrative and religious buildings and was intersected by two major roads in any Roman fortified settlement: the cardo (running from north to south) and the decumanus (crossing the cardo from west to east). Today, the locations of the cardo are represented by via Roma, via Calimala, and via Por

Santa Maria, running sequentially from the Arno riverbank to Piazza del Duomo. The decumanus is now represented by via del Corso, via degli Speziali, and via degli Strozzi. Thus, these six streets, which continue one after the other, are among the oldest in the city and have certainly retained their direction for over 2000 years. The intersection of these two main streets of Roman Florence is still marked by the "Column of Abundance"—the only medieval monument, albeit restored, on this square.

By the Middle Ages, the once-spacious forum square had become so densely built up that, according to chroniclers, “there was no space left for gardens or pasture,” and residential buildings had to be extended with additional floors due to the lack of space. Despite this, the square, now known as the Market Square, remained the main meeting place for Florentines and one of the three central locations in the city, alongside the spiritual center (Piazza del Duomo) and the administrative center (Piazza della Signoria).

From the 13th century onwards, the part of the city adjacent to the market, now situated between via dei Brunelleschi, via dei Pecori, and via Roma, began to decline rapidly: after the Guelphs were expelled from Florence, this district suffered heavily from fires and was looted. Since then, it was considered a “disreputable” area, and by the 15th century, despite the land and many buildings being owned by noble Florentine families, most of the houses were occupied by brothels, taverns, and people of “less respectable habits.” This fact determined the fate of the district in the 16th century, when Sephardic Jews fleeing the Inquisition from Spain began arriving in Tuscany. Grand Duke Cosimo I de' Medici and his son Francesco ordered all these Jews to be settled in this very district, and local Italian Jews were also relocated there, thus forming the Florentine Jewish ghetto. The district was enclosed by a wall and, thanks to the Jewish community, which took care of order, cleanliness, and the welfare of its “city within a city,” it underwent a transformation.

On the square itself (which became known as the Old Market Square in the 16th century due to the construction of the new Market Loggia near Ponte Vecchio), many ancient churches were preserved for a long time, but were demolished in the 19th century during a reorganization of the area.

After the 1848 revolution, Florentine Jews were emancipated, and most of them left the ghetto, causing the district to once again be overrun by

dubious characters. The horrendous sanitary conditions and the poor reputation of these places led the city municipality to decide on the demolition of the old quarters of Piazza di Mercato Vecchio (the Old Market Square), which began in the 1880s. Of course, along with the slums and dreadful tenements that harbored prostitution and criminal activities, significant historical landmarks were also demolished: churches, ancient mansions of noble families, and medieval towers. Among the great works of art that once stood in the market square, only Giorgio Vasari's Loggia del Pesce was preserved. It was carefully dismantled and moved to Piazza dei Ciompi. Later, after a statue of the first King of united Italy, Vittorio Emanuele II, was erected there, the square was renamed in his honor, but was often simply called "Piazza Vittorio." After the 1946 referendum, which abolished the monarchy, the square was renamed to honor the Republic, though it continued to be called by its old name among Florentines for some time. By the way, the statue of King Vittorio Emanuele II was also relocated and now stands at the entrance to the Cascine Park.



Piazza della Repubblica primarily features 19th-century architectural monuments. One of them is the "Trianon" palace, which combines various elements of Renaissance architecture and serves as a sort of

"quintessence of Italian revival." This palace houses the famous department store "La Rinascente." Between the "Trianon" and the rather unremarkable and controversial building of the headquarters of the "Banca di Sicilia," is the barely noticeable "Torre Romaldelli"—a reconstructed copy of a 13th-century building that once stood on this very spot and belonged to the renowned Florentine family Romaldelli. The arch of this tower leads to a small inner square—Piazza dei Tre Re or "Square of the Three Kings," named after an ancient inn that existed here since the 14th century. In those times, this "square" was more of a private courtyard and the heart of the Macci family's estate, whose seven-century-old, four-story mansion greets you upon entering Piazza dei Tre Re.

Another notable building on the square is the palazzo delle Giubbe Rosse or "Palace of the Red Coats," which appears to be composed of three distinct parts.

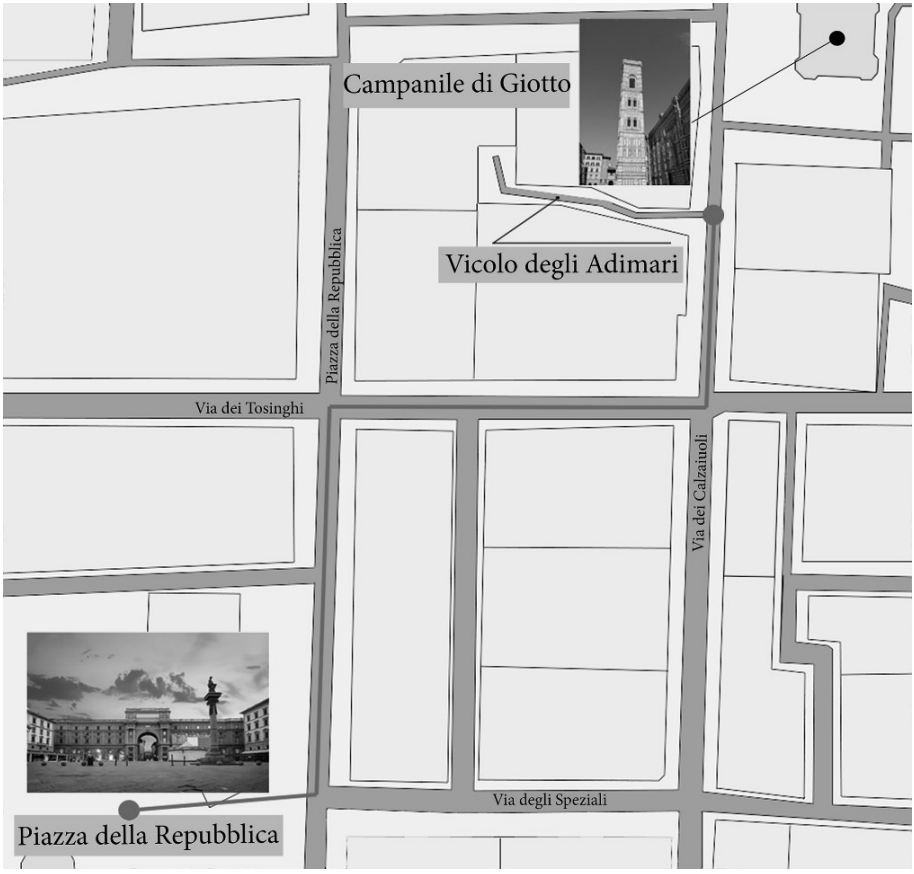
The palace received its name from the café “Le Giubbe Rosse” (“The Red Coats”), which opened here in 1897 as a Bavarian brewery under the original name “Reininghaus.” The brewery quickly became very popular among Florentines, and because the waiters wore red jackets in the Viennese fashion of the time and the German name was too complex, locals preferred to say: “andiamo da quelli delle giubbe rosse” – “let’s go to those in red coats.” When the brewery was replaced by a café and a chess club, the old nickname became the official name of the establishment, and in the following years, many notable personalities visited it, including André Gide, Gordon Craig, and Vladimir Lenin. If you walk around the back of the palace, you will find that it “absorbs” an older building – the palazzo dei Catellini da Castiglione (its corner is visible from via dei Cavalieri). This palace, built perhaps in the 13th-14th centuries, once belonged to one of the prominent Florentine families and was partially demolished and partially restored to be incorporated into the new building at the end of the 19th century during the reorganization of the Old Market Square.

The undisputed dominant feature of the square and its main “background” is the majestic palazzo dell'Arcone di Piazza, whose two wings are connected by a large arch. This palace was also built on the site of medieval buildings, which are now remembered only through old photographs, daguerreotypes, and drawings. As a symbol of the

destruction of the medieval Market Square heritage, the palace was long criticized for being “excessively pompous” and possessing a “distinctly non-Florentine, more Roman character.” As a result, in the early 1930s, one of the most sought-after Italian architects of the time, Marcello Piacentini, proposed a project to demolish the arch and simplify the facades of the resulting two buildings. For some reason, however, this plan was not realized, and the palace has only been restored twice (in 1980 and 2022).



GIOTTO'S BELL TOWER



Now let's walk a bit further down Via Roma and turn right at the first intersection onto Via dei Tosinghi, then return to the already familiar Via dei Calzaiuoli, which will lead us straight to Piazza del Duomo. But let's pause for a moment before reaching the end, at the turn onto Vicolo degli Adimari. Get ready to witness a true marvel. Compose yourself and don't rush to start taking photos – don't gulp wine like water. Walk cautiously until the yellowish house on the corner of Via dei Calzaiuoli fades away and Giotto di Bondone's bell tower reveals itself – the herald, faithful companion, and eternal guardian of Santa Maria del Fiore. This bell tower is the junction

of geometry, painting, and music, the creation of a brilliant architect who managed to draft a detailed project but only completed the first tier before his death.

As you get closer, you'll see numerous relief medallions – hexagons and diamonds – which, along with the statues on the third tier and the sharp boundary lines between them, form a stunning geometric symphony. Each medallion, of course, has its own story. To read the images in the diamonds, you should start from the West façade (facing Piazza di San Giovanni). There, you can observe: God creating Adam; the creation of Eve; their hard labor after being expelled from Eden; the invention of animal husbandry by Jabal (a descendant of Adam and Eve); the invention of musical instruments by Jubal (Jabal's brother); the invention of metallurgy by Tubal-cain (half-brother of Jabal and Jubal). My favorite scene is the drunken Noah lying under a tree after planting grapes and making the first wine following the Great Flood.

Next, we move to the South façade, where we see: Noah's fourth son, Ionitus, who, according to the Old Testament, invented astronomy; the art of construction (an unidentified but substantial master and two apprentices building a stone tower); medicine (a healer diagnosing a patient's urine, contained in a vessel he holds in his hand); hunting; weaving; lawmaking (another link between Florence and Ancient Greece: this medallion depicts the mythical King of Peloponnesus, Phoroneus, who gave people their first laws); and finally, Daedalus as the "father of mechanics" – the mythical inventor of wings and builder of the legendary Labyrinth on the island of Crete, home to the Minotaur.

On the East façade, you can observe: navigation; Hercules with his club (with which he killed Cacus at Palazzo Vecchio). The exact meaning of Hercules is difficult to determine, but it is believed that he symbolizes either civil liberties or justice – quite debatable, in my opinion. Behind him, we see men plowing the land with oxen – representing agriculture; and the next medallion, I bet you will never guess its meaning: a man riding in a cart pulled by two mares. Carriage drivers? No, not them. Horse breeders? Wrong again. And no, not even couriers. Strangely enough, it represents theatrical art, and if you guessed it right the first time, allow me to mentally shake your hand. The mythical founder of the theatrical acting profession – an ancient Greek named Thespis –



traveled from town to town in a cart, giving performances right from it. The last medallion on the East side depicts Euclid with a compass in hand, symbolizing architecture, inconceivable without geometric measurements.

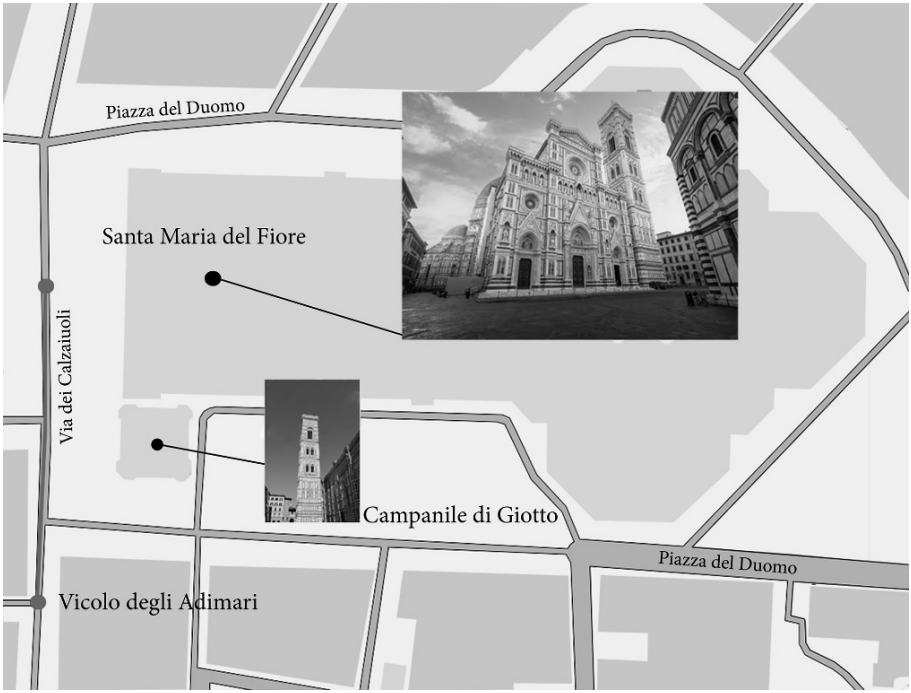
On the North side, we find: the ancient Greek sculptor Polykleitos; the ancient Greek painter Apelles; the Roman grammarian Priscian of Caesarea (author of an 18-volume grammar of the Latin language) or Aelius Donatus – a grammarian and rhetorician known as the teacher of Saint Jerome of Stridon; Plato and Aristotle debating, representing dialectics; Orpheus, symbolizing musical art; Pythagoras and Euclid (again), representing arithmetic and geometry, which go hand in hand; and finally, what is believed to be Ptolemy, symbolizing either astrology or astronomy, but inexplicably depicted with a hammer and anvil.

Of course, these medallions are not original – the originals are housed in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo (Museum of the Works of the Cathedral), and these precise replicas were installed in their place in the last century. The same applies to the diamonds and the sculptures on the third tier of the campanile.

The diamonds on the East side represent the Seven Liberal Arts (those pursued by free people in antiquity, as opposed to mechanical arts, which were the domain of slaves): grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric (trivium), and arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy (quadrivium). The sculptures on this side, with the exception of one ("Abraham Sacrifices

Isaac"), are rather tentatively identified: they are likely the prophets Malachi, Zechariah, and Isaiah.
Moving to the South side, we see diamonds depicting the theological virtues: Faith, Hope, and Charity. Additionally, we find the Cardinal Virtues: Prudence, Justice, Temperance, and Fortitude. Among the sculptures, which also depict Old Testament prophets, only one can be identified with certainty – the first one – which is Moses.
Finally, let's look at the West side of the campanile. Here, the diamonds represent the seven planets of the Solar System: the Moon (then considered a planet), Mercury, Venus, the Sun (also considered a planet), Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. The sculptures on this side again depict prophets: Daniel, Habakkuk, Jeremiah, and Obadiah.
The construction of the entire campanile took 25 years: from 1334 to 1337 it was overseen by Giotto himself. After his death, the project was continued by Andrea Pisano, for whom the campanile of the Duomo also became a lifelong endeavor – he would die of the plague in 1348, after which the construction of the campanile was halted until 1351, when Francesco Talenti took over. Talenti completed the last three tiers of the bell tower with Gothic windows and a large, projecting terrace instead of a spire.
Today, the campanile houses seven bells, the oldest of which, "Campanone," was cast in 1705.
The seven diamonds on the second tier on the North side depict the seven sacraments of the Church: baptism, confession, marriage, holy orders, confirmation, Eucharist, and anointing of the sick. The four sculptures on this side represent the Tiburtine Sibyl (an ancient prophetess who foretold the birth of Christ), King David, King Solomon, and the Erythraean Sibyl (another prophetess who taught the Etruscans divination).

SANTA MARIA DEL FIORE



Now, let us stand before the facade of the Cathedral of Florence – the city's main attraction, one of Italy's symbols, and a pinnacle of the Italian Renaissance. This is not just a church, not just a cathedral, not just an architectural masterpiece, but a true manifesto of Florence. For almost 600 years, it has stood tall over this city, dominating it and allowing no other building to surpass it in significance or grandeur. "Beauty will save the world," wrote the great Dostoevsky, and Santa Maria del Fiore seems to declare this with its sheer majesty. How many rulers has Florence seen in its history, how many dukes, gonfaloniers, captains, margraves, and podestas, how many states have been born and disappeared around it, how many republics, duchies, and kingdoms have come and gone, all seemingly flowing away with the waters of the Arno into the distant sea, while the immutable beauty, frozen in stone on this square, remains eternal.

Several generations of craftsmen worked on this cathedral, led by the finest masters of their time. The first stone of Santa Maria del Fiore was laid by Arnolfo di Cambio, who completed a large-scale brick model of the future cathedral in 1296 (later models of the facades made of wood and stone are now housed in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo). After his death in 1302, construction halted for 30 years until the wool merchants' guild took over financing and entrusted the project to Giotto di Bondone, who enlisted Andrea Pisano as his assistant. After Giotto's death in 1337, Pisano continued to work on Santa Maria del Fiore, with the help of other masters such as Andrea Orcagna and Neri di Fioravante. However, Pisano fell victim to the plague, which claimed the lives of more than half of Florence's population in 1348. Following the end of the epidemic, Francesco Talenti was appointed chief architect in 1349, but he only managed to complete Giotto's campanile, and the cathedral itself was completed (except for the dome) by 1418.



The dome posed significant challenges. A dome of the size required for the colossal cathedral (which remains one of the largest Christian churches in the world) would have collapsed if built according to classical methods. While Gothic architects had effectively addressed roofing for such large structures, the Gothic style was considered



Filippo Brunelleschi

barbaric by Renaissance masters who predominantly worked in the Romanesque style (from the word Rome). According to an established legend in art history, the eminent architect Filippo Brunelleschi presented his dome design to the Florentine Signoria (government) and, for simplicity, brought a boiled egg with him. "Can you make it stand upright?" he asked the officials. "No," they naturally replied. Brunelleschi then tapped the bottom of the egg on the table and stood it on the resulting dent: "This is how I will set the dome," he concluded. While this story may sound anecdotal, the fact remains that Brunelleschi succeeded in building the dome.

The dome is protected from collapse by a pointed, cone-shaped internal framework onto which the external, visible dome is essentially "fitted." This framework bears the weight of the structure and transfers it to the building's walls, while the inner vault of the dome, 91 meters above the floor, rests on this framework without issue. Brunelleschi was involved in every stage of the dome's preparation and construction. He also invented innovative mechanisms and devices for lifting the dome's components to such a significant height. In the workshop of his teacher Andrea del Verrocchio (who later worked on the golden sphere topping the lantern of the dome), the young Leonardo da Vinci had the opportunity to see some of Brunelleschi's inventions and sketch them in his notebooks, leading to the long-held belief that these inventions were Leonardo's rather than Brunelleschi's.

It is also worth noting that this is the largest brick dome in the world, as Brunelleschi and his craftsmen used approximately 4 million bricks of various shapes and sizes to line its interior.

A competition was held among all Florentine engineers and architects to design the lantern for the dome, similar to the earlier contest for the dome

itself. Unsurprisingly, Brunelleschi won again. His design for the lantern was the logical completion of his dome, continuing the octagonal shape of the main structure. However, Brunelleschi did not live to see his brilliant creation crowned with the lantern, as he died just two months after the competition. The lantern was completed by another renowned architect, Michelozzo, while the large gilded copper sphere at the top was crafted in the workshop of Andrea del Verrocchio, the teacher of Leonardo da Vinci, Sandro Botticelli, Domenico Ghirlandaio, Pietro Perugino, and many other famous Renaissance artists. Unfortunately, the original sphere no longer sits atop the dome; it fell twice during storms (in 1492 and 1600) and was replaced with a sturdier, larger one. The site of the last fall is marked by a marble disc on the rear side of Piazza del Duomo.



The observation balcony, or ballatoio, on the southeast side of the cathedral was added in the early 16th century by Baccio d'Agnolo and Antonio da Sangallo the Elder. The reason this balcony doesn't encircle the entire cathedral is quite comical. During its construction, Michelangelo was in Florence, and when asked his opinion about the work of d'Agnolo and da Sangallo, the great master remarked, "It makes

the cathedral dome look like a cricket cage." Consequently, the work was halted. Michelangelo's comment referenced a well-known Florentine tradition, the "Festival of Crickets," held on Ascension Day to mark the arrival of spring, during which people gathered in the Cascine Park and gifted each other cages with live crickets for good luck (today, mechanical crickets are used instead). The origins of this tradition are unclear, with three hypotheses: crickets awakening in spring heralding summer, a historical method of pest control, and a romantic story of two youths gifting crickets to a girl to symbolize their desire to be "imprisoned" with her.

Returning to Santa Maria del Fiore, let us stand before the entrance of this magnificent cathedral and gaze at its facade. The incredible number of intricate, fine details, each carrying its own significance and telling part of a larger story, combine to create a unique symphony in stone. But this facade is not the one originally envisioned by the architects, nor the one seen by Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci. The current facade is less than 150 years old. The original facade was incomplete at the cathedral's consecration by Pope Eugene IV on March 25, 1436, and remained so for many decades, even centuries. The lower part was adorned with marble and sculptures (a reconstruction of this part of the old facade can be seen in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo), but most of it was left as bare bricks. Lorenzo the Magnificent held a competition to complete the facade, but nothing was decided. In 1587, under Grand Duke Francesco I de' Medici, the unfinished facade was dismantled entirely. Several projects for a new facade were proposed, the most famous being the Baroque design by Gerardo Silvani in 1636 (on display in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo), but none were accepted. Santa Maria del Fiore remained in this unpresentable state until the 19th century. Two more competitions were held, and finally, in 1870, Emilio De Fabris's design was approved, and he was officially appointed as the "architect of the Florence Cathedral facade." The project was expensive, and funding came largely from wealthy Florentines, including the Russian aristocrat and millionaire Pavel Pavlovich Demidov, Prince of San Donato. The Demidov coat of arms can be seen on the facade, to the right of the main entrance, among the heraldic shields of other donors.

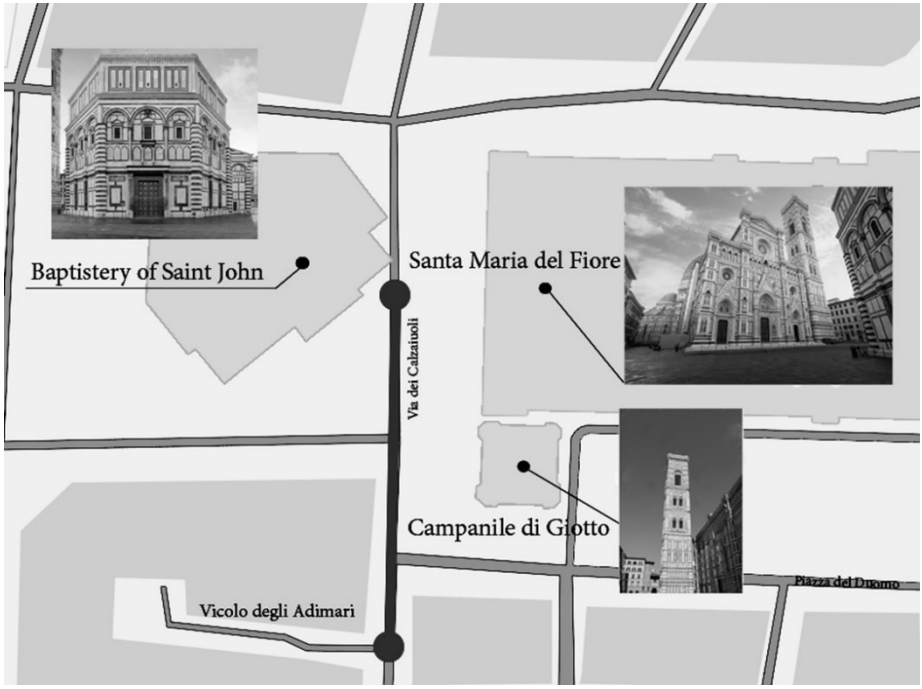
While we won't detail each of the numerous sculptures adorning this beautiful facade, we should note a few important ones. The two main statues flanking the central entrance depict the patron saints of Florence: Saint Reparata and Saint Zenobius. The four large statues on the second tier, corresponding to the nave boundaries, represent church hierarchs directly associated with the cathedral's construction. From left to right, these are Cardinal Pietro Valeriani, who participated in laying the cathedral's foundation stone; Bishop Agostino Tinacci, who blessed the laying of the columns in 1357; Pope Eugene IV, who consecrated the cathedral in 1436; and Archbishop of Florence Saint Antoninus, who blessed the start of the dome's construction and the lantern's completion. At the top of the facade are busts of distinguished Florentines, each symbolizing a particular science or craft in which they excelled. For instance, Amerigo Vespucci represents geography and history. Yes, the man after whom two continents (North and South America) are named, who proved that Christopher Columbus had discovered a new continent rather than a shortcut to India, was a native of Florence. His relative's wife, Simonetta Vespucci, is believed to be the model for Sandro Botticelli's "The Birth of Venus."

Now, let's step inside. These vaults have witnessed so many incredible historical events that it's hard to choose just one for an example. Here, in front of the altar, Francesco de' Pazzi brutally murdered Giuliano de' Medici while Lorenzo the Magnificent hid from the conspirators in the sacristy. Forty years earlier, the concluding session of the Council of Ferrara-Florence was held here, culminating in the signing of the Union Decree, which proclaimed the union of most existing Christian churches (mainly Catholic and Orthodox) into a single structure under the Pope (later rejected by the Grand Duke of Moscow and most Byzantine clergy, effectively nullifying the council's achievements). Fiery preacher Girolamo Savonarola delivered his sermons here, and the first public readings of Dante Alighieri's "Divine Comedy" took place here, with a fresco of Dante illuminating Florence on the north nave (left of the entrance).

If you turn around and look above the main entrance, you will see unique clocks showing "Hora Italica" or "Italian Time." Their dial is divided into 24 hours, and the hand moves in the opposite direction from what

we are used to. The clock's peculiarity doesn't end there: it reaches its 24th hour not at midnight but at sunset, requiring constant adjustment as sunset times change throughout the year. This task is managed by two employees of the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo. The original clocks (not exactly these but similar) were constructed and installed in the cathedral by Florentine clockmaker Angelo de Niccolò in 1443. Their mechanism was connected to the bells in Giotto's campanile, and when the hand reached the 24th hour, the bells rang, calling Florentines and peasants working in the fields outside the city walls to evening prayer and signaling the imminent closing of the city gates. Today, the clocks are still connected to the campanile bells, but of course, the city gates are no longer closed. The original clocks were replaced with a standard 12-hour clock in 1761, and by the late 18th century, Italy had adopted the modern time system under Napoleon Bonaparte's decree. The original mechanism was restored only in 1973 when, during restoration, a fresco by Paolo Uccello was discovered under a layer of paint, which you can now see around the clock. At that time, the renowned Florentine watchmaking house Officine Panerai (one of the oldest in the city, with its historic shop and museum located directly across from the baptistery on Piazza del Duomo) was commissioned to restore the original Hora Italica mechanism.

THE BAPTISTERY OF ST. JOHN



The eminent German architect Adolf von Hildebrand was outraged when, in the 19th century, the city authorities decided to expand the Piazza del Duomo and remove some buildings behind the Baptistery of St. John. This decision disrupted the original architectural ensemble formed by the Baptistery, the Cathedral, and Giotto's Campanile. "Now the Baptistery looks like a misplaced cabinet. It has become meaningless: it is encountered as an obstacle, and the immediate impression of the Cathedral is destroyed," von Hildebrand wrote. Well, we won't be so critical: at least now we have the opportunity to thoroughly inspect this architectural masterpiece from all sides.

To this day, it is not definitively known what stood on the site of the Baptistery in ancient Roman times. Until the 19th century, the theory that a Temple of Mars was located here enjoyed support. However, later archaeological evidence disproved this theory: under the Baptistery of St. John, the remains of an ancient Roman house with a beautiful mosaic

floor were found, but not a temple. Nonetheless, by the 9th century, a church dedicated to John the Baptist already stood here, and in 1128, it was officially transformed into a baptistery—a place where newborns and new converts to Christianity were baptized. In the 12th century, long before the Renaissance, the building was clad in marble, and in the 13th century, the marble floor that remains to this day was added. The mosaics inside, also dating from the 1200s, were created in the Proto-Renaissance style that emerged from Byzantine art. The interior mosaic decoration of the dome, one of the latest embellishments of the Baptistery, dates to the 1270s and was likely the work of three masters: Fra Jacopo, Coppo di Marcovaldo, and Cimabue—one of the principal artists of Florentine Proto-Renaissance painting.



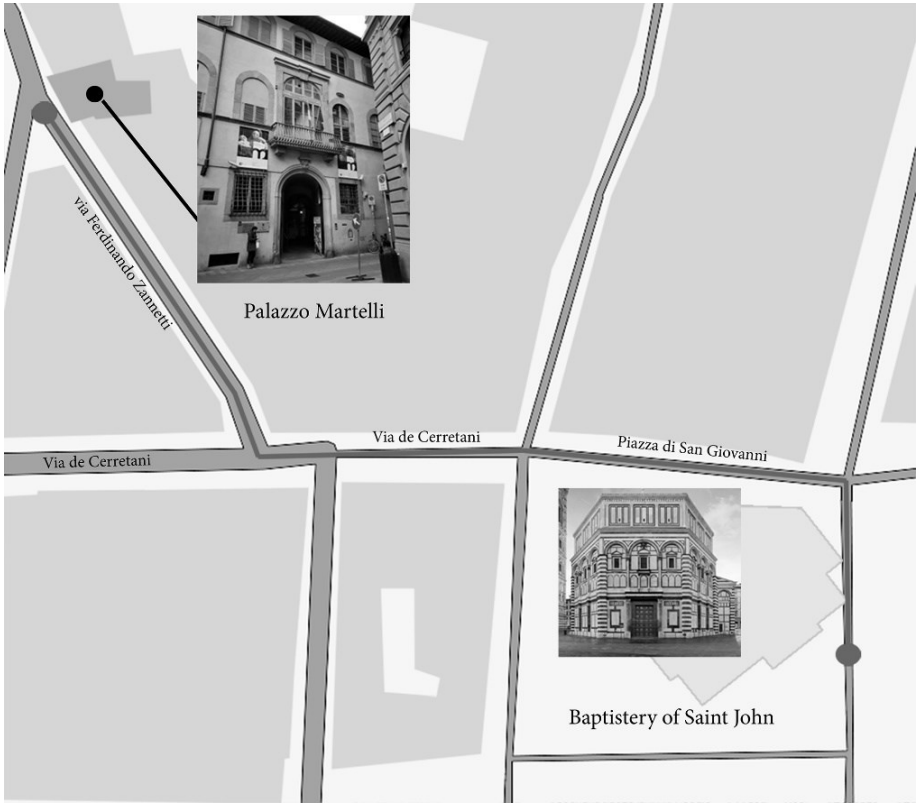
Of course, the most notable adornment of the Baptistery is the golden "Gates of Paradise" by the eminent Lorenzo Ghiberti, installed on the building's eastern exit in 1452. They are one of three bronze doors of the

Baptistery of St. John, along with the southern doors by Andrea Pisano and the northern ones also by Ghiberti. The exquisitely crafted panels of the "Gates of Paradise" depict scenes from the Old Testament, each framed by rectangular and circular borders with images of biblical figures and prophets. All except one: on the left door, about eye level, in the third round frame from the bottom, you'll find a self-portrait of Lorenzo Ghiberti. This marks one of the Renaissance's revolutionary innovations—individualizing works and creating a "personal brand," as we would say today. We all know that Giotto designed the campanile of Santa Maria del Fiore, but try to recall, for instance, the names of the architects of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople (Istanbul), built 800 years before the Renaissance began.

On either side of the "Gates of Paradise" stand the porphyry "Saracen Columns," a gift from Pisa, given in gratitude for Florence's military assistance in 1117 during Pisa's war with Lucca. At that time, most of Pisa's forces were engaged in battles against the Saracens (Arabs) in the Balearic Islands. Initially, these two columns were placed in the square without any base, but after they fell and shattered into many pieces, it was decided to place them against the Baptistery walls.

Another noteworthy feature of the Baptistery, often overlooked, are the two rectangular marks on the southern columns. These are the gold standards of two medieval units of measure used in Florence. The larger one is known as the "Langobard Foot" or "Foot of Liutprand" (named after the Lombard King who reigned from 712 to 744). It's uncertain whether the actual foot length of the ancient King served as the basis for this measure, but the name stuck. The smaller measure is called the "Florentine Measure" and, according to the most likely hypothesis, these standards were used for brick-making. Further along, on the same southern side, the base of the Baptistery incorporates a piece of an ancient Roman sarcophagus, depicting a ship loading wine barrels after a grape harvest. Most likely, the original owner of the sarcophagus was a wine merchant. Indeed, the reuse of ruined ancient monuments was common practice in the early Middle Ages. This tradition is especially evident in Byzantine and early Christian architecture in Athens, for which your humble servant has also written an excellent guide.

PALAZZO MARTELLI (CASA MARTELLI)



Continuing our journey through Dante's city, I suggest we leave Piazza del Duomo via Via de' Cerretani. After a short walk, turn right onto Via Ferdinando Zannetti. This street is named after the Italian surgeon and revolutionary Ferdinando Zannetti, who lived on a nearby street and became famous in 1862 for performing a highly complex and successful operation to remove a bullet from the leg of the legendary General Garibaldi, saving the national hero of Italy from losing his leg.

Soon, Via Ferdinando Zannetti merges with Via dei Conti, and at the junction, under number 8, stands one of Florence's notable mansions—Palazzo Martelli. Along with Palazzo Davanzati, Orsanmichele, the Medici Chapel, and the National Museum of Bargello, Palazzo Martelli

is part of a single museum system. A combined ticket for all five sites can be purchased on the official Musei del Bargello website for €21.

The noble Martelli family owned several houses on this street as early as the beginning of the 16th century. These were unified into a single palace in 1627 after Senator Marco Martelli married his cousin from another branch of the family. The Martelli family were long-time supporters of the Medici, and one of their members, Camilla, became the second wife of Cosimo I, the first Grand Duke of Tuscany, in 1570. This marriage helped rehabilitate other Martelli family members who had been exiled from Florence not long before, suspected of involvement in the Pucci conspiracy (which we will discuss later at the main building of the Bargello Museum).

The Martelli family thrived and, over three centuries, became one of the city's most influential families, amassing rich art collections, mainly paintings. However, in the second half of the 19th century, radical changes in the life of the ancient Tuscan aristocracy occurred, and many families struggled to adapt to new social conditions, leading to a gradual decline in their economic situation. Finding no other means of survival, families like the Martelli began to sell off their art collections, and today, individual portraits of the family members can be found in places like the National Gallery of Washington.

The long history of this noble dynasty ended in 1986 with the death of the last owner of this mansion, Francesca Martelli. With no heirs, she bequeathed the family palazzo, along with the remaining artworks, to the Florentine Curia—a decision that, as it turned out, caused significant harm to the Martelli legacy. During the 12 years the palazzo was under church management, numerous everyday items (ceramics, dishes, clothing, furniture elements) disappeared without a trace, and due to the lack of inventories, it is impossible to estimate the extent of these losses even approximately. Nonetheless, in 1998, the Curia sold Palazzo Martelli to the Italian government, and after long and meticulous restoration work, the mansion opened its doors to visitors as a museum in 2009. Today, you can see works by outstanding masters such as Pieter Brueghel the Younger, Piero di Cosimo, Salvator Rosa, Luca Giordano, and many others. Of particular interest are the thematic frescoes on the

palace walls, such as the "Winter Garden" or the panoramic decorations of the bathroom.

BASILICA DI SAN LORENZO & CAPPELLE MEDICEE



Continuing along Via dei Conti, we will soon arrive at Piazza di Madonna degli Aldobrandini, where on our right we will find the grand Basilica of San Lorenzo (Basilica di San Lorenzo). More precisely, we will see part of the basilica known as the Chapel of the Princes (Cappella dei Principi) — a structure boasting the second-largest dome in Florence after Santa Maria del Fiore. Like Orsanmichele and Palazzo Martelli, the Medici Chapels are part of the Bargello

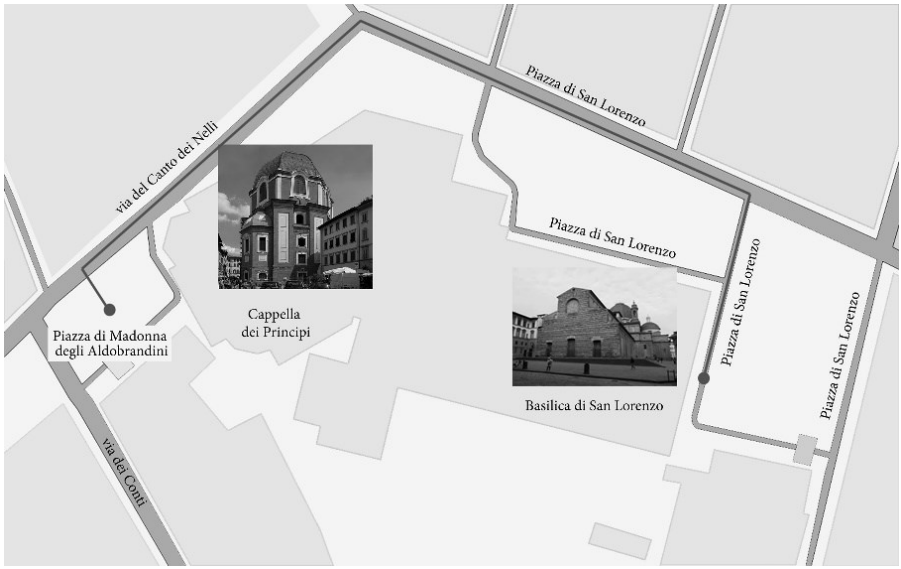
Museum organization, and tickets can be booked on the same website, bargellomusei.



Entering the basilica, you step into an exquisitely detailed and refined interior, as if crafted by masters of High Classicism in the 18th-19th centuries. The craftsmanship of the church's decor belies the fact that most of the work was completed almost 600 years ago. In the right nave, you will find the masterpiece "Marriage of the Virgin" by the painter Rosso Fiorentino. This painting was revolutionary for its time, as Joseph is depicted not as an old man, as was traditional according to the biblical narrative, but as a young man, the same age as Mary. It is believed that the artist reflected the renewal of the Catholic Church in his work (the early 16th century marked the beginning of the Reformation).

At the edge of the colonnade dividing the three naves of the basilica, you can see two intriguing bronze pulpits, each mounted on four columns. These are the last creations of the great Donatello, and it is likely that the master originally conceived these elegant works not as church pulpits, but possibly as sarcophagi for members of the Medici house (according to the most common theory, for Cosimo the Elder and his wife, Contessina). Exactly how they were transformed into pulpits remains

unknown, but they found their place here in the basilica, mounted on columns of dark marble, in 1515, during a visit to Florence by Pope Leo X.



On the left side is the entrance to the Old Sacristy (Sagrestia Vecchia), a room designed by Filippo Brunelleschi and decorated by Donatello. Here you can see the sarcophagi of Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici — the founder of the illustrious dynasty of Florentine rulers and patrons of great art — as well as his wife, Piccarda, and two of their descendants: the banker Giovanni and the de facto ruler of Florence, Piero "the Gouty."

Opposite the Old Sacristy is the New Sacristy — another masterpiece by Michelangelo. When you enter, it may not impress you at first. Yes, it might indeed seem less grandiose, especially after the architectural and sculptural marvels we have already seen. It is modest in size, this is true. But Michelangelo, the great master of stone, imbues this space with an extraordinary sense of perfect harmony. The master began work on it in 1520, commissioned by Pope Leo X and his relative, Cardinal Giulio de' Medici (the future Pope Clement VII). The commission arose from the sudden deaths of two important family members — Giuliano, Duke of Nemours, who was intended to receive the crown of Naples (1516), and

Lorenzo, Duke of Urbino and ruler of Florence (1519). This chapel was to be their resting place, and their sarcophagi are what we see here now. Above the tombs sit the marble Medici figures — the very same Dukes Giuliano and Lorenzo (in a helmet). Their sarcophagi are topped with allegorical sculptures: Dusk and Dawn (Lorenzo's tomb) and Day and Night (Giuliano's tomb). Michelangelo also intended to sculpt four more allegorical figures representing rivers, which were to lie at the foot of the tombs, but in 1527, the Medici family was expelled from Florence, and work halted.



These sculptures collectively set the main philosophical theme for the entire space as a unified work of art: mourning the swiftly passing time, the sorrow of fleeting youth, the sadness of the impossibility of turning back time, just as one cannot make a river change its course. This thought slowly permeates you, the deeper the longer you stand here and observe these curves of cold stone, in unnatural poses, in sorrow, in sadness, lying through the tension of every part of their bodies on the lids of the coffins of those whose very bones no longer remain.

As for Michelangelo, a staunch supporter of the Republic who nevertheless enjoyed the patronage of the Medici, he joined the rebels after the powerful family was expelled from Florence. He was appointed chief inspector of the city's fortifications. In 1530, when Florence was



Michelangelo Buonarroti. Attributed to Daniele da Volterra (1509–1566).

besieged by the forces of Emperor Charles V, who acted in alliance with the Medici, Michelangelo was one of the leaders of the city's defense as an engineer and mechanic. However, his genius alone was not enough, and Florence fell to the enemy. Fearing retribution from his former patrons, the great artist took refuge in the Basilica of San Lorenzo, where he had previously worked, in a hidden room of about 30 square meters, accessible from the New Sacristy. Throughout August and September 1530, Michelangelo lived unnoticed in this secret room, leaving numerous charcoal sketches on its walls. These sketches remained unknown even after Michelangelo fled to Venice in September 1530 and after his return to Florence at the request of Pope Clement VII (Giulio de' Medici) to complete his work on the New Sacristy. This room was discovered by chance in 1975 during a search for a possible alternative entrance to the chapel, and it was only in November 2023 that it was opened to the public under limited visitation conditions: only four people can enter every 15 minutes, so it is advisable to book tickets to Michelangelo's secret room in advance.

The third chapel in the Basilica of San Lorenzo, which we have already seen from the outside, the "Chapel of the Princes," is situated between the Old and New Sacristies. This space is notable because it was designed by Don Giovanni de' Medici, the illegitimate son of Cosimo I, Grand Duke of Tuscany. Together with the sculptor Matteo Nigetti, he began work on this chapel in 1604. This magnificent work of architectural art took nearly 360 years to complete: while the majority of

the work was finished by the mid-18th century, the inlaying of the floor with precious stones was only completed in 1962. Thus, the Chapel of the Princes, commissioned by Ferdinando I de' Medici, was completed only 200 years after the end of the grand ducal dynasty itself (its last representative was Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici, who died in 1743). And yes, these luxurious tombs are actually empty, although they bear the names of six Tuscan rulers: Cosimo I, Ferdinando I, Cosimo II, Francesco I, Ferdinando II, and Cosimo III. Their remains rest not here, but beneath the basilica, in the crypt where other members of the illustrious dynasty are also interred.

PALAZZO MEDICI RICCARDI



Adjacent to Piazza di San Lorenzo, on via de' Gori, lies another significant landmark – the Palazzo Medici Riccardi and its adjoining garden. The land for this garden was once acquired by Clarice Orsini, wife of Lorenzo the Magnificent and mother of Pope Leo X. It was in this very garden that the young Michelangelo Buonarroti began to hone his craft, copying beautiful ancient sculptures. He was one of many students at the first art academy in Florence, which operated under the patronage of the Medici and was led by Bertoldo di Giovanni, a pupil of Donatello. Thus, Michelangelo, indirectly, inherited Donatello's expertise. This connection was no secret: Michelangelo's "David" was significantly influenced by his illustrious predecessor's bronze "David," which also resided here in the Palazzo Medici until the time of Savonarola.

The commissioning of this massive and imposing building was by Cosimo de' Medici the Elder, who decided to mark his new, high position in Florence after his return from exile in 1434. Renowned architect

Filippo Brunelleschi competed for the position of chief architect of the future Medici residence, but his design seemed too grandiose to Cosimo the Elder, who wanted to avoid public and aristocratic dissent. Instead, the patriarch of the future Tuscan ducal dynasty appointed Michelozzo di Bartolomeo as the chief architect.



The times in Florence during the 15th and 16th centuries were turbulent, so the palace was designed with powerful, rough, almost fortress-like walls (like most other noble palazzi in Florence) and with the intention that its owners wouldn't need to leave its premises. The palace included a spacious courtyard that housed sculptures (including Donatello's "David"), fruit trees, and benches. Similar courtyards, surrounded by "arcades on columns" (peristyles), were a signature of Michelozzo's work in many buildings he was commissioned to design, leading Florentines to call them "Michelozzo's courtyards."
The palazzo was completed in 1460, and by 1492, when the Medici were expelled from the city and Girolamo Savonarola became the de facto dictator of Florence, the residence was looted, and many artworks were auctioned off at Orsanmichele. During this time, Donatello's "David"



Detail of a fresco by Benozzo Gozzoli, which, according to a popular version, depicts the Byzantine Emperor John Palaeologus as the "middle magus."

moved to Palazzo Vecchio, and his sculpture "Judith and Holofernes" moved to Piazza della Signoria. The palace's troubles didn't end there: the Medici returned to the city, but in 1527 they were again expelled, and their main urban residence was once again plundered. It was restored in 1530 after the family's return to the city. For seven years thereafter, it was owned by the Duke of Florence, Alessandro de' Medici, who was murdered by his cousin Lorenzino for unclear reasons. Alessandro's successor, Cosimo I from the junior branch of the Medici dynasty, chose Palazzo Vecchio as his residence, leaving this palace to house the youngest members of the family until the mid-17th century. The palace acquired its double name after Grand Duke of Tuscany Ferdinand II de' Medici sold it to the prosperous Riccardi family, who held the title of marquises. These last private owners, out of respect for the Medici legacy, did not significantly alter its interiors or exterior, and in 1814, the Riccardi sold the palazzo to the Tuscan government, which established its residence there sixty years later. Along with the palazzo, the Riccardi also handed over their excellent library, which had been publicly accessible since 1715. Today, this luxurious collection of rare books (such as manuscripts by Niccolò Machiavelli and a 10th-century copy of Pliny's "Natural History") belongs to the Accademia della

Crusca, one of the main institutions regulating the norms of the Italian literary language.

Undoubtedly, the most impressive room in Palazzo Medici Riccardi is the Chapel of the Magi, painted by Benozzo Gozzoli in 1461. The frescoes in this chapel are remarkable for two reasons. Firstly, when you enter it, you witness an opulent spectacle: nobles dressed in silks and capes embroidered with gold, accompanied by large retinues, ride on pedigreed horses with precious harnesses along a picturesque road among the Tuscan hills, following a caravan of camels laden with gifts. You can't help but sense a subtle irony here, as the fresco is titled "The Procession of the Magi," and the Magi—Caspar, Balthazar, and Melchior—who brought their gifts to the stable where the Messiah was born under the star, are typically depicted much more modestly. This is the second reason the chapel's frescoes attract attention. Of course, there are excellent carved benches with plant motifs and coats of arms, and a wonderful marble floor, but don't be distracted by this visual noise; we are here for more than just furniture and stones, of which there are plenty in Florence! If we divide this narrative into three parts, as Gozzoli did, starting to "read" the image from the eastern side of the chapel (which will be on your right if you stand facing the altar), the first prominent figure is a young man with golden curls, sitting on a white horse whose harness is richly decorated with gold embroidery and Medici coats of arms. This youth is usually identified as Lorenzo "the Magnificent," the future ruler of Florence, who was 12 years old at the time of the fresco's creation in 1461. Note his headgear: a golden crown with equal triangular spikes adorned with precious stones. In European heraldry, this type of crown is known as the "Eastern Crown," traditionally depicted on the heads of ancient Eastern rulers, such as Cyrus the Great, Seleucus Nicator, or the Egyptian Pharaohs of the Ptolemaic dynasty. In this case, the crown indicates Lorenzo's role in the procession, that of one of the Magi or Eastern Kings, as they are called in the Catholic tradition. Thus, Lorenzo personifies the "Young King"—Caspar. This "Eastern Crown" also helps us identify the "Middle-aged King"—Balthazar. Following "Caspar" Lorenzo, also on horseback, we see other members of the dynasty: Piero de' Medici, ruler of Florence from 1464-1469 (riding a white horse with a harness adorned with the motto

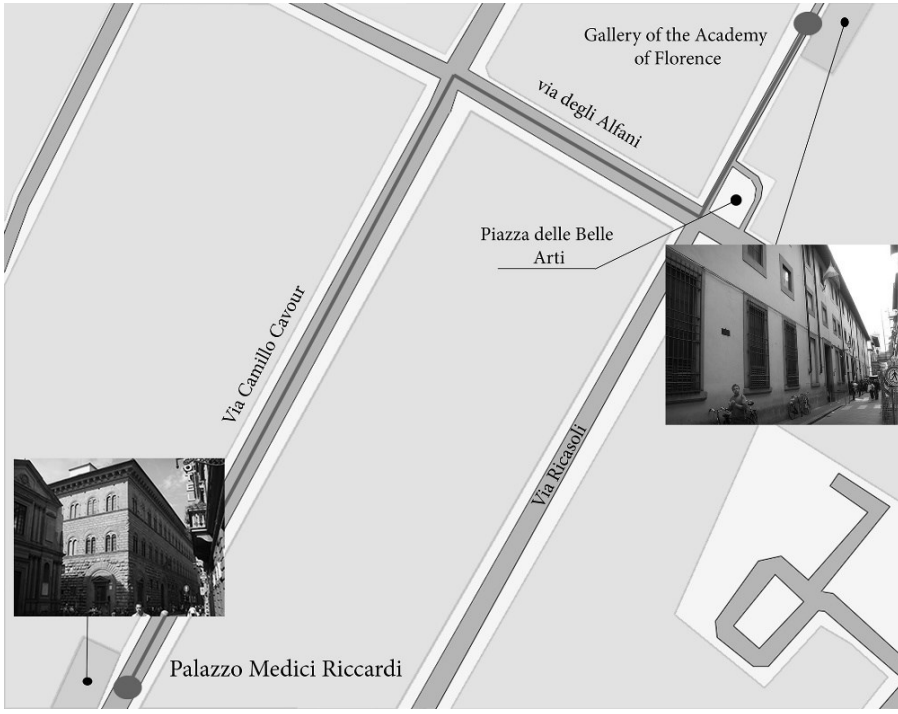
"Semper"—"Always"), and behind him, also in a red cap, according to popular belief, is his father and Lorenzo's grandfather, Cosimo de' Medici the Elder, who ruled Florence from 1434-1464 and was still alive at the time of the fresco's creation. As we recall from our visit to the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, during Cosimo the Elder's rule, Florence hosted the Ecumenical Council of Christian Churches, aiming to sign the decree of union between the Orthodox Constantinople Patriarchate and the Catholic Rome. In 1439, a large Greek delegation led by Byzantine Emperor John VIII Palaiologos and the Patriarch of Constantinople, Joseph II, visited Florence. Benozzo Gozzoli witnessed their stay in the city, which likely inspired this fresco, and he even depicted himself among the Greek guests. We can find him by the red cap with the golden inscription "Opus Benotii"—"Work of Benozzo." To his left is an elderly man—George Gemistos Plethon, a Byzantine philosopher and close friend of the Byzantine emperors. Directly above Plethon, in a red hat, is Cardinal Enea Silvio Bartolomeo Piccolomini—a prominent humanist, writer, poet, historian, and future Pope Pius II. To his left, slightly behind the cardinal, is Catholic Cardinal and Patriarch of Kyiv Isidore, also a great humanist with a remarkable destiny. We won't turn our acquaintance with the fresco into a full-fledged history lecture, but these details will help us further "read" the work's narrative, especially when identifying Balthazar—the second of the Three Kings. He is the man in gold-embroidered garments with golden curls, a beard, mustache, and upward-gazing blue eyes, possibly with a slight squint, a feature considered a sign of regal beauty in those times and frequently found in Renaissance frescoes, paintings, and sculptures. Who is this person representing Balthazar? According to the most common version, it is the same Byzantine Emperor John VIII Palaiologos (1392-1448), who strived to save his country from the Muslim Turks' onslaught by forming a church-political alliance with Catholic Europe. In 1439, in Florence, Emperor John VIII and Pope Eugene IV solemnly opened the Ecumenical Council, which, as mentioned earlier, signed the decree uniting the Catholic and Orthodox churches under the Pope's supremacy over the Patriarch of Constantinople. This move was not accepted by most Byzantine aristocrats and Orthodox clergy, significantly contributing to Byzantium's inevitable collapse in 1453. In the corner of

the same wall, we also see three more members of the Medici family—Lorenzo "the Magnificent"'s sisters, dressed in male clothing and riding horses—Maria, Bianca, and Lucrezia.

Moving to the third wall, the third "chapter" of Gozzoli's narrative, we again encounter his self-portrait, but this time not among Greek philosophers and humanists, but among Florentine patricians and bankers. Here he is, turning towards us in his azure hood with a white handkerchief, while the banker Francesco Sassetti, standing to his right, shows us his palm. As for the next figure—a young man in a blue tunic, sitting on a horse with a small leopard on a beautiful leash—there is no consensus. Some researchers believe Gozzoli depicted Thomas Palaiologos, the younger brother of Emperor John VIII, who was living in Rome at the time of the fresco's creation and was recognized as the Byzantine Emperor in exile, as Constantinople had already been captured by the Turks. Other art historians see this young man as Castruccio Castracani (1281-1328), a condottiero and Duke of Lucca, the hero of Niccolò Machiavelli's "Life of Castruccio Castracani."

Finally, the concluding figure of the procession is the "Old King Melchior"—an elderly man with a gray beard, his head crowned with the same "Eastern Crown," depicted, like the other two "Kings."

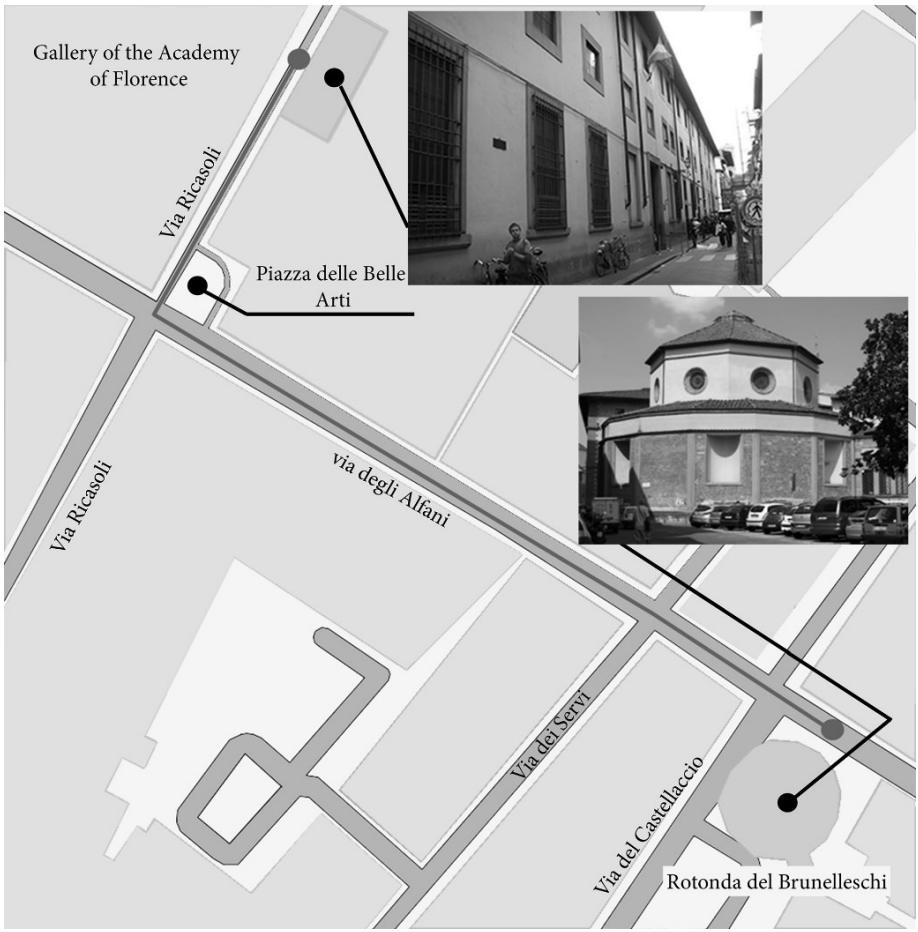
ACCADEMIA GALLERY OF FLORENCE & MEDICI MUSEUM



It is very easy to get from the Palazzo Medici to the Accademia Gallery: in this great city, everything is unexpectedly close together—the ceilings painted by Michelangelo, the floors trodden by Dante, and the Medici tombs beneath them.

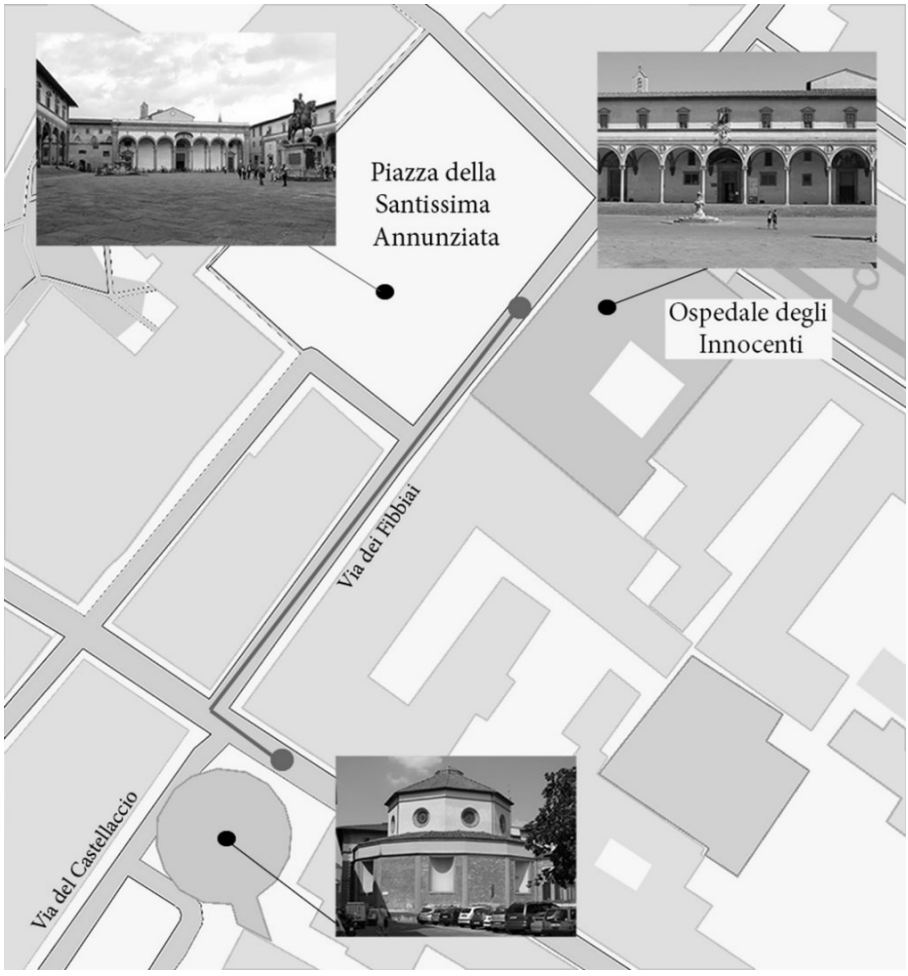
We'll take Via Camillo Cavour to the intersection with Via degli Alfani, and from there, we'll walk to Piazza delle Belle Arti—Square of the Fine Arts. Via Ricasoli, which leads out from the square, will take us directly to the Accademia Gallery, one of Florence's main museums. Undoubtedly, its most important exhibit is the original "David" by Michelangelo, which was moved here in 1872 from Piazza della Signoria. In addition to this masterpiece, you will find works by other outstanding Renaissance artists such as Domenico Ghirlandaio, Fra

Filippo Lippi, Sandro Botticelli, Giotto, and others. The extensive collection of Russian icons, which was housed in the Accademia Gallery until 2021, is now displayed on the first floor of the Palazzo Pitti.
I will not dwell too much on the exhibits of this museum in this guide, as I want you, dear reader, to be able to carry it without a cart. However, if you are interested in learning something unusual about the works of art in Florence's galleries, something no other guide or tour guide will tell you, you can contact me on Facebook or Instagram, or via the email listed at the end of the book. If there is enough interest, I will release a separate guide to Florence's museums.



For now, I invite you to continue along Via degli Alfani until you come upon an octagonal rotunda with empty niches and a tiled roof.
This is the "Brunelleschi Rotunda," a structure on which the great architect worked simultaneously with the dome of Santa Maria del Fiore. The funds for constructing this rotunda, originally intended to be a church dedicated to the Virgin Mary and the Twelve Apostles, were bequeathed to Florence by one of its distinguished sons, the military commander Filippo Scolari (also known as Pippo Spano). Scolari gained fame as a general in the service of the King of Hungary and Emperor Sigismund I of the Holy Roman Empire during the wars with the Turks. Five thousand gold florins from his estate were given to the Florentine wool merchants' guild, which then commissioned Brunelleschi to build the church. However, the architect could not complete the work: when the walls of the future church were already constructed, the government confiscated the remaining funds from Scolari's legacy to cover the expenses of the war with the neighboring Republic of Lucca. Ultimately, the rotunda was finished only in the 17th century and now forms part of the Medici Museum, which was recently opened in 2019 to mark the 500th anniversary of the birth of Cosimo I, Grand Duke of Tuscany. This museum houses a collection of personal items and artworks from the private collection of the Medici family, along with documents and multimedia installations that provide insight into the history of the renowned dynasty of ruthless tyrants and generous patrons of artists and sculptors.

SPEDALE DEGLI INNOCENTI & PIAZZA DELLA SANTISSIMA ANNUNZIATA



Via dei Fibbiai leads us from the Brunelleschi Rotunda to Piazza della Santissima Annunziata—another significant spot in Florence that tourists sometimes overlook. Here, alongside two fountains adorned with sea monsters by Pietro Tacca and his joint creation with Giambologna, the equestrian statue of Grand Duke Ferdinando I de' Medici, stands a very important structure: the "House of the Innocents" or "Ospedale degli Innocenti" by Filippo Brunelleschi.

This is one of the first buildings of the Italian Renaissance, setting the tone for an entire architectural era. The long building with a loggia will be on your right as soon as you step into the square. The Florentine silk merchants' guild commissioned Filippo Brunelleschi to design this building in 1419, and over the next eight years, he oversaw its construction according to his plans. With only minor deviations from the original design, the building was completed in 1445 and became the first orphanage of such scale in Europe.



Just ten days after the orphanage opened—on February 10, 1445—the first foundling arrived (a special window, used to anonymously leave a baby at the orphanage, was built in 1660 and remains intact in the orphanage's loggia). By tradition, foundlings in Florence were typically given the surnames Degl'Innocenti or Nocentini ("of the Innocents" and "Innocent"), names still common among Florentines and their descendants worldwide. It wasn't until the 19th century that this tradition was replaced with the practice of naming children after saints commemorated on the day they were found at the special window by the orphanage staff.

Brunelleschi's architectural solutions embodied in this building (such as the arcade supported by columns—the most prominent part of the facade) set the tone for the later stylistics of the Italian Renaissance. Although the old orphanage closed in 1875, it still houses charities related to childhood and motherhood and UNICEF offices, known as the Istituto degli Innocenti. Additionally, the Brunelleschi masterpiece hosts the Spedale degli Innocenti Museum, with detailed information available in the "Museums" section at the end of this book.



On the opposite side of the square is the Loggia dei Serviti, the "counterpart" to Brunelleschi's "House of the Innocents," constructed in the 16th century by the Order of the Servants of Mary—a Florentine monastic order founded three centuries earlier and associated with the Basilica of the Santissima Annunziata, a monumental architectural landmark that crowns the square. The first church or oratory at this site was established in 1081, during the reign of the notable Margravine Matilda of Tuscany. At that time, and for many years thereafter, this area lay outside Florence's city walls and was primarily farmland. By the 13th century, the ancient oratory had fallen into disrepair, and the townspeople appealed to Florentine Bishop Ardinghiero Trotti and seven

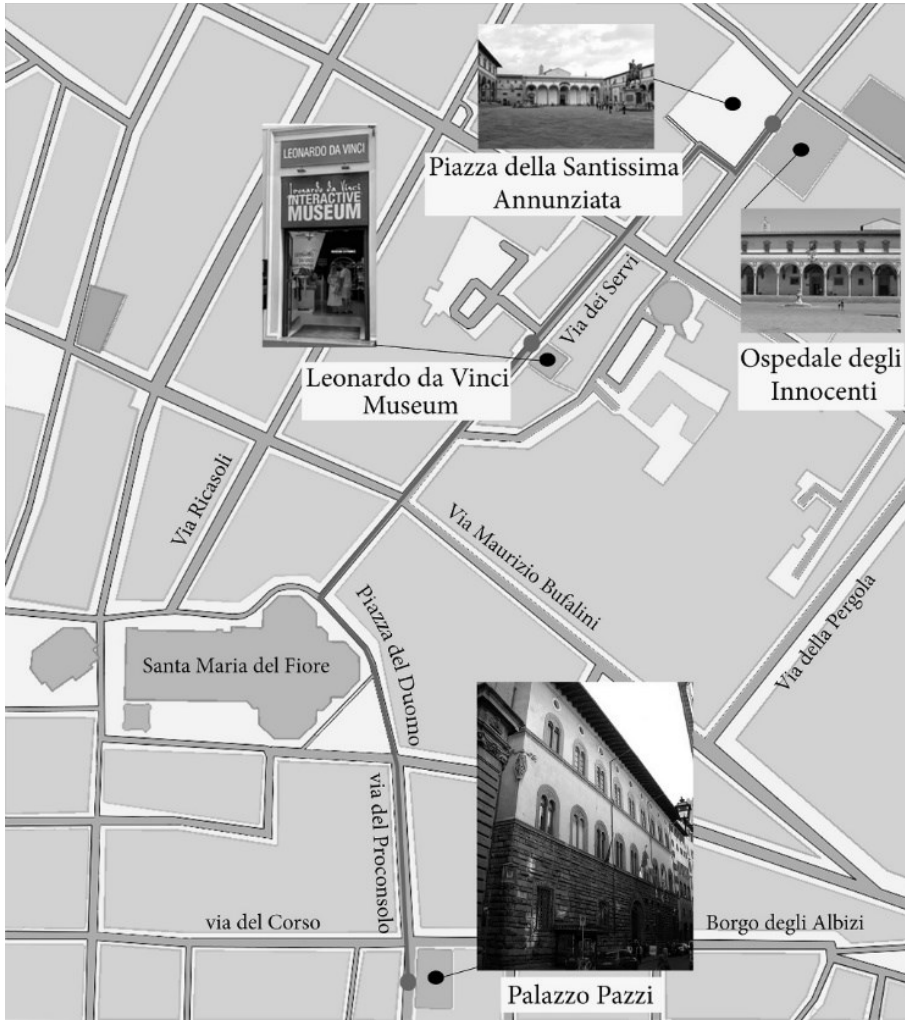


young men, who had twice experienced visions of a weeping Virgin Mary, to restore the oratory. Thus, in 1233, the Order of the Servants of Mary was founded, and in 1250, its members laid the cornerstone of the future basilica on the site of the old oratory. The construction and embellishment of the main basilica building and its numerous chapels continued over the subsequent centuries. Today, the basilica still functions as a church, while the Loggia dei Serviti, acquired in the mid-19th century by the Budini Gattai family (who also own the adjacent three-story palazzo), has housed the Hotel Loggiato dei Serviti for the past 150 years (detailed information about which can also be found in the relevant section of this guidebook).

A bit further along via Gino Capponi lies the Palazzo della Crocetta, built in the 17th century for Maria Maddalena de' Medici, sister of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Cosimo II. Born with very short legs and suffering from various other congenital ailments throughout her brief life of 33 years, the princess lived as a recluse in her residence. To allow Maria Maddalena to attend religious services without attracting unwanted attention from the townspeople, the palace architect, Giulio Parigi, connected it to the Basilica of the Santissima Annunziata via covered overhead galleries. However, shortly after the princess's death, these galleries were demolished, and the palace was separated from the

monastery, becoming a private residence that changed hands several times over the following centuries. After the unification of Italy and the proclamation of Florence as the capital, the Palazzo della Crocetta housed the Royal Audit Office. In 1880, it was converted to accommodate the collection of the Florence Archaeological Museum, which remains there to this day. The museum offers a wealth of intriguing artifacts from Etruscan, ancient Roman, ancient Greek, and ancient Egyptian art, including a female portrait from the famous necropolis in Al-Fayoum and reliefs from the tombs of pharaohs of the 18th and 19th dynasties (14th-13th centuries BC).

PALAZZO PAZZI & MUSEO NAZIONALE DEL BARGELLO



Via dei Servi, named after the Order of the Servants of Mary, leads us from Piazza della Santissima Annunziata directly back to Piazza del Duomo, where the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore stands. Along this street, you'll find the intriguing Leonardo da Vinci Museum, where many of the great Tuscan

scientist and artist's inventions have been recreated, allowing visitors to explore the principles behind these creations.

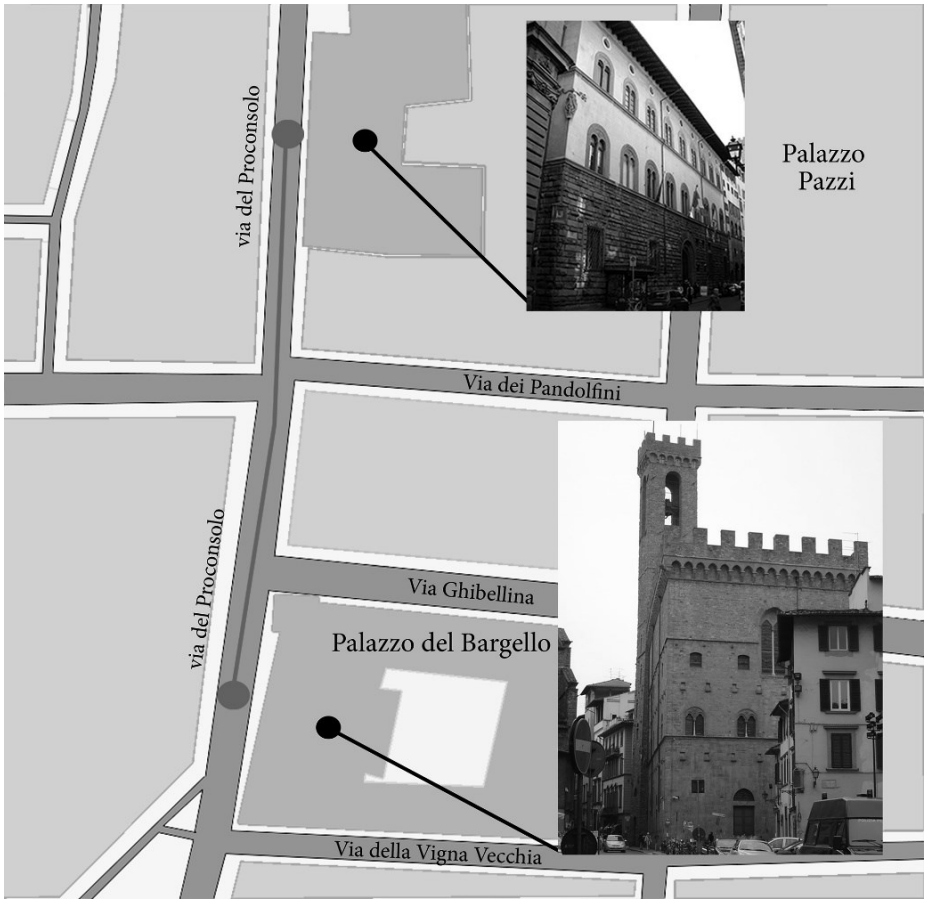
From the square, we head down via del Proconsolo, passing the intersection with via del Corso and Borgo degli Albizi, until we reach Palazzo Pazzi – one of the Florentine residences of the Pazzi family, known for their failed conspiracy against Lorenzo the Magnificent. The current building was constructed on the foundations of two older mansions purchased by the Pazzi family in 1476, shortly before their expulsion from the city following the failed plot against the Medici. The houses were then transferred to the loyal Medici family, the Gherardini della Rosa, from whom the Pazzi repurchased them in the 16th century upon their return to Florence. It was during this time that the palazzo acquired its present appearance.

In the 18th century (in 1735), a small, tower-like structure in the palazzo, resembling a dovecote but offering an excellent view of Florence, officially became home to the "Accademia La Colombaria" – the "Dovecote Academy." This society of scholarly friends, founded by the palace's owner, Giovanni Girolamo de' Pazzi, included notable figures such as physicist and astronomer Ruggero Giuseppe Boscovich, future Naples State Secretary Bernardo Tanucci, theologian and bibliophile Angelo Maria Bandini, and economist Ferdinando Galiani.

Throughout the 19th century, the Pazzi-founded Academy focused solely on the study of Tuscan history. During the Fascist regime in Italy and especially during the retreat of Nazi German troops, the Academy, which then occupied the entire palazzo, suffered significant damage, with much of its library and furniture destroyed. Nevertheless, after the war, the Academy resumed its activities as the Tuscan Academy of Sciences and Letters "La Colombaria." Today, it is divided into four classes: Philology and Literary Criticism; Historical and Philosophical Sciences; Legal, Economic, and Social Sciences; and Physical, Mathematical, and Natural Sciences.

Continuing along via del Proconsolo, we arrive at the main building of the Bargello Museum, one of the three most significant museums in Florence, alongside the Accademia Gallery and the Uffizi Gallery. We have already visited some of the Bargello Museum's branches (the Medici Chapel, Orsanmichele, and Palazzo Martelli). Here, in the

Bargello Palace itself, the most valuable works of Florentine Renaissance sculpture are exhibited, including Donatello's "David" and "Saint George," Michelangelo's "Bacchus," and many others. You can also see the original right panel of the famous "Franks Casket" in this museum – a fine piece of 8th-century Anglo-Saxon art, richly decorated with Old English runes and mythological scenes, sold to the Bargello Museum in the late 19th century.



The name of the palace, which was later transferred to the museum, originates from the ancient Germanic word "burg" meaning "fortress," which evolved into the Late Latin term "bargillus" (via the Gothic "bargi") and then into the Italian language. Indeed, built in the mid-13th century in the Italian Gothic style, the palace resembles a classic castle.

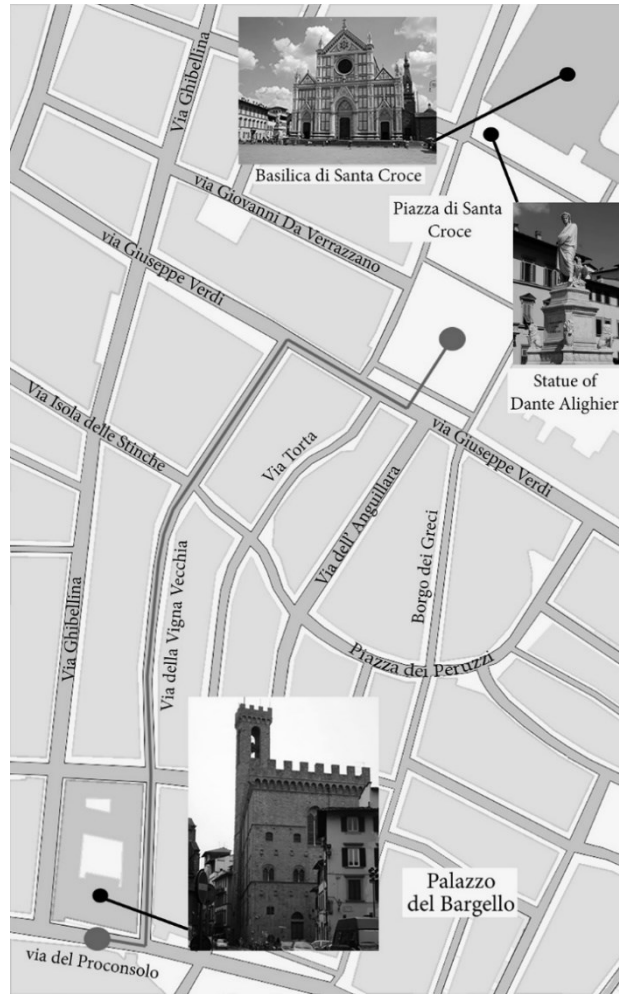
However, the word "Bargello" was not initially associated with architecture by the Florentines; for many centuries, it referred to the head of the city militia, who safeguarded Florence "like a fortress." Before this name was transferred to the castle before us, it housed the residence of the elected "Captain of the People" of Florence, and later, the head of the city's magistrate (government) – the podestà. In those times, this palace was known as the "Palazzo del Podestà" and, as the oldest administrative building in the city, served as a model for the construction of the Palazzo Vecchio we know today. It was only in 1574, after the position of the podestà was abolished by the Medici rulers of Florence, that the empty palace was transformed into the residence of the "Bargello" – the head of the city militia – and thus received its current name.

In the following years, the Bargello Palace was used as a city prison, and until the abolition of the death penalty in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany in 1786, executions were carried out in the inner courtyard of the castle. The palace became a museum in 1859, when, amid the wave of revolutions and wars for unification sweeping Italy, the temporary governor of Tuscany declared the deposition of Grand Duke Leopold II and proclaimed the prison in the ancient castle abolished. The museum officially opened in 1865, and since then, it has housed one of the largest collections of Italian Gothic and Renaissance sculpture.



BASILICA OF THE HOLY CROSS & PAZZI CHAPEL

From the Bargello Museum, we will turn onto Via della Vigna Vecchia and proceed to its junction with Via Giuseppe Verdi. Here, we will turn right and soon find ourselves at Piazza di Santa Croce – the Square of the Holy Cross, home to the eponymous basilica, another iconic landmark of Florence.



As we approach, we are greeted by the marble figure of Dante, gazing sternly towards the southern side of the square, surrounded by four Marzocco lions – symbols of Florence – and a "rising from the ashes Roman eagle," as described by the creator of this sculptural composition, Enrico Pazzi (no relation to the infamous dynasty). Behind Dante rises the masterpiece of Florentine Gothic architecture, the basilica itself, which houses the final resting places of the greatest sons of this immortal



city: Michelangelo Buonarroti, Niccolò Machiavelli, Leon Battista Alberti, Vittorio Alfieri, and Gioachino Rossini.

There is also room for foreigners, such as the Pisan Galileo Galilei or the Polish composer Prince Michał Kleofas Ogiński. Yet, Dante Alighieri, the exile, never found peace in his native land; his mausoleum is in Ravenna, while here in Santa Croce, there is only a cenotaph erected in 1829. Interestingly, the inscription on this cenotaph refers to the father of the modern Italian language as a "Tuscan," or "Etruscan."

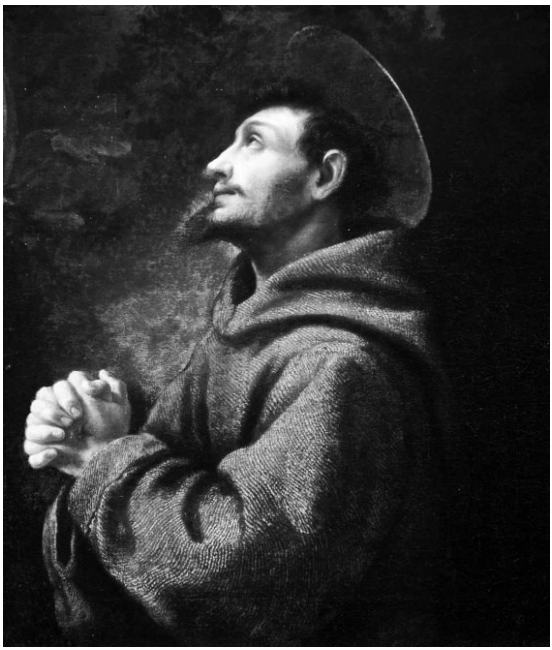
Michelangelo's lavish tomb was created by Giorgio Vasari, a sculptor and architect who is perhaps even better known for his *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* — the first and only collection of 178 biographies of Italian Renaissance artists at the time, which laid the foundation for modern art history. It is quite possible that Michelangelo himself would have preferred a much more modest tomb, but, as is well known, true geniuses are usually marked by their humility.

In the chapels of the basilica, you can also find works by early Renaissance artists such as Giotto and another whose name remains a mystery, known only by his single known work, the altarpiece of Saint Francis in the Bardi Chapel (located to the right of the church choir) — the "Master of San Francesco Bardi." Giotto adorned the Baroncelli Chapel with his polyptych, *The Coronation of the Virgin*. In the Bardi di Vernio Chapel, you can also see Donatello's *Crucifixion*, and in the

basilica's cloister, which is part of the Franciscan monastery and the largest Franciscan church in Italy, there is another architectural masterpiece by Filippo Brunelleschi — the famous Pazzi Chapel.
The creation of the Pazzi Chapel dates back to the first half of the 15th century: in 1423, a fire destroyed the library and part of the residential quarters of the Santa Croce monastery. To restore them, a competition was announced by the city authorities, in which architects and potential sponsors participated. Among them were representatives of the Medici, Spinelli, and Pazzi families, with the Pazzi ultimately winning. Andrea de' Pazzi, a member of the family, proposed financing the construction of the monastery's chapter house, provided that the rear part would serve as the Pazzi family mausoleum, and he intended to dedicate it to his heavenly patron, Saint Andrew the Apostle.



Unfortunately, the detailed history of the project and the preparations for construction remain unknown. Nevertheless, in 1441, Filippo Brunelleschi took on the work for the future Pazzi Chapel, and by 1443, Pope Eugene IV, visiting Florence, stayed there. The construction was only fully completed in 1478, after Brunelleschi’s death, and the interior decoration was done by his friend Luca della Robbia. Della Robbia



Saint Francis of Assisi. Anonymous artist of the Lombard school, mid-17th century.

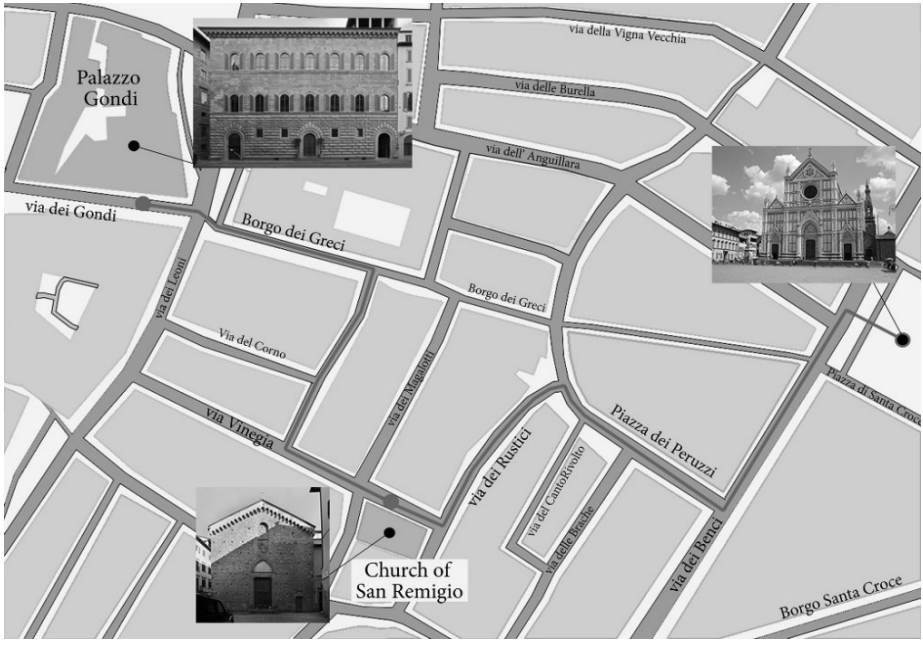
adorned the chapel's dome with rich paintings featuring the Pazzi family coat of arms, as well as roundels (medallions) depicting scenes from the life of Saint Andrew the Apostle. Additionally, in the dome above the chapel's altar, Brunelleschi, who also had a keen interest in astronomy, depicted the constellations visible in the night sky over Florence on July 4, 1442 — the date when work on the chapel resumed after a brief pause due to funding issues.

The founding of the Santa Croce Monastery is traditionally associated with Saint Francis of Assisi, the founder of the monastic order that, in his memory, was named the Franciscan Order. In 1226, a small group of Saint Francis' followers, who preached asceticism and the renunciation of all worldly goods as key Christian virtues, settled near the old city walls of Florence and established an oratory—a prayer house—on the future site of the monastery. This oratory was converted into a full-fledged church in the mid-13th century, becoming the center of the Franciscan community. As the community grew, the original church became increasingly inadequate for worship services. Consequently, in 1294, the decision was made to construct a new church, and according to the most prevalent version, this task was entrusted to the renowned architect Arnolfo di Cambio. The project was indeed so grand that the primary construction was not completed until 1385, and the basilica was only consecrated in 1443 by Cardinal Bessarion—a fascinating figure, a Greek from Trebizond (modern-day Trabzon, Turkey), a Byzantine

scholar, philosopher, theologian, and humanist, and a major proponent of the union between the Orthodox and Catholic churches.

Significant damage was inflicted on the basilica during the flood of November 4-6, 1966—the largest flood in Florence's history, during which the Arno River rose more than five meters, surpassing the grim record set exactly 633 years earlier by the flood of November 4, 1333. During this deluge, caused by relentless heavy rains across central Italy, the Santa Croce monastic complex bore the brunt of the disaster, as the square on which it stands is one of the lowest points in Florence. Among other losses, the floodwaters destroyed Cimabue's *Crucifixion*, created during the Proto-Renaissance period between 1272 and 1280. This artwork, still housed in the Santa Croce Basilica, became a symbol of the devastation wrought by the flood. Another reminder of the two most destructive floods in the city's history are the plaques on Via San Remigio, the first of which indicates the water level reached in 1333, while the second shows how much higher the floodwaters rose in 1966.

PALAZZO GONDI AND THE UFFIZI GALLERY

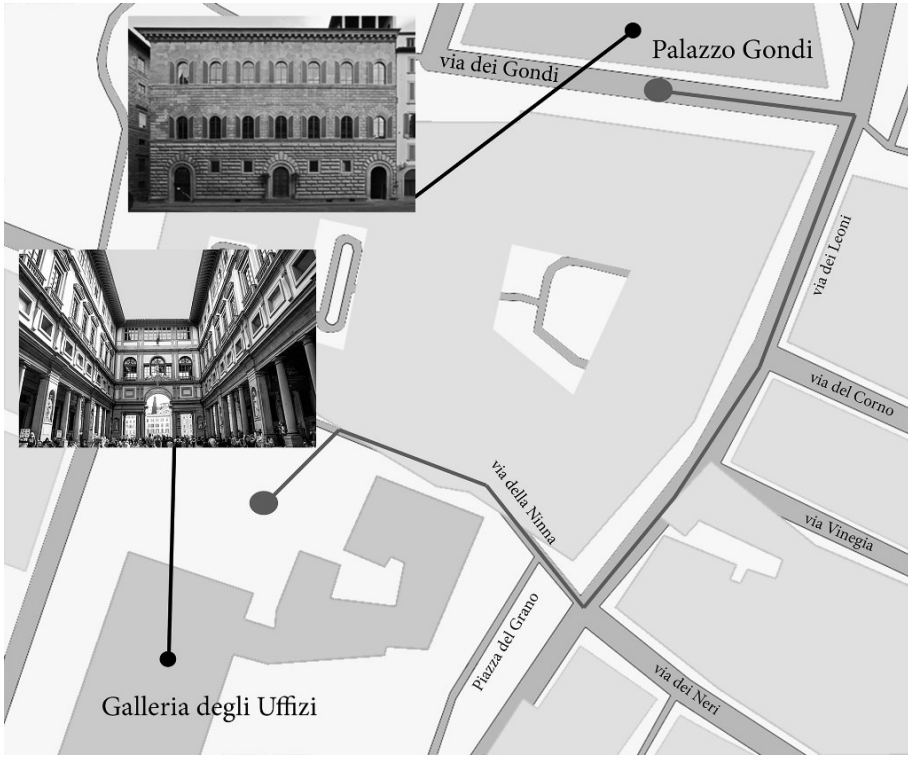


Walkig along Via dei Benci, we can turn onto Piazza dei Peruzzi and delve into the web of medieval Florentine streets, making our way back to Via del Proconsolo. Turning onto the charming Via dei Rustici, we take the first turn onto Via Vinegia, arriving near the Church of San Remigio, on the very street where two plaques commemorate the two most devastating floods in Florence's history. Turning onto Via del Parlagio, we then head left onto Borgo dei Greci, arriving at Palazzo Gondi—one of the few Florentine mansions from the Italian Renaissance period still inhabited by the descendants of its original owners, the Gondi family.

This palace is also notable for being built on the site of the former building of the Guild of Cloth Merchants, where the great Leonardo da Vinci resided for a time. It is widely believed that here he painted the portrait of Madonna Lisa Gherardini del Giocondo, the wife of the Florentine silk merchant Francesco del Giocondo—a rather ordinary portrait of an unremarkable woman by Leonardo's standards, which,

through a series of simple marketing strategies and the creation of a web of remarkably silly myths, now provides the Louvre in Paris with a considerable annual revenue. From the window of this building, incidentally, da Vinci watched the body of Bernardo Bandini, the last participant of the infamous Pazzi Conspiracy to be hanged from the window of Palazzo Vecchio, swinging from a rope.

Later, the house of the Guild was bought by the Florentine patrician Giuliano Gondi, who demolished it to expand his palazzo. Today, a plaque at the entrance to the Gondi family home commemorates this fact: "Leonardo da Vinci spent his happy youth in the house of the Guild of Cloth Merchants, purchased and demolished by Giuliano Gondi to erect this palace, the completion of which in 1874 was marked by a mutual wish of the owner and the city to honor such a glorious name, adorning this elegant and noble building with it."



In other respects, this palazzo is quite typical of its time: the inner courtyard is designed in the style of Michelozzo (similar to what we observed at the Palazzo Medici Riccardi), the ground floor is adorned with rusticated stone (raised stonework), and the windows are fitted with sturdy grilles (as the times were then unsettled). Today, the palace is open for visits by appointment through the official website, and its basement houses a wine bar.

Immediately after Palazzo Gondi, where Via del Proconsolo transitions into Via dei Leoni, you can turn onto the small Via della Ninna and soon find yourself at the entrance to the Uffizi Gallery—the most famous and most visited museum in Italy. This marks the end of our journey along the right bank of the Arno River, completing a full circle of its main streets. Now, we will be introduced to the greatest masterpieces of the Italian Renaissance and, of course, the magnificent setting in which they are housed—a technically complex palace created in the 16th century by Giorgio Vasari, situated right on the banks of the Arno, built not so much on land but above it.

Originally, the palace housed the offices of the administrative and judicial institutions of the Florentine Magistrate (government). Their consolidation in one building allowed the Grand Duke to better monitor their activities. To enable the Medici family members to move safely between their residence at Palazzo Pitti on the left bank of the Arno and the government buildings, Vasari was assigned an unusual task: to construct a special covered corridor above the city, passing directly over the Ponte Vecchio—the oldest bridge in Florence, located near the present-day Uffizi Gallery. The name "Uffizi" itself indicates the original role of the palace: in Italian, "Uffizi" means "Offices."

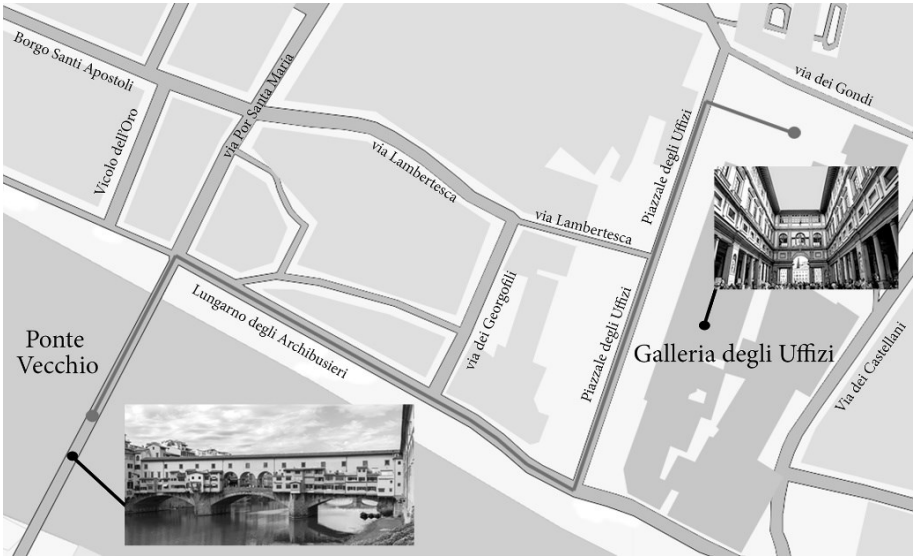
Currently, the gallery is fully open to visitors, except for the San Pier Scheraggio hall, which consists of the nave of the church of the same name, demolished to make way for the Uffizi Palace. This hall is opened only for temporary exhibitions or conferences. As for Vasari's Corridor, it has been under restoration since 2016, with its reopening still anticipated in 2024. I hope that the next edition of my guidebook to Florence and Tuscany will include it.

Among the most outstanding works of art in the Uffizi Gallery are Giotto's "Madonna d'Ognissanti," one of the first depictions of the Virgin

Mary where the artist departs from the iconographic conventions of the Byzantine tradition to detail the fabric in which she is draped; Leonardo da Vinci's "Annunciation"; the famous "The Birth of Venus" and the stunning "Primavera" by Sandro Botticelli; Michelangelo's "Doni Tondo" (The Holy Family with the Young Saint John the Baptist); and, of course, the incredible "Medusa" by Caravaggio. Additionally, in the Uffizi, you will see numerous ancient sculptures and busts, miniatures, and portraits of prominent Florentines. And don't forget to look around, as the gallery's interior is a work of art in its own right..



PONTE VECCHIO (VECCHIO BRIDGE)



There are cities in this world to which one can't return.

The sun beats on their windows as though on polished mirrors.

And no amount of gold will make their hinged gates turn.

Rivers in those cities always flow beneath six bridges.

There are places in those cities where lips first pressed on lips

And pen on paper. In those cities there's a richness

Of scarecrows cast in iron, of colonnades, arcades.

There the crowds besieging trolley stops are speaking

In the language of a man who's been written off as dead.

This is how one of the great Russian poets of the 20th century, Joseph Brodsky, wrote about Florence (translated from Russian by Maurice English and George L. Kline). The six bridges under which the Arno River eternally flows are actually ten, and the oldest and only one that has remained virtually unchanged since the

16th century is the "Old Bridge"—"Ponte Vecchio." All its neighbors, including the two closest—Santa Trinita Bridge and Ponte alle Grazie—were completely rebuilt after World War II. In 1944, during their retreat from Tuscany, Nazi German troops blew up all the crossings over the Arno except for Ponte Vecchio. The sad fate that befell the Florentine bridges, including the Ponte alle Grazie, built in the 13th century and over a hundred years older than Ponte Vecchio, spared Italy's most famous bridge thanks to the German consul in Florence, Gerhard Wolf (1896-1971), a Bavarian-born lawyer and diplomat appointed to his post in 1940. During the German army's retreat from the city, Wolf managed to convince the Wehrmacht command that the "Vasari Corridor" running over Ponte Vecchio had no strategic value, thereby saving the bridge from destruction. Additionally, during his diplomatic service, Wolf managed to save several Italian Jews from arrest and deportation to concentration camps (one of those saved by Wolf, together with the Reich's plenipotentiary minister in Italy, Rudolf Rahn, was Renaissance art expert Bernard Berenson). In memory of this man and his role in preserving Florence's cultural heritage during World War II, a commemorative plaque was installed on Ponte Vecchio in 2007.



But what about the bridge itself? It is likely that the current Ponte Vecchio was preceded by at least two earlier bridges. The first, a Roman bridge, was constructed at the dawn of Florence's history and was expanded and fortified in 123 AD during the reign of Emperor Hadrian,

becoming part of the Cassian Way—one of the main routes of the Apennine Peninsula, connecting Etruria (Tuscany) with the city of Rome. This bridge was probably destroyed in the 6th-7th centuries during the barbarian invasions of Tuscany, and the subsequent fate of crossings over the Arno is difficult to trace. However, it is believed that during the reign of Emperor Charlemagne (who, as we know, stayed in Florence twice), a large wooden bridge was built at the site of Ponte Vecchio, which was fortified in the 9th or 10th century and rebuilt after collapsing in a flood in 1177. This bridge, in turn, was repeatedly damaged by floods and fires but was finally destroyed during one of the largest floods in Florence's history on November 4, 1333, when the water rose 4.22 meters (13.10 feet) above the current level of the Arno, claiming the lives of about 300 Florentines.

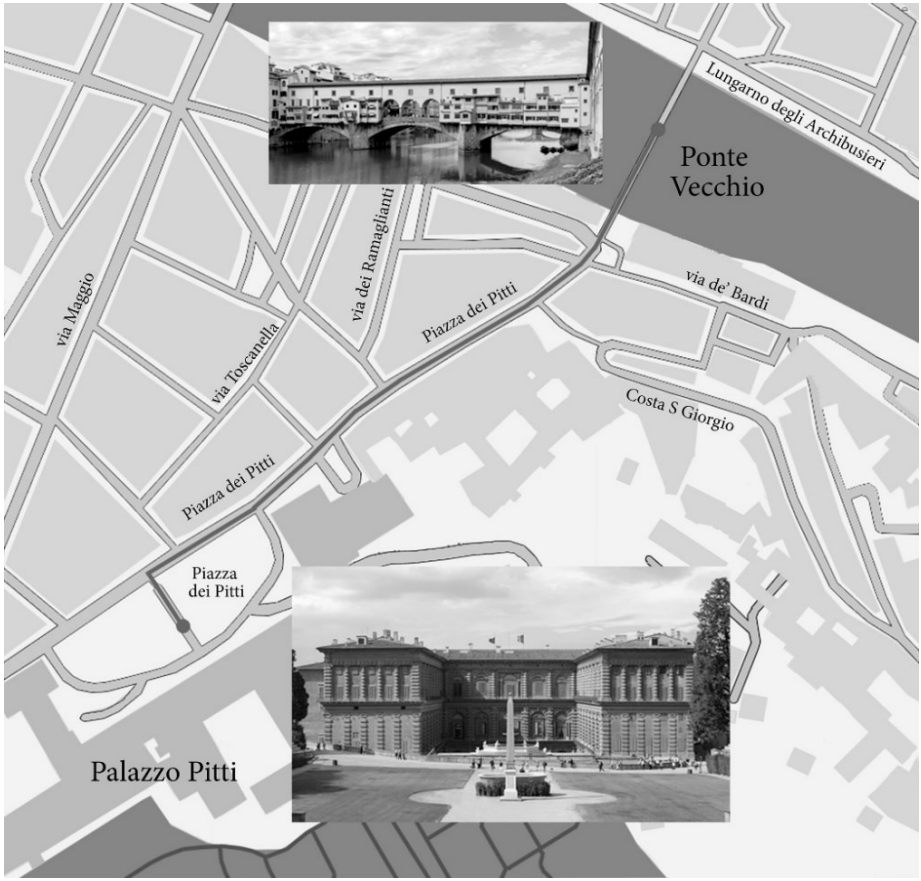
It was after this flood that the current Ponte Vecchio was built, and in the 16th century, it was complemented by the famous "Vasari Corridor," connecting the residence of the Grand Dukes of Tuscany in Palazzo Pitti with the government seat of Florence in Palazzo Vecchio. The numerous shops and stores on the "Old Bridge" appeared a bit earlier, in the mid-15th century. At that time, the primary occupants of the bridge were butchers, as the river flowing directly under their shops was convenient for disposing of "production waste." In 1495, the 48 existing shops on Ponte Vecchio were officially sold to private individuals, trade guilds, and religious organizations by the Florence municipality, and these new owners began expanding them, primarily through extensions on the exterior. All these numerous and rather chaotic modifications eventually gave the bridge its modern appearance.

The only change to the bridge came in 1938 when, by Mussolini's decree, large panoramic windows were installed in the central part of the Vasari Corridor for Adolf Hitler's visit to Florence.

Today, the bridge's complex history is commemorated by two plaques. Both recount how the "Ponte Vecchio" was destroyed by the flood on November 4, 1333, and then rebuilt with even greater beauty and elegance. One of these plaques is located near a building just before the monument to the renowned Mannerist master, sculptor, and architect Benvenuto Cellini (if you are coming from the Uffizi Gallery). This plaque is the least well-preserved and difficult to read, but on the

opposite side, under the arches of the Vasari Corridor, there is an obelisk with a much clearer inscription: "On November 4, 1333, this bridge collapsed due to the swirl of many waters; then in 1345, it was rebuilt, more beautiful and elegant. This child briefly shows what happened." Indeed, on the right side of the 14th-century plaque, we see the image of a winged infant, but what exactly it signifies and what it wants to show us remains unclear.

PALAZZO PITTI & THE BOBOLI GARDENS



Our final stop in the wonderful city of Florence will be the main residence of the Grand Dukes of Tuscany and one of the largest museum complexes in Florence—the Palazzo Pitti. This is where the famous Vasari Corridor ends, and you can reach it on foot via the Piazza de' Pitti, which starts right from the Ponte Vecchio.

This palace, austere and somewhat rough in appearance, was commissioned by Luca Pitti, a Florentine banker knighted and lavishly rewarded by the Republic's government during the reign of his friend, Cosimo the Elder de' Medici. Despite this friendship, the Medici and

Pitti families couldn't avoid rivalry. Thus, when the first stone of the future palazzo was laid in 1458, Luca Pitti decided that the windows of his residence should be larger than the entrance to the Medici Palace. Naturally, such a large project required cheap labor, which was found among criminals fleeing Florence or enemies of the Medici sentenced to exile. Nevertheless, by 1465, Luca Pitti's funds had run out, and his heirs lived in a partially unfinished residence for some time. In 1549, when the Pitti Bank collapsed, the palazzo was purchased by Grand Duchess Eleanor of Toledo, the wife of the famous Cosimo I. Suffering from tuberculosis, Eleanor found the left bank of the Arno much cleaner and more pleasant for living than the crowded and stuffy old city, and she was undoubtedly right. However, moving to a new residence didn't significantly improve her health or that of some of her children with Grand Duke Cosimo I; two of them died before reaching adulthood. It was here, by the way, that the future Queen of France, Maria de' Medici, daughter of Grand Duke Francesco I and granddaughter of Cosimo I and Eleanor of Toledo, spent her childhood.



During the 16th to 18th centuries, while the Palazzo Pitti was owned by the Grand Dukes of Tuscany from the House of Medici, the palace and



Cosimo I de' Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany

its adjoining territories underwent numerous restorations and additions. Two side wings to the main building were added only in the 18th century by architect Giuseppe Ruggieri, in imitation of French royal residences. When the Tuscan crown passed to the Habsburg-Lorraine dynasty, the Palazzo Pitti became the favorite residence of Grand Duke Peter Leopold I, a great reformer and humanist who abolished the death penalty in Tuscany and succeeded his elder brother on the throne of the Holy Roman Empire in 1790. His son, Grand Duke Ferdinand III of Tuscany, was forced to leave Florence during Napoleon Bonaparte's advance and abdicate the Tuscan throne, after which the Palazzo Pitti was plundered by the French army. Many Renaissance and Mannerist masterpieces in its collection, such as Annibale Carracci's "Holy Family," Paolo Veronese's "Moses Crossing the Nile" and "The History of Jacob," and many others, were lost forever: the French occupational government sent them to the Napoleonic Museum in Paris, but they never arrived. Napoleon himself stayed at the Palazzo Pitti multiple times, and in 1809 he housed his sister Elisa there, granting her the honorary title of Grand Duchess of Tuscany.

When the Napoleonic Wars ended and the French left Tuscany, the old order was restored, and the Habsburgs returned to the Palazzo Pitti. In 1833, Grand Duke Leopold II opened part of the palace to the public as

an art museum. However, due to the Habsburgs' strong opposition to the unification of Italy in 1859-1861, all their Tuscan property was confiscated after the Grand Duchy was annexed to the Kingdom of Italy. Consequently, the Palazzo Pitti briefly became the residence of the first King of Italy, Victor Emmanuel II, as commemorated by Annibale Gatti's fresco "The Genius of the House of Savoy" in the Palazzina della Meridiana in the Boboli Gardens, where the Costume Gallery is now located—the largest collection in Italy dedicated to the history of fashion.

Besides the Costume Gallery, the Palazzo Pitti complex houses the collections of the Palatine Gallery, the Gallery of Modern Art, the Silver Museum, the Porcelain Museum, and the Carriage Museum. Detailed information on booking tickets and exhibition schedules is available on the official Uffizi Gallery website in the "Palazzo Pitti" section.

In the Boboli Gardens, special attention should be given to the "Buontalenti Grotto" – a masterpiece of Mannerist architecture created by Giorgio Vasari and Bernardo Buontalenti (primarily the latter, hence the name of the grotto) at the behest of Grand Duke Francesco I de' Medici. The unique decor of this pavilion imitates natural forms, delicately interwoven with marvelous sculptural and pictorial compositions. On either side of the entrance stand the statues of Apollo and Ceres by Baccio Bandinelli. The central theme of this architectural marvel is the metamorphosis of chaos into order, the transformation of primordial matter into a finished creation – a core concept of alchemical philosophy, passionately pursued by Grand Duke Francesco I (as well as many other European rulers of the 16th and 17th centuries). The creator of all these stunning forms, corals, shells, and stalactites, from which anthropomorphic figures seem to crystallize, was the plaster master Pietro Mati.



WHERE TO STAY IN FLORENCE

In this section, you will find a selection of excellent Florence hotels, inns, and hostels, some of which will not only provide you with comfortable accommodations in the city of Dante and Michelangelo but also help you momentarily lose track of time (a sensation that is your best ally when traveling through Tuscany).

HOSTELS

Ostello Gallo d'Oro

- Cozy and clean hostel with a good location.
- Address: Via Camillo Cavour, 104, 50129 Firenze FI
- +39 055 552 2964
- info@ostellogallodoro.com
- Features: Free Wi-Fi, breakfast included, shared and private rooms.

A very clean and cozy hostel offering its guests a delicious and varied breakfast. The staff is extremely pleasant and always available to answer any questions about the city (if you have any left after reading this guide, of course). The hostel is within walking distance of the city center and all major attractions, although the bustling Camillo Cavour street and the shared bathrooms, which might have queues in the evening, can be a bit inconvenient. Overall, this hostel offers an excellent balance of price and quality.

Plus Florence

- Modern hostel with a variety of amenities including a pool and fitness centre.
- Address: Via Santa Caterina d'Alessandria, 15, 50129 Firenze FI
- +39 055 628 6347
- Features: Swimming pool, bar, terrace, common and private rooms.

Conveniently located, this hotel offers a wide range of included and additional services, as well as a pool, fitness center, and a rooftop bar with a beautiful view of the city. The rooms are spacious and clean, though it is worth noting the relatively weak Wi-Fi signal and potential street noise at night.

Hostel Archi Rossi

- Popular hostel with good reviews and cozy atmosphere.
- Address: Via Faenza, 94R, 50123 Firenze FI
- +39 055 290804
- Features: Breakfast included, garden, city tours, shared and private rooms.

This hostel is located just a few minutes' walk from Florence's train station, in close proximity to the old city center. It offers top-notch service, and the rooms are simple yet quite comfortable. Breakfast is varied and included in the price of the stay. Additionally, the hostel provides an extra service of organized evening tours of the city for guests.

INEXPENSIVE HOTELS

Hotel Dali

- Cozy and affordable hotel in the city center.
- Address: Via dell'Oriuolo, 17, 50122 Firenze FI
- +39 339 576 9086
- Features: Free Wi-Fi, close to major attractions.

The hotel is conveniently located within walking distance of Piazza del Duomo. The rooms are always clean and furnished quite cozily. However, it is important to note that there are no elevators, so please keep this in mind.

Hotel Alessandra

- Family run hotel with a friendly atmosphere and good services.
- Address: Borgo Santi Apostoli, 17, 50123 Firenze FI
- +39 055 283 438
- Features: Breakfast included, free Wi-Fi, convenient location.

Conveniently located in the heart of Florence, just a few minutes' walk from Piazza della Signoria. The rooms are clean, cozy, and spacious, and the breakfast is varied and tasty (though the selection could be larger). Some inconveniences might include the old and slow elevator, and the potential noise from the street due to the hotel's location in the tourist center.

Hotel Casci Florence

- Small family run hotel with excellent service.
- Address: Via Camillo Cavour, 13, 50129 Firenze FI
- +39 055 211686
- Features: Breakfast included, free Wi-Fi

The hotel is situated in the historic center of Florence, just a few minutes from Piazza del Duomo. It offers comfortable rooms, breakfast included in the price, and friendly staff (as is the case with the other hotels I recommend). This hotel provides excellent value for money and great service, despite minor drawbacks such as street noise and a somewhat repetitive breakfast.

MID-RANGE HOTELS

Hotel Loggiato dei Serviti

- A hotel with historical charm and comfortable rooms.
- Address: Piazza della Santissima Annunziata, 3, 50122 Firenze FI
- +39 055 289592

- Features: Breakfast included, free Wi-Fi, historic building

This hotel is located right on Piazza Santissima Annunziata, near the Accademia Gallery, and stands out for its antique interiors, crafted with great attention to detail, instantly setting the timeless tone for your journey through Florence. Guests will also appreciate the varied and delicious breakfast included in the room rate.
Minor drawbacks include small windows in some rooms and an old elevator, which, though perfectly fitting the hotel's overall style, might be inconvenient for some guests..

Hotel Davanzati

- Comfortable and modern hotel.
- Address: Via Porta Rossa, 5, 50123 Firenze FI
- +39 055 286666
- Features: Free Wi-Fi, breakfast included, bar.

Located in the heart of Florence, this hotel allows you to reach all the city's main attractions within minutes on foot. The rooms are clean, cozy, and comfortable, though they may seem a bit small.

The central location can result in nighttime noise, which might disturb a peaceful night's sleep.

Hotel Santa Maria Novella

- A cozy hotel with a beautiful interior and convenient location.
- Address: Piazza di Santa Maria Novella, 1, 50123 Firenze FI
- +39 055 271840
- Features: Breakfast included, free Wi-Fi, fitness center.

This hotel is one of those where the interiors set the tone for your trip from the very first moments of your stay. The spacious and elegant rooms, furnished in an eclectic classical style, offer stunning views and, combined with first-class service, will leave you impressed. Additionally, the varied breakfast included in your stay is worth noting.

Hotel Torre Guelfa Palazzo Acciaiuoli

- A hotel with historical charm located in the centre of Florence.
- Address: Borgo Santi Apostoli, 8, 50123 Firenze FI
- +390552396338
- Features: Historical building, central location, great views, rooftop terrace

Palazzo Acciaiuoli, still named after its most famous owner—the Grand Seneschal of the Kingdom of Naples, patron of the arts, and friend and correspondent of Boccaccio and Petrarch, Niccolò Acciaiuoli, Count of Melfi, Malta, Gozo, and Baron of Corinth—was constructed in the 13th century. The building's commissioners and initial owners were members of another noble Florentine family, the Buondelmonti. It is believed that the feud between the Buondelmonti and the Amidei families marked the beginning of the bloody rivalry between the Florentine Guelphs and Ghibellines (with the Buondelmonti aligned with the Guelphs and the Amidei with the Ghibellines; hence, the tower adjoining the palazzo is called Torre Guelfa). The Buondelmonti family initially resided here on Borgo Santi Apostoli, and their 13th-century tower, which later became part of the 15th-century family palazzo, still stands on the nearby Via delle Terme. In 1341, the palazzo was purchased by Niccolò Acciaiuoli, son of the prominent Florentine banker and politician Acciaiolo Acciaiuoli (d. 1349) and Guglielmina de' Pazzi, cousin of the infamous Jacopo Pazzi. Leveraging his father's connections, Niccolò built a distinguished career at the court of King Robert of Anjou, who bestowed upon him the title of Grand Seneschal (effectively the supreme commander of the army and the highest judge of the Kingdom). Niccolò Acciaiuoli is said to have become the lover of King Robert’s daughter-in-law, Catherine de Valois, for whom he secured the Principality of Achaea (on the Peloponnese peninsula). Catherine de Valois had legitimate claims to this principality, but it had long been usurped by another family. For these services, Acciaiuoli was awarded the title of Baron of Corinth (an ancient city on the Peloponnese that became a crucial fortress and trade center in the Principality of Achaea during the Crusader period). In his later years, Niccolò Acciaiuoli, one of the wealthiest nobles of Naples and Florence, funded the construction of the

Certosa di Firenze, a Carthusian monastery completed after his death in 1365. He and many of his family members were interred there. The monastery is located five kilometers south of the old center of Florence, and although not included in my general city tour, I highly recommend visiting it if you have the time.

Niccolò Acciaiuoli's memory is preserved on the façade of the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore and by the prominent Florentine artist Andrea del Castagno in his series of frescoes at Villa Carducci-Pandolfini (the originals of which are now in the Uffizi Gallery), where Acciaiuoli is depicted alongside Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch. Additionally, above the entrance to the palazzo, you can see the combined coat of arms of the Acciaiuoli and Buondelmonti families: two lions holding banners with the heraldic lilies of the House of Anjou (these banners were added to the Acciaiuoli arms by King Robert in recognition of Niccolò's faithful service to his house) and a cross on top of Golgotha, referring to the meaning of the family names, including Buondelmonti ("Good from the Mountain").

Niccolò Acciaiuoli also bequeathed the palace to the Carthusian monastery, which owned it until the 19th century, when secularization of monastic properties in Tuscany took place. The Palazzo Acciaiuoli was subsequently sold several times and eventually came into the possession of the Burresi Pettini family, who converted part of it into a superb hotel offering a unique blend of historical charm and modern comfort in the heart of Florence. I can assure you that your journey to the capital of the Italian Renaissance will be truly unforgettable if, after exploring the Uffizi Gallery and Piazza del Duomo, you return to your room within one of the oldest Florentine palaces, deeply connected to the history of one of the city's most influential patrician families.

However, the hotel does have a few drawbacks. The historic building lacks an elevator, which may pose inconvenience for guests with heavy luggage or mobility issues. Additionally, due to its central location and insufficient soundproofing, some rooms may experience noise.

HI-RANGE HOTELS

Four Seasons Hotel Firenze

- A luxury hotel with excellent service and extensive gardens.
- Address: Borgo Pinti, 99, 50121 Firenze FI
- +39 055 26261
- Features: Spa, swimming pool, restaurants, gardens, free Wi-Fi

The Four Seasons Hotel Firenze impresses guests with its luxurious service and magnificent location. The hotel offers spacious, elegantly decorated rooms with stunning views of its private garden, which is open to guests. The hotel staff stands out for their attention to detail and friendly approach, making the stay even more comfortable. The breakfast features a variety of delicious dishes.

Hotel Savoy

- An elegant hotel in the heart of Florence with stunning views.
- Address: Piazza della Repubblica, 7, 50123 Firenze FI
- Features: Restaurant, fitness center, free Wi-Fi, bar.

The name of this hotel speaks for itself. You will enjoy spacious and elegant rooms, first-class service, and a friendly staff, along with a varied and delicious breakfast. Its perfect location in the heart of Florence offers excellent views from the rooms.

WHERE TO EAT IN FLORENCE.

It is important to note that in Tuscany you will encounter three main types of establishments:

- “Trattoria”: Often simple, family-run taverns in classic Tuscan style, with affordable prices and a pleasant atmosphere.

- “Osteria”: Originally humble drinking establishments or inns, now often wine bars with a focus on fine dining.

- “Ristorante”: High-end Italian restaurants offering gourmet cuisine.

Additionally, Italian fast food is categorized as **tavola calda** – "hot table" – featuring tasty and inexpensive dishes, usually served for takeaway.

STREET FOOD AND INEXPENSIVE TAVERNS

Trattoria ZaZa

Address: Piazza del Mercato Centrale, 26R, 50136 Florence FI, Italy

Located near the central market, Trattoria ZaZa offers traditional Florentine dishes at reasonable prices. The menu features items such as ribollita (Florentine soup) and the renowned Florentine steak. The interior is simple yet cozy, adding an authentic charm to the place.

Prices: Main courses range from 10 to 20 euros.

Osteria Santo Spirito

Address: Piazza Santo Spirito, 9R, 50125 Florence FI, Italy

This osteria is located on Piazza Santo Spirito, a bit further from the center but well worth the walk. It serves traditional Tuscan dishes, such

as truffle pasta and roasted vegetables. The warm and friendly atmosphere makes it an ideal spot for a relaxing lunch or dinner.

Prices: Main courses are around 12 to 18 euros.

Trattoria Mario

Address: Via della Spada, 27R, 50123 Florence FI, Italy

Trattoria Mario is a small and popular establishment known for its homemade dishes and delicious cuisine. It offers traditional Florentine fare, such as tortelli and stewed meats.

Prices: Main courses range from 10 to 15 euros.

All three of the aforementioned establishments are within walking distance from the Ostello Gallo d'Oro, the first on our list, and offer excellent options for a tasty and affordable lunch or dinner while maintaining an authentic Florentine dining experience.

Trattoria da Giorgio

Address: Via San Gallo, 30R, 50129 Firenze FI, Italy

This cozy trattoria offers traditional Tuscan cuisine at affordable prices. The menu features dishes such as the Florentine steak and homemade pizza. The atmosphere is friendly and laid-back, making it an excellent choice for lunch or dinner.

Prices: Main dishes range from 10-15 euros.

Osteria Vecchio Cancello

Address: Via dei Servi, 52R, 50122 Firenze FI, Italy

Located within walking distance from Plus Florence, Osteria Vecchio Cancello offers authentic Florentine cuisine in a traditional style. Signature dishes include ribollita (Florentine soup) and pizza cooked in a wood-fired oven. The interior is simple but cozy.

Prices: Main dishes range from 12-18 euros.

La Burrasca

Address: Via del Leone, 50R, 50124 Firenze FI, Italy

This osteria, located a bit farther from Plus Florence but still within walking distance, offers homemade Tuscan dishes. The menu features simple yet delicious options like homemade pasta and braised meat. The establishment has a pleasant and relaxed atmosphere, making it an excellent choice for a leisurely lunch or dinner.

Prices: Main dishes range from 10-15 euros.

These establishments provide a great selection of authentic and affordable dishes near the Plus Florence hostel, the second on my list, allowing you to enjoy genuine Florentine cuisine without significant expense.

Osteria Vini e Vecchi Sapori

Address: Via dei Magazzini, 3R, 50122 Firenze FI, Italy

Located in the heart of the city, Osteria Vini e Vecchi Sapori offers homemade Tuscan cuisine. Here, you can enjoy dishes such as ribollita (Florentine soup) and homemade pasta. The establishment boasts a cozy and traditional atmosphere, making it an excellent choice for an authentic lunch or dinner.

Prices: Main dishes range from 12-18 euros.

Trattoria da Giorgio

Address: Via San Gallo, 30R, 50129 Firenze FI, Italy

This cozy trattoria, located near Hostel Archi Rossi, offers traditional Tuscan cuisine at reasonable prices. The menu features classic Florentine dishes, and the establishment itself is charmingly simple and homely.

Prices: Main dishes range from 10-15 euros.

These establishments are within walking distance of Hostel Archi Rossi, the third on my list, and provide excellent value for money while maintaining an authentic Florentine atmosphere.

Trattoria il Contadino

Address: Via dei Conti, 17R, 50123 Firenze FI, Italy

This traditional Florentine trattoria is just a few minutes' walk from Hotel Dali. It offers a varied menu of homemade Tuscan dishes, including ribollita, Florentine steak, and pasta. The interior is simple and cozy, creating an authentic atmosphere.

Prices: Main dishes range from 10-15 euros.

MID-RANGE RESTAURANTS

Buca Lapi

Address: Via del Trebbio, 1R, 50123 Firenze FI, Italy

This historic establishment is renowned for its traditional Florentine dishes and an excellent wine list. Here, you can enjoy specialties like Florentine steak and pasta, as well as a selection of Tuscan wines.

Prices: Main dishes range from 20-30 euros.

Feature: An outstanding wine list with a focus on local wineries.

La Giostra

Address: Borgo Pinti, 10R, 50121 Firenze FI, Italy

La Giostra is located a 15-minute walk from Hotel Casci and is renowned for its authentic Tuscan dishes and friendly service. The restaurant offers a wide selection of wines, including excellent local and regional options. The cozy and atmospheric interior makes it an ideal place for a relaxing dinner.

Prices: Main dishes range from 20-30 euros.

Feature: A diverse wine list with a focus on Tuscan and Italian wines.

Ristorante Romantico il Paiolo

Address: Via dei Neri, 8R, 50122 Firenze FI, Italy

Ristorante Romantico il Paiolo offers traditional Tuscan and Italian cuisine in a cozy and romantic setting. Located in the historic center of Florence, it is conveniently situated for dining during city strolls. The menu features a variety of dishes, including pasta, risotto, and meat delicacies. Desserts include traditional Tuscan sweets among other options. The restaurant also boasts a fine selection of local wines, allowing for perfect pairings, with knowledgeable staff to assist with recommendations.

The restaurant's warm and romantic atmosphere makes it an ideal spot for a romantic dinner or a special celebration. The traditional Italian decor creates a welcoming ambiance.

Main dishes range from 20-30 euros.

Appetizers and desserts range from 10-15 euros.

La Nicchietta in Calimaruzza

Address: Via Calimaruzza, 1R, 50122 Firenze FI, Italy

La Nicchietta offers traditional Tuscan dishes in a cozy and authentic atmosphere. Located in a picturesque area of Florence, it is close to attractions such as Piazza della Signoria and the Duomo. The restaurant is renowned for its attention to detail and quality of food, allowing guests to enjoy genuine Florentine cuisine. The menu features a variety of traditional pastas, such as pasta with Bolognese sauce or pasta with truffles, meat dishes including the famous Florentine steak (bistecca alla fiorentina), and various risottos with seasonal ingredients. Desserts include traditional Italian options like tiramisu and panna cotta. A wide selection of Tuscan and Italian wines is also available.

Main dishes typically range from 15-25 euros.

Appetizers and desserts are around 10-15 euros.

Trattoria Lo Stracotto

Address: Via dell'Acqua, 2R, 50122 Firenze FI

The establishment is located in the historic center of Florence, making it convenient for those who want to enjoy delicious local cuisine after exploring the city. The restaurant is renowned for its dishes prepared according to traditional recipes and its attention to ingredient quality. The menu offers a variety of pasta dishes, including popular Tuscan recipes, and meat dishes such as steak and stews. A highlight is the stracotto, a specialty slow-cooked meat dish. Additionally, there is a wide selection of risottos, desserts, and local Tuscan wines.

Main courses range from 15-25 euros.

Appetizers and desserts are typically around 10-15 euros.

Locanda de' Medici

Address: Via della Stufa, 1, 50123 Firenze FI

The restaurant is located in the center of Florence and offers the opportunity to enjoy both traditional Italian dishes and local Tuscan specialties. It is known for its attention to the quality of ingredients and excellent service. The restaurant features a cozy and traditional interior that creates a pleasant atmosphere for lunch or dinner. The decor includes elements of Italian classic design, adding to the overall charm of the establishment.

Main courses typically cost between 20-30 euros.

Appetizers and desserts are around 10-15 euros.

Trattoria Anita

Адрес: Via Faenza, 90, 50123 Firenze FI

Trattoria Anita is located in the historic center of Florence and is a popular choice among locals and tourists for its authentic Florentine cuisine and pleasant atmosphere. The restaurant offers a wide selection of traditional Italian dishes prepared with fresh, local ingredients. The interior creates a cozy and relaxed ambiance, featuring traditional Italian decor that adds to the friendly and welcoming atmosphere, making it an ideal setting for lunch or dinner.

Main courses typically cost between 15-25 euros.

Appetizers and desserts are around 10-15 euros.

HI-RANGE RESTAURANTS

Osteria Vini e Vecchi Sapori

Address: Via dei Velluti, 1R, 50125 Firenze FI

This restaurant is located in the heart of Florence and is renowned for its traditional Tuscan dishes, prepared with high-quality ingredients. The menu features both classic Florentine dishes and modern interpretations of Tuscan cuisine. The restaurant also offers an exquisite wine list with an excellent selection of Tuscan and Italian wines.

Prices: Main courses range from 30-50 euros.

Highlights: Polite and attentive service, cozy atmosphere.

Enoteca Pinchiorri

Address: Via Ghibellina, 87, 50122 Firenze FI

One of the most renowned restaurants in Florence, Enoteca Pinchiorri boasts three Michelin stars and offers a unique gastronomic experience. The restaurant specializes in modern Italian cuisine with a focus on

authentic Tuscan ingredients. It is also famous for its impressive wine collection.

Prices: Main courses range from 70-150 euros.

Highlights: Elegant interior, top-notch service, outstanding wine selection.

Borgo San Jacopo

Адрес: Borgo San Jacopo, 14, 50125 Firenze FI

Borgo San Jacopo, located in the Lungarno Collection Hotel, offers modern interpretations of traditional Tuscan cuisine. The restaurant has been awarded a Michelin star and is known for its refined approach to cooking. The interior is stylish and contemporary, creating the perfect atmosphere for an exquisite dining experience.

Prices: Main courses range from 40-70 euros.

Highlights: A remarkable blend of tradition and modernity, elegant setting, and attentive service.

FLORENCE MUSEUMS

MUSEO DI PALAZZO VECCHIO

- Piazza della Signoria
- Tel. Ticket Office + 39 055 2768325
- musei.civici@comune.fi.it
- ticketsmuseums.comune.fi.it

This palace is also the seat of the city council. Unfortunately this means that on certain special occasions when institutional ceremonies are scheduled, the museum may be totally or partially closed to the public. Before planning a visit, please check the museum website for closure information.
The 'Traces of Florence' section of the museum, on the ground floor of Palazzo Vecchio, can be visited free of charge. The opening hours are the same as the rest of the museum. For safety reasons, visitors who have a backpack with them are asked to carry it by hand along the tour route.
Tower and Patrol Walk
Access not permitted to children under 6 years of age and not recommended for visitors with mobility difficulties, heart patients, asthmatics, those who suffer from vertigo and claustrophobia. Children under 18 must be accompanied by an adult. In case of rain, access to the Tower is suspended. The visit ends at the Patrol Walk.
MUSEUM
Access for disabled visitors is via the side entrance in Via dei Gondi.
The two main floors of the museum are wheel-chair accessible, but unfortunately architectural barriers prevent access to the mezzanine floor and to some of the educational activity locations.
Cloakroom
Situated on the ground floor in the Cortile della Dogana, in the ticket office area.

Visitors must leave all umbrellas, backpacks and large bags in the cloakroom, free of charge.
Students must leave their backpacks in the cloakroom.
Wheelchairs and strollers may be borrowed free of charge

Lift

The lift, which is situated on the ground floor in the Cortile della Dogana, is for the use of visitors with reduced mobility only.

ORSANMICHELE CHURCH AND MUSEUM

- Via dell'Arte della Lana, 50123 Firenze FI
- Tel. Ticket Office + 055294883 .
- mn-bar.orsanmichele@cultura.gov.it
- bargellomusei.it

The museum does not have facilities for disabled access.

CHIESA DI SAN CARLO DEI LOMBARDI

- Via dei Calzaiuoli, 29, 50123 Firenze FI
- Tel./fax: +39 055 986 1648
- sancarlo-firenze.it

This is a working church. Admission is free but may be restricted due to mass.

GIOTTO'S BELL TOWER

- Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, Piazza del Duomo, 50122 Firenze FI
- +39 055 2645789

- help@duomo.firenze.it
- tickets.duomo.firenze.it

Accessibility
Visitors who climb the Bell Tower, before entering, must mandatory leave inside the Luggage Storage (Piazza Duomo n. 38/r) suitcases, backpacks, parcels, containers and large and medium-sized bags and other types of objects (see the complete regulation at this link). Visitors who present themselves at the entrance with objects prohibited by the regulation will not be able to enter.
The Bell Tower can only be accessed on a contingent basi, following the restricted rhythms of the slot and not independently. No lift is available and there are many steps. The climb is not recommended for people with a heart condition or suffering from dizziness and claustrophobia. It is possible to reserve free admission for the person with difficulties, by writing to the email accessibilita@duomo.firenze.it or by contacting the cash desk in Piazza Duomo 14, subject to availability, against a certification document. Any gratuity for the companion is subject to further considerations. For privacy reasons, the email conversation will be deleted. For any paying people to match, we kindly ask you to make the purchase online.

SANTA MARIA DEL FIORE

- Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, Piazza del Duomo, 50122 Firenze FI
- +39 055 2645789
- help@duomo.firenze.it
- tickets.duomo.firenze.it

Accessibility
Admission to the cathedral is allowed only to people wearing clothing suitable for a place of worship. Visitors with bare legs and shoulders or wearing sandals, hats and sunglasses are not allowed inside the

cathedral. Bulky backpacks and bags are not allowed. The entrance for people with motor disabilities or impaired mobility is located on the right side of the Cathedral.
The monument features the **TouchAble**
Every first Thursday of the month at 3:00 pm there are free guided tours for the blind and visually impaired; advance registration is required, the number of participants is limited.
Reservations: +39 055 302885 and accessibilita@operaduomo.firenze.it

THE BAPTISTERY OF ST. JOHN

- Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, Piazza del Duomo, 50122 Firenze FI
- +39 055 2645789
- help@duomo.firenze.it
- tickets.duomo.firenze.it

N.b. Visitors are advised that the Baptistery is undergoing restoration of the mosaics of the vault, which are not visible.
Accessibility
The Baptistery is also accessible to people with disabilities. Depending on the availability of places, it is possible to reserve free entry for a person with disabilities by writing to accessibilita@duomo.firenze.it or at the ticket office in Piazza Duomo 14, subject to availability, upon presentation of a document confirming the availability. Any tip for an accompanying person will be subject to further review. For privacy reasons, email correspondence will be deleted. For all paying people, in order to comply, we kindly ask you to make your purchase online.

DOME OF SANTA MARIA DEL FIORE

- Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, Piazza del Duomo, 50122 Firenze FI
- +39 055 2645789
- help@duomo.firenze.it
- tickets.duomo.firenze.it

Accessibility
Visitors who climb the Dome before entering must mandatory leave inside the Luggage Storage (Piazza Duomo n. 38/r) suitcases, backpacks, parcels, containers and large and medium-sized bags and other types of objects (see the complete regulation at this link). Visitors who present themselves at the entrance with objects prohibited by the regulation will not be able to enter.
The Dome can only be accessed by booking a slot time No lift is available and there are many steps. The climb is not recommended for people with a heart condition or suffering from dizziness and claustrophobia.
It is possible to reserve free admission for the person with difficulties, by writing to the email accessibilita@duomo.firenze.it or by contacting the cash desk in Piazza Duomo 14, subject to availability, against a certification document.

THE DUOMO TERRACES

- Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, Piazza del Duomo, 50122 Firenze FI
- +39 055 2645789
- help@duomo.firenze.it
- tickets.duomo.firenze.it

Accessibility
The Terraces can only be accessed on a contingent basis with one of our companions or guides, following the rhythms of the slot and not independently. No lift is available and there are many steps. The climb is not recommended for people with a heart condition or suffering from dizziness and claustrophobia. Bulky backpacks and bags are not allowed. It is possible to reserve free admission for the person with difficulties, by writing to the email accessibilita@duomo.firenze.it or by contacting the cash desk in Piazza Duomo 14, subject to availability, against a certification document.

ANCIENT BASILICA OF SANTA REPARATA

- Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, Piazza del Duomo, 50122 Firenze FI
- +39 055 2645789
- help@duomo.firenze.it
- tickets.duomo.firenze.it

Accessibility
Access is from the Cathedral “Porta Campanile” (south side, beside the Bell Tower entrance).
Visitors arrive at Santa Reparata by going down a short staircase in the second bay of the right aisle of the Cathedral (no lifts).

CASA MARTELLI

- Via Ferdinando Zannetti, 8, 50123 Firenze FI
- +390550649420
- bargellomusei.it

Accessibility
The museum is equipped with facilities for disabled access. The use of scooters and electric wheelchairs is limited and assessed on a case-by-case basis to ensure the safety of museum spaces and artworks.

CAPPELLE MEDICEE

- Piazza di Madonna degli Aldobrandini, 6, 50123 Firenze FI
- +390550649430
- bargellomusei.it
- Closing days: Tuesday, Closed for Christmas holidays

Accessibility
The museum is equipped with facilities for disabled access. The sidewalk is seamlessly connected to the street. Wheelchair accessibility on the ground floor is possible through a ramp. The use of scooters and electric wheelchairs is limited and assessed on a case-by-case basis to ensure the safety of museum spaces and artworks.
To reach the Cappella dei Principi on the first floor, an elevator is available, and from there, access to the Sagrestia Nuova is provided through a platform lift. Restrooms and the bookshop are accessible along the exit route.

"Michelangelo's Secret Room"
Please note that visits are available by reservation only. For more information, please visit the Tickets section.
Each visit lasts 15 minutes, with a maximum of 4 people per time slot.
Access and exit are via a narrow staircase with 12 steps. Unfortunately, no elevator is available, and the room is not accessible to individuals with disabilities or mobility limitations. Additionally, entrance to children under 10 years old and to unaccompanied minors is not allowed.
Please be advised that access is not recommended to individuals with heart conditions, claustrophobia, and to women in advanced stages of pregnancy.

Prior to entry, please deposit luggage, backpacks, large and medium-sized packages, umbrellas, and any other large items deemed unsuitable by our security staff on the upper floor.

Cloakroom
Access to the museum is allowed with small-sized bags or backpacks. Some key lockers are available, activated with a deposit of 1€, returned upon reopening.
Due to the limited number of lockers available, student groups cannot use them. Large-sized luggage, suitcases, and oversized backpacks are not allowed. Umbrellas must be carried with you during your visit.

PALAZZO MEDICI RICCARDI

- Via Camillo Cavour, 3, 50129 Firenze FI
- +390552760552
- palazzomediciriccardi.it
- info@palazzomediciriccardi.it
- Closing days: Wednesday and 25th December

Tickets to Palazzo Medici Riccardi include admission to the Palace, with the Cappella dei Magi (Chapel of the Magi), and Galleria degli Specchi (Mirror Gallery), as well as access to the Archaeological Itinerary, Marble Museum, and ongoing Temporary Exhibitions.
Please note that the number of visitors allowed inside the Chapel of the Magi at any one time is restricted to allow access to all those visiting the premises. Access is limited to 10 people every 5 minutes, and the visit duration is 5 minutes. You may be asked to wait in the Coloumn Courtyard before entering.

Accessibility
All the exhibition rooms of Palazzo Medici Riccardi, except the Chapel of the Magi, are fully accessible to people with impaired mobility. The

Chapel of the Magi is accessible, by means of a special platform, to wheelchairs that measure a maximum of 70 cm in width and for a maximum total weight of 250 kg.
Upon request, a wheelchair is available at the info point.
Access for visitors with impaired mobility is from Via Ginori no.2.

ACCADEMIA GALLERY OF FLORENCE

- Via Ricasoli, 58/60, 50129 Firenze FI
- +390550987100
- galleriaaccademiafirenze.it
- Closed: January 1, December 25, every Monday

Useful Information
To access the Museum and ensure everyone's safety, visitors must go through security inspection.
Items like scissors, blades, and any other metal objects that could pose a danger to people or the art works on display will be collected by the security staff at the entrance to the Museum and left at the metal detector.
The Museum does not have a cloakroom, therefore visitors with large bags and backpacks, helmets, etc. will not be allowed to enter. Access is allowed for bottles of water not exceeding 0.5 liters.
Lost items
Objects left at the metal detector and not collected on the day of the visit will remain in custody at the Museum until the first Tuesday of the following month. After this date they will be considered lost objects and delivered, in accordance with current legislation, to the Lost and Found Office of the Municipality of Florence
The same procedure will be followed for objects lost by visitors inside the Museum. The Museum does not under any circumstances provide for the shipment of forgotten or lost objects.

Accessibility
The museum is equipped with facilities for persons with disabilities . Entrance and ticket office are accessible from Via Ricasoli 60. Each of

the halls and galleries that are open for exhibition are completely wheelchair accessible.

Lift

The museum is equipped with a lift to reach the upper floor.

MEDICI MUSEUM

- Piazza Filippo Brunelleschi, via degli Alfani, Via del Castellaccio, 50121 Firenze FI
- museodemedici.org
- museodemedici@gmail.com

THE INNOCENTI MUSEUM

- Piazza della Santissima Annunziata, 13 50122 Florence
- +39 055 203 7122
- museodeglinnocenti.it

Accessibility

For people with disabilities or reduced mobility, the Museo degli Innocenti is accessible from the main entrance and with the use of lifts to reach the floors.

The entire museum can be visited.

Toilets for the disabled are located along the tour route.

The Museo degli Innocenti and its "artworks to be touched"

A project that aims to make some of the artworks of the Innocenti museum accessible to visually impaired and blind users.

Along the museum itinerary – from the history section, through the courtyards, to the art section – a series of 10 original works of art are now accessible to visually impaired and blind visitors. You just need to wear special latex gloves and you will be able to discover The Coat of Arms of the Silk Art, the marble font in the Courtyard of Men, the Coronation of the Virgin by Benedetto Buglioni and many other works!

NATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM OF FLORENCE

- P.za della SS. Annunziata, 9b, 50121 Firenze FI
- +3905523575
- cultura.gov.it

Please note! From July 2024 to the end of December 2025 the museum will be partially closed for reconstruction. Inconveniences during visiting are possible

LEONARDO DA VINCI INTERACTIVE MUSEUM

- Via dei Servi, 66/R, 50122 Firenze FI
- +39055282966
- leonardointeractivemuseum.com

To celebrate the museum's 20th anniversary, a 50% discount is available for tickets purchased online. Additionally, with an online ticket, you are guaranteed entry at your selected time, even if there is a queue.

INPS TOSCANA – PALAZZO PAZZI

- Via del Proconsolo, 10, 50122 Firenze FI
- +3905343011343

A creative and art space for various exhibitions. Part of the EXIBART network.

MUSEO NAZIONALE DEL BARGELLO

- Via del Proconsolo, 4, 50122 Firenze FI
- +390550649440
- bargellomusei.it

Accessibility
The museum is equipped with facilities for disabled access. The pavement is seamlessly connected to the street level. The use of scooters and electric wheelchairs is limited and evaluated on a case-by-case basis to ensure the safety of museum spaces and artworks. The museum's rooms are accessible, except for the Chapel and the Sacristy; any elevation differences can be overcome with ramps (staff assistance is available) and an elevator. Some thresholds have slight elevation. Access to the Michelangelo Hall is through the bookshop, and the exit is through the same entrance. Adequate restroom facilities are available on the second floor.

Paths for Visually Impaired and Blind Visitors
Visually impaired visitors interested in exploring the Museo Nazionale del Bargello can contact the Educational Services to receive necessary guidance on the planned route within the museum, with the possibility of arranging a specific date for their visit:
Tel. +39 055 0649444 (Tuesday and Wednesday from 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM)
Email: mn-bar.didattica@cultura.gov.it
To touch selected sculptures and appreciate their volumes, the use of a pair of gloves, available at the museum's ticket office, is required. Additionally, a tactile path diagram for non-sighted and visually impaired visitors is available for consultation at the ticket office.

Cloakroom
The cloakroom is located in front of the ticket office. Visitors are required to deposit umbrellas, large backpacks, and bulky bags. Oversized luggage, suitcases, and excessively large backpacks are not allowed. The service is complimentary

BASILICA OF THE HOLY CROSS

- Piazza di Santa Croce, 16, 50122 Firenze FI
- +390552008789
- santacroceopera.it
- ticket.santacroceopera.it

Accessibility
Visitors with impaired movement or in a wheelchair can access the basilica and the cloister via a ramp and a raised platform. The ramp is situated on the north side of the basilica in Largo Bargellini, while the platform is situated at the cloister exit giving onto Piazza Santa Croce. Please note that admission for visitors with disabilities and their carers is free of charge and enjoys priority, with no need to book. Guide-dogs used by visitors with impaired sight or hearing and holding the appropriate certification are welcome.

PAZZI CHAPEL

- Largo Piero Bargellini, 50122 Firenze FI
- +390552466105

Pazzi Chapel is part of the Basilica of the Holy Cross complex and can be visited with a single ticket

CHURCH OF SAN REMIGIO

- Piazza S. Remigio, 50122 Firenze FI
- +39055284789

Active Catholic church. May not always be available for visiting

PALAZZO GONDI

- Via dei Gondi, 2, 50122 Firenze FI
- +390552670177
- gondi.com

Private property. For the possibility of viewing the interior, please check the family website via the feedback form.

THE UFFIZI GALLERY

- Piazzale degli Uffizi, 6, 50122 Firenze FI
- +39055294883
- 142ffizi.it/gli-uffizi

Planning your visit
Prior to your visit, particularly during extremely busy times and in the case of single visitors, we suggest booking your ticket online, in order to avoid lengthy queues on admission. Booking is optional and charged, but enables reducing waiting times. The ticket allows a single entry and cannot be reused. The museum staff may ask you to show your ticket at any point during the visit, and it must therefore be kept carefully for the entire length of the visit.
Backpacks, bags, umbrellas and other large objects must be stored in the cloakroom prior to entry. Storage is free. Visitors are subject to metal detector inspection in some museums.
At the Uffizi, a route for the visually impaired offers the opportunity to autonomously touch some original sculptures from the Medici collection.
'Uffizi by touch' is a tactile journey that includes 15 original sculptures from the Medici family's archaeology collection.
It is designed to be enjoyed independently through a tactile orientation map that is provided free of charge at the ticket office together with a pair of gloves to be worn during the experience. The gloves are disposable and made of hypoallergenic material.

Each work is accompanied by captions in Braille and with enlarged characters for the visually impaired, both in Italian and English.
The sculptures on the list are located along the corridors of the Gallery on the second floor and in the Niobe Hall, and were selected for their archaeological interest and their tactile qualities. They are actually protected by spacers that can be removed by contacting the security personnel.
Due to ongoing set-up work, the itinerary may be subject to changes, which cannot be promptly shown on the map handed out at the ticket office.
For information on the works actually available for the tactile experience, please write, well in advance, to uffiziaccessibili@cultura.gov.it

PALAZZO PITTI

- Piazza de' Pitti, 1, 50125 Firenze FI
- +39055294883
- uffizi.it/palazzo-pitti

Accessibility
From the square, the climb to the entrance of the Pitti Palace is rather steep (with a maximum gradient of 20%), so an accompanying person is recommended for wheelchair users or persons with reduced mobility. The entire area is pedestrianised, and it is not possible to access it by vehicle; if you have a disabled person's badge, you can park nearby.
The ticket office is located to the right of the façade, on the same level as the entrance door, under an open loggia about 87 metres away.
There are no steps to enter the inner courtyard of the palace (the Cortile dell'Ammannati). The courtyard is the entrance space where some services are located: the cafeteria, bathroom and bookshop, as well as the starting point for visiting the Pitti museums. From here it is possible to access the Boboli Gardens: on the left side of the courtyard there is a vaulted corridor that leads to a road with a dirt and gravel track (uphill), which leads to the Amphitheatre. The ordinary entrance, located in the courtyard near the cafeteria, instead involves climbing a winding incline

(also known as a flat staircase) with 44 shallow steps and no handrail, which connects to a short paved slope leading to the Amphitheatre.
Treasury of the Grand Dukes Museum: located on the left side of the courtyard. The entrance door is also the exit of the Museum and the threshold has a maximum height of 3 centimetres. The museum is set up on two floors connected by a staircase, which is why persons with reduced mobility can only access the ground floor.
From the courtyard, you can take the stairs or lifts to access the Palatine Gallery (first floor), the Gallery of Modern Art and the Museum of Costume and Fashion (second floor). The lifts are located on the right side of the courtyard, near the cloakroom.
The ordinary entrance, on the other hand, involves climbing four flights of stairs (71 steps) to reach the Palatine Gallery, while to reach the Gallery of Modern Art you must climb another four flights of stairs (68 steps).
There are signs in the courtyard indicating the direction to reach the Pitti Palace museums and services.


Tuscany
Adriatic Sea
Lucca
Pistoia
Florence
Pisa
Ligurian Sea
San Gimignano
Arezzo
Siena
Tyrrhenian Sea

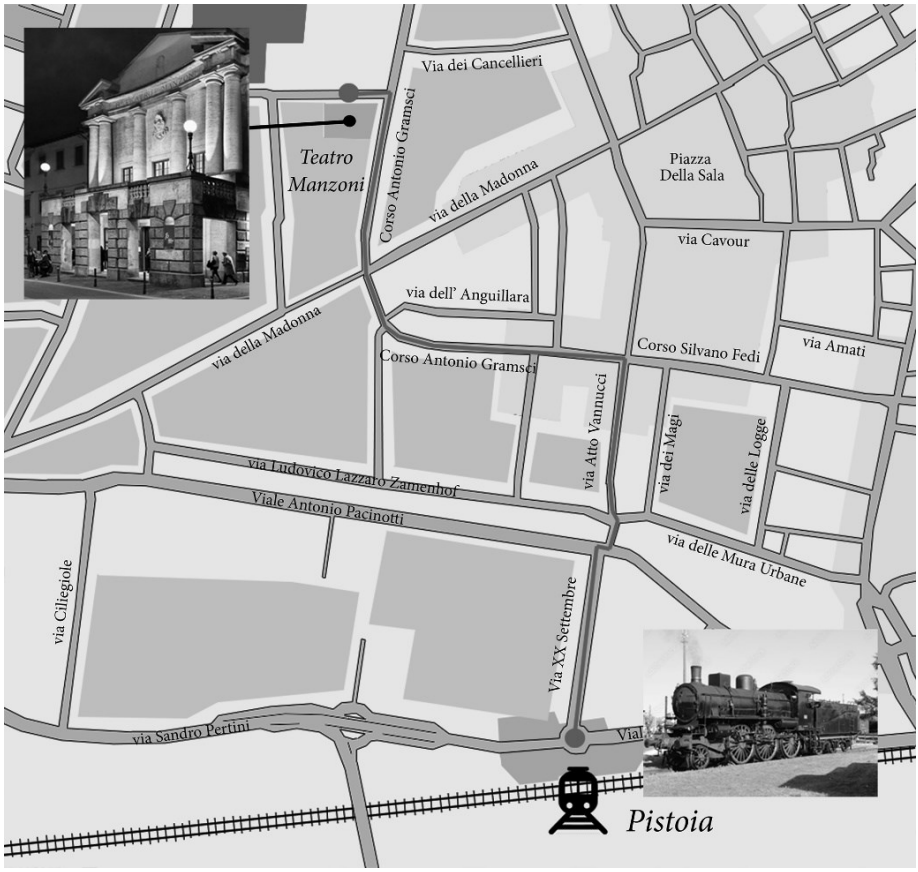
CITY OF TROUBLES, HARSH PISTOIA…



Gabriele D'Annunzio, one of the most significant Italian poets of the 20th century, wrote about this city. It was founded as a Roman outpost during their conflict with the local Ligurian tribes and the conquest of their land in the 2nd century BCE. It was here, in 62 BCE, that the infamous Lucius Sergius Catiline perished in battle against the forces of the Roman Republic. Catiline, who attempted to seize power and establish his dictatorship, raised a rebellion and amassed an army of 20,000 men. According to later legend, Catiline's rebellious body was buried in Pistoia itself (and not thrown into the river beheaded, as the ancient Roman historian Sallust wrote), which is why the oldest surviving medieval tower in the city, supposedly built over Catiline's grave in the 9th century, was named after him.

You can reach Pistoia from Florence either by train from Firenze Santa Maria Novella station or by car via the Via Toscana. In any case, the journey will not take long: this small town is very close to Florence, and the historic center of Pistoia is very close to the train station. Unlike

Florence, whose winding medieval streets can be endlessly explored, Pistoia is a small town that can be fully experienced in just one day.



It is much more difficult to say anything about Pistoia than about Saturn-Florence, into whose orbit Pistoia has hopelessly fallen and is now doomed to be just one of the many satellites of this giant until the end of the universe. Indeed, the spirit of Florence permeates every canvas, every stroke, every marble curve of Italian art, while Pistoia's fate has been less fortunate—sub umbra (in the shadow), occasionally drenched in blood.

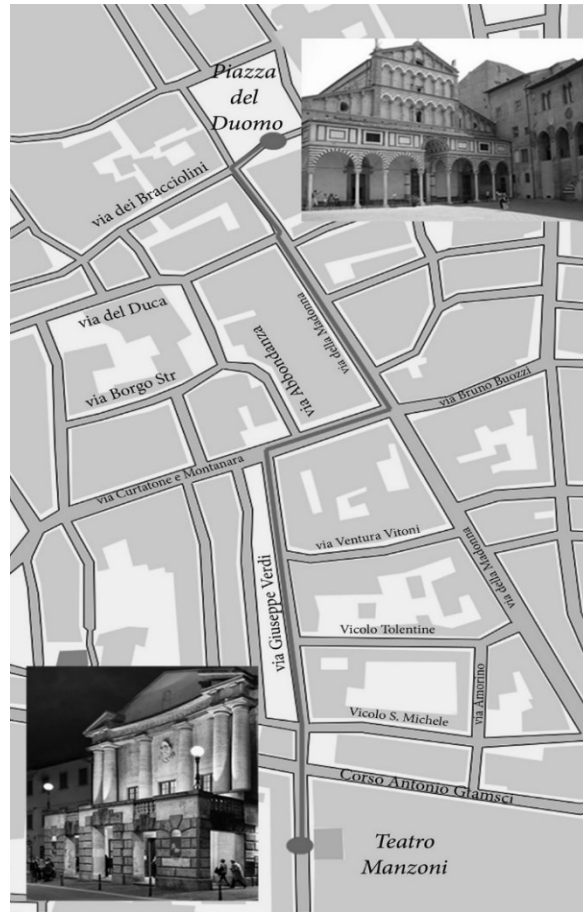
As early as 1105, this town became a self-governing municipality, independent of any Italian feudal lord. For the next two centuries, it had its own government, consisting of elected consuls. During this time, Pistoia developed its own patrician class, particularly notable for the nine

wealthiest and most influential families. Their rule is considered the city's golden age. However, as you might have guessed, the larger and more powerful neighbors of Pistoia—Lucca and, of course, Florence—could not ignore the prosperity of this independent city. In May 1305, Florentine and Lucchese troops arrived at the walls of Pistoia, beginning an 11-month siege that lasted until April 11, 1306. The new rulers of the city—the Florentines—immediately began to dominate the public life of Pistoia through their trusted representatives, drowning in blood any inhabitants who tried to rebel against Florence.

It is to this harsh period in the city's history, and partly to the fact that it was here that the rebellion of the ancient Roman politician Catiline met its tragic end, that the lines of Gabriele D'Annunzio, which I have used as the title of this section of the guide, are dedicated. The harsh truth we learn from all of human history is that the strong always oppress the weak. This has been the case, is the case, and will always be the case as long as humanity lives under the sun.

For Pistoia, this dismal state of affairs persisted until the beginning of the rule of Cosimo I de' Medici, who proclaimed himself Grand Duke of Tuscany in 1569. With his rise to power, a period of "restoration" of old municipalities began, allowing Pistoia to regain its status as a cultural center. Academies and clubs for poetry, music, painting, and sculpture enthusiasts opened in the city. At the end of the 17th century, in the building of one of Pistoia's first academies—the Accademia dei Risvegliati—the city's first theater opened, known today as Teatro Manzoni, located at Corso Gramsci 127. Although the theater's modern appearance is the result of a major reconstruction in the 1860s, it can rightly be considered the oldest theater in Pistoia.

PIAZZA DEL DUOMO AND CATHEDRAL OF SAN ZENO



Here, in this small square, whose nearly complete square shape is defined by the surrounding buildings, all the main attractions of Pistoia are gathered as if on display—an attribute of many small Tuscan towns, which do not typically "spread their thoughts" along the banks of rivers, but rather succinctly express their status in one concise statement. Like in Florence, this square was formed at the intersection of the two main streets of any Roman city: the decumanus and the cardo, whose directions today correspond to Via degli Orafi and Via dei Bracciolini, respectively. Naturally, the main landmark of the square is the Cathedral of San Zeno, dedicated to Saint Zeno of Verona, who is venerated as the patron saint of Pistoia.

And of course, the church before you now did not emerge from nothing: as early as the 10th century AD, there was a church here, mentioned in ancient records but significantly damaged by fires in the 12th and 13th centuries. It was subsequently rebuilt and gradually altered, expanded, and adorned over the following centuries, as is typically the case with

most ancient Italian churches. The current façade of the San Zeno Cathedral, which we see today, was constructed between 1379 and 1449, and in the early 16th century, the renowned Florentine artist Andrea della Robbia worked on its decoration.



Perhaps, after Santa Maria del Fiore, the San Zeno Cathedral may not seem particularly impressive to you (after all, what could seem so after the Florence Cathedral?). However, what attracted me most about the main church of Pistoia was not the façade but the interior, which serves as a fascinating metaphor: rather rough and sparsely decorated colonnades, separating the main nave from two side aisles, similarly gray and bare, converge in the central apse, richly decorated in the Mannerist style in the 17th century and adorned with frescoes by Domenico Cresti and the painting "Resurrection" by Cristofano Allori.

What might impress you the most in the San Zeno Cathedral is the silver altar of San Jacopo, located in the Chapel of the Crucifix. This masterpiece of silverwork, adorned with silver foil, was worked on by

twelve masters over nearly two centuries. Among them, Andrea di Jacopo d'Ognabene stands out as the author of the figures of the Apostles and saints in the upper central part of the altar and scenes from the New Testament in the lower central part. It is also likely that Filippo Brunelleschi himself contributed, with figures of saints and prophets attributed to him in the right part of the altar.
It is also worth briefly mentioning the bell tower of the San Zeno Cathedral—rebuilt by Giovanni Pisano, incorporating part of the Lombard fortifications, and featuring an observation deck at its summit. The building that almost adjoins the San Zeno Cathedral on the right side is none other than the Antico Palazzo dei Vescovi.



As if assembled from various parts of other buildings entirely different in form and style, this palazzo was constructed on the main square of Pistoia back in the 11th century. It would be more accurate to say that the Cathedral adjoins it, rather than the other way around. Its intricate appearance combines elements of French Gothic and remnants of the Chapel of San Jacopo, where, incidentally, Dante's character Vanni Fucci, nicknamed "The Beast," committed his crime—the theft of church

valuables—for which he was condemned to Hell, in the "pit of thieves," where he was encountered by the most famous Florentine and his timeless companion Virgil. The palazzo, gradually expanded and reconstructed over the centuries, developed its unique identity much like many of its contemporaries.

Since the 15th century, the rooms on the ground floor of the palace were rented out to merchants, eventually making the bishop's residence resemble a series of shops. By the end of the 18th century, the Bishop of Pistoia, Scipione de' Ricci (whose name will appear again on this square), received permission from Grand Duke of Tuscany, Pietro Leopoldo I, to build a new residence. The old palazzo was finally sold to private individuals. Divided into numerous shops, apartments, and stores, the palazzo lost its former appearance for a long time. It wasn't until the early 20th century that the first restoration was undertaken to transform the old Bishop's Palace into a museum, which was opened in 1980.



Today, the museum associated with the San Zeno Cathedral houses, among other things, a stunning 16th-century Flemish tapestry once gifted to the Bishop of Pistoia and kept in the cathedral until 2016. This

magnificent work of art, known as the "Millefiori Tapestry" or "Tapestry of a Thousand Flowers," measures 790x270 cm (25x8 feet) and depicts scenes of wildlife with various animals amidst a multitude of plants and flowers—hence its name.

Also part of the San Zeno Cathedral complex, the Baptistery of St. John the Baptist, located opposite the cathedral's facade and also known as the Baptistery of San Giovanni in Corte, has an octagonal shape similar to the Florentine Baptistery we are already familiar with. Combining elements of Pisan, Florentine, and Sienese Gothic, this building is rightfully considered one of the masterpieces of the Tuscan direction of this architectural style. Standing about 40 meters tall, the baptistery is clad in white and green marble from Siena, Prato, and Carrara, and its interior is adorned with terracotta tiles, continuing the metaphorical contrast seen in the interior of the San Zeno Cathedral.



To the left of San Zeno Cathedral, deeper into the square, stands a grey palazzo with five arches spanning three stories. This is the Palazzo degli Anziani, or Palazzo di Giano, which has housed the Pistoia City Hall for the past 700 years and, since 1922, also hosts the civic city museum. The museum's collection, though not extensive, is highly intriguing,



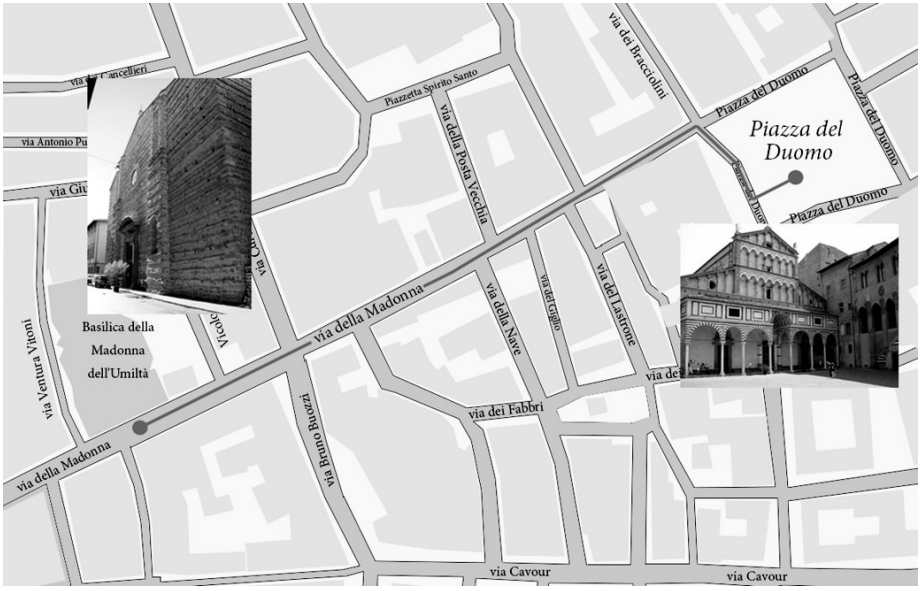
featuring works such as "Saint Francis, Stories of His Life and Miracles After Death," attributed to Coppo di Marcovaldo, and pieces by the Proto-Renaissance master Lippo di Benivieni.

To the left of this palazzo is an interesting 18th-century building—an unassuming three-story structure with the "Duomo" café on the ground floor. If you look closely, you will notice elements of marble decoration typical of Romanesque churches in Tuscany, similar to those on the facade of San Zeno Cathedral. With even closer inspection, you will see preserved apses, indicating that this building was once a church. Indeed, what you see before you is all that remains of the Santa Maria Cavaliera Church, which is likely several centuries older than the Pistoia Cathedral. The first mention of this church dates back to 979, and its name is connected to the knightly investiture ceremonies held there over time. However, in 1784, by decree of Bishop Scipione de' Ricci, the church was closed, and its building was sold to private individuals for the establishment of shops. This decision was part of the bishop's effort to reform his parish and reduce the influence of various monastic and knightly orders. Opposed to the popular Catholic cult of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Scipione de' Ricci found himself in conflict with the Vatican and, in 1790, after losing the support of Grand Duke Pietro Leopoldo I

of Tuscany (who was elected Holy Roman Emperor that same year and left Tuscany), Scipione was forced to flee Pistoia to escape the ensuing unrest. In 1791, he officially resigned from his episcopal see.

Further to the left of this three-story house is the famous Tower of Catiline, reputedly built on the burial site of the rebellious Roman general, as previously mentioned. This tower marks the culmination of Piazza del Duomo, the main square of Pistoia.

BASILICA DELLA MADONNA DELL'UMILTÀ (SHRINE BASILICA OF OUR LADY OF HUMILITY)



Following Piazza del Duomo along Via degli Orafi past the Palazzo del Podesta, also known as Palazzo Pretorio—constructed in 1367 to house the city government and still functioning as the city court—we soon reach Via della Madonna, which continues from Via degli Orafi after the intersection with Via Bruno Buozzi. Shortly, to our right, we will see another large church which, compared to the Cathedral of San Zeno and many other churches in Tuscany, might seem rough and almost devoid of elegance. In some sense, this architectural approach reinterprets the metaphor of the Pistoia Cathedral: you can't judge a book by its cover, especially when that book is the Holy Scripture.

For many decades, two of Pistoia's most noble families—the Panciatichi and the Cancellieri—were embroiled in a bloody feud. These noble lords spared no one: women, children, and the elderly were hanged, beheaded, or burned alive in their homes alongside their husbands, fathers, and

sons. The streets of Pistoia, dubbed "the city of sorrows" by Gabriele d'Annunzio, indeed turned crimson whenever a Panciatichi or Cancellieri raised their heraldic banner. On one such bloody day, July 17, 1490, the parishioners of the Santa Maria Forisportae Church, located where the Basilica of Our Lady of Humility now stands, witnessed a true miracle: the image of the Virgin Mary on the chapel wall began to bleed. Indeed, a few drops of thick, crimson liquid appeared on the Virgin's forehead, and soon half the city's residents gathered to witness the divine sign sent by the silent witness of so many terrible fratricides.

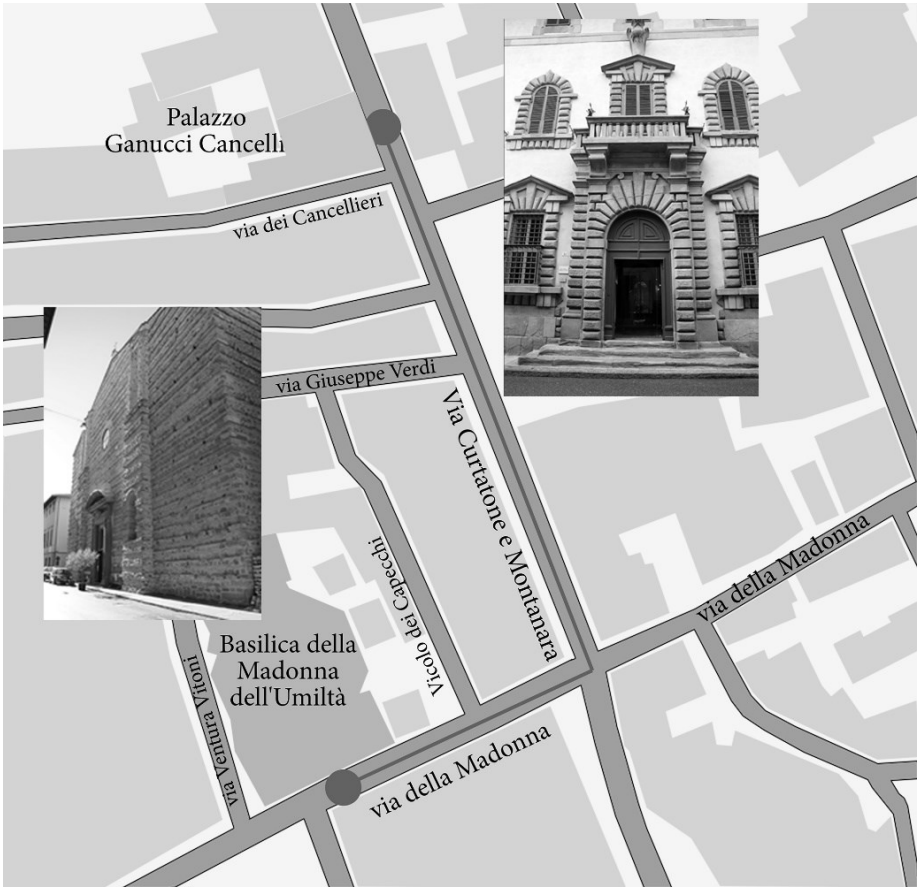
Soon, the mayor of the city, the people's captain, the gonfaloniere, city council members, and Bishop of Pistoia Nicollo Pandolfini arrived at the Santa Maria Forisportae chapel, officially confirming the miracle. Soon after, the heads of the Panciatichi and Cancellieri families—the indirect "culprits"—appeared in the chapel. The bloodstained sign seen by Pistoia's residents was interpreted by Bishop Pandolfini as the Virgin's demand for peace between the city's two most influential families and their supporters. Reluctantly, Signor Cancellieri shook hands with Signor Panciatichi, and both solemnly vowed to eternalize their "humility before the will of the Lord" by erecting a worthy temple on the site of the old Santa Maria Forisportae Church. Thus, in 1495, local architect Ventura Vitoni began work on the future Basilica della Madonna dell'Umiltà based on a design by the more famous but likely recently disgraced Giuliano da Sangallo.

Vitoni devoted 27 years of his life to constructing the basilica but died in 1522 without completing it. After a period of stagnation, Grand Duke Cosimo I de' Medici entrusted the basilica's completion to his court sculptor and architect, the renowned "father of art history," Giorgio Vasari, whose main task was to crown the church with a worthy dome. In this regard, Vasari decided to depart from Sangallo's original design, making the dome slightly larger and more massive. In its final form, Vasari's dome rises 59 meters (194 feet) above the stone streets of Pistoia. However, shortly after its completion in 1569, cracks appeared in the dome's structure, forcing Vasari to reinforce it in various ways. Yet, even this proved insufficient: perhaps Giorgio Vasari was simply not Filippo Brunelleschi. Over the following years, the dome underwent

additional reinforcements and restorations, the latest of which occurred recently, at the beginning of this century.

Vasari never completed the basilica's facade, having been consumed with the challenge of countering gravity with his enormous dome, thereby creating that accidental dialogue with the Cathedral of San Zeno mentioned earlier. But did the basilica help reconcile Pistoia's two largest families? Alas, by 1537, members of the Cancellieri family, expelled from the city by their adversaries, sought refuge in the town of Cutigliano, just north of Pistoia, where they were besieged by Panciatichi supporters. Trapped in the Church of Saint Bartholomew in Cutigliano, the Cancellieri decided to surrender to their enemies. However, as soon as they opened the church doors, an armed mob stormed in and slaughtered everyone inside before setting the church on fire. Thus, "stern Pistoia" claimed the Cancellieri for the last time.

PALAZZO CANCELLIERI, THE CEPPO HOSPITAL AND THE UNDERGROUND PISTOIA



But no, the story of the Cancellieri family did not end in the Church of Saint Bartholomew in Cutigliano. If you leave the Basilica of Our Lady of Humility and head along Via Curtatone e Montanara in the direction of the traffic, you will soon see on your left a massive palazzo with abundant rustication on the corners. It will be at number 51. The Palazzo Ganucci Cancellieri was inherited by the family in an unfinished state at the very end of the 16th

century, when all past conflicts had subsided, and they were able to return to Pistoia in peace. Architect Jacopo Lafri worked on the exterior of this palace in the early 17th century, and in 1795, the last member of the Cancellieri family died within its walls, after which the building was inherited by the Ganucci family. The only reminder of its original owners today is the large Cancellieri coat of arms adorning the main entrance: according to family legend, the founder of the lineage bore the nickname "The Boar," which is reflected in the family emblem.
But let us continue a bit further and turn onto Via Abbi Pazienza, which, after crossing Via de' Rossi, becomes Via del Carmine, and after a slight turn, Via delle Pappe. Here, at the end of this street where it opens onto Piazza Papa Giovanni XXIII, your attention will inevitably be drawn to a building resembling Brunelleschi's "Ospedale degli Innocenti" in Florence – the Hospital del Ceppo. Its name translates directly as "Hospital of the Donation Box," and its founding likely dates back to 1277.



The building before us acquired its current appearance only in the 15th century, following the plague epidemic that struck Pistoia and other Tuscan cities. During this time, the Hospital del Ceppo became the city's priority medical facility. Many residents who died from the plague

bequeathed their movable and immovable property to the hospital. As a result, the "Company of Saint Mary," which managed the hospital, came into possession of numerous buildings and lands in Pistoia. This significant acquisition did not go unnoticed. In 1350, a year after the Black Death left Pistoia, the city authorities decided to secularize the hospital, placing it under municipal management. This decision was reaffirmed in 1424, after Pistoia was conquered by Florence, and it was then that the hospital began to expand.

As you might have guessed, the architects of the facade before you drew inspiration from Brunelleschi's "Ospedale degli Innocenti," and the glazed terracotta decorations created in the early 16th century also echo, albeit not exactly, the decorations of the renowned Florentine master's work. Since that time, based on the frieze by Andrea della Robbia, which depicts a scene resembling a medical lesson, the hospital del Ceppo began conducting lessons in medicine. However, the official opening of the "Medical School of Pistoia" took place in the hospital in 1666, and in 1784, Grand Duke of Tuscany Pietro Leopoldo I confirmed its operation with his charter. The curriculum at this school was designed for three courses over two years each, and until 1844, it had departments of "Practical Medicine," "Surgical Institutions," "Anatomy," "Practical Affairs," "Operations and Obstetrics." However, by the mid-19th century, due to low attendance, the school was closed, and from then until 2013, the hospital del Ceppo operated exclusively as a city hospital. Today, this elegant building houses a medical museum, featuring a collection of surgical instruments, ancient medical texts, an "apothecary laboratory," and an anatomical theater, which can also be visited during the "Underground Pistoia" tour organized by the Institute of Historical and Archaeological Research. This tour is a unique event, taking place along the longest underground route in Tuscany—900 meters (2952 feet). The tour route follows the ancient course of the Brana River, which once crossed the historic center of Pistoia, but from the 12th century flowed through an artificial channel, and by the 15th century had entirely gone underground. Since then, the Brana has invisibly connected the city's most important buildings: hospitals (including the hospital del Ceppo), laundries, metallurgical plants, mills, and more. Today, the underground course of the Brana still holds the "ghosts" of Pistoia's old

days: the vaults beneath the hospital del Ceppo, which once supported the dome of the catacombs when they were only partially filled with earth, the remains of ancient city walls, preserved building foundations eight centuries old, and much more. This route became accessible to all after extensive restoration, conservation, and disinfection of the catacombs, recently carried out by the company Publiacqua SPA. Tickets for one of the most unusual tours in Tuscany can be booked on the official Pistoia Sotterranea website.

WHERE TO STAY IN PISTOIA

HOSTEL

B&B Canto Alla Porta Vecchia

- Address: Via Curtatone e Montanara, 2, 51100 Pistoia
- Phone: +39 0573 27692
- Description: A small hostel with cozy rooms, offering guests breakfast and Wi-Fi. Located in the very heart of the city, it provides easy access to the main attractions.

The hostel is within walking distance of major landmarks. The staff is friendly and hospitable. The rooms are clean and cozy, with a well-thought-out interior. Guests are served a variety of homemade dishes and pies for breakfast.

Cons: The location can be noisy in the evenings. The Wi-Fi is slow, and the rooms and bathrooms may feel cramped. It is difficult to find parking nearby if you are traveling by car.

INEXPENSIVE HOTELS

Casa Rowe B&B

- **Address:** Via Verdi, 1, 51100 Pistoia PT, Italy
- **Phone:** +39 389 604 4369
- **Amenities:** Coffee machine, Free Wi-Fi

A small B&B located in the city center. Cozy and comfortable rooms with good design. The staff is friendly and welcoming. The hotel offers a classic Italian breakfast with coffee and pastries. There is no bar or restaurant on-site. Rooms might seem small, and street-facing rooms may experience some noise.

SMART Rooms Pistoia

- **Address:** Via della Stufa, 4, 51100 Pistoia PT, Italy
- **Phone:** +39 389 450 7833
- **Amenities:** Free Wi-Fi

A modern hotel offering stylish, comfortable, and minimalist rooms. The staff is attentive and friendly. The hotel serves a classic breakfast with coffee and pastries. Downsides include small rooms and insufficient soundproofing.

MID-RANGE HOTELS

Battistero Residenza d'Epoca

- **Address:** Piazza del Duomo, 12, 51100 Pistoia PT, Italy
- **Phone:** +39 0573 079220
- **Amenities:** Free Wi-Fi, Minibar, Coffee machine

A unique hotel in the city center, located directly on Piazza del Duomo. The hotel is housed in a historic building, giving it a special charm. Notable for its elegant interiors that retain original architectural elements, it offers high-level service and a personalized approach. Rooms are stylish and comfortable. The hotel serves breakfast with coffee, pastries, and fruits. Downsides include potential noise issues and the lack of an elevator.

Hotel Patria

- **Address:** Via Francesco Crispi, 8, 51100 Pistoia PT, Italy
- **Phone:** +39 0573 358800
- **Amenities:** Bar, Free Wi-Fi, Non-smoking rooms, Facilities for disabled guests

Located within walking distance of major attractions, the hotel features clean and comfortable rooms. The staff is hospitable and friendly. The hotel offers a good breakfast. Downsides include potential internet issues, the need for room updates, and the lack of on-site parking.

WHERE TO EAT IN PISTOIA. AUTHENTIC RESTAURANTS.

STREET FOOD AND INEXPENSIVE CAFES

Pizzeria Partenope

- **Address:** Via Sigismondo Morelli Gualtierotti 13, 51100 Pistoia, Italy
- **Phone:** +39 0573 190 4742

Pizzeria Partenope offers guests delicious and authentic Neapolitan-style pizza. The menu features a variety of pizzas cooked in a wood-fired oven, including classics like Margherita, Pepperoni, Quattro Formaggi, and many more. The staff is friendly and attentive. The interior is styled traditionally, creating a cozy and relaxed atmosphere. Please note that there may be queues during peak hours.

Pizza prices range from €8 to €15.

La Tazza Rossa

- **Address:** Via Porta Carratica, 32, 51100 Pistoia, Italy
- **Phone:** +39 331 876 7268

La Tazza Rossa is a cozy and popular café-restaurant in Pistoia, offering a diverse menu and a pleasant atmosphere. The establishment is highly rated for the quality of its food and beverages, with particular praise for its delicious coffee and desserts. The staff is often described as friendly and attentive, enhancing the overall dining experience. However, during peak hours, it can become crowded and noisy, which may slow down service. Overall, it is an excellent choice for those seeking a comfortable spot for breakfast, lunch, or dinner in the heart of Pistoia.

Prices for dishes are in the mid-range, varying from €5 to €20.

Caffè Valiani 1831

- **Address:** Via Camillo Benso Conte di Cavour 55, 51100 Pistoia, Italy
- **Phone:** +39 0573 178 1353

Caffè Valiani 1831 is one of the oldest cafés in Pistoia, having been in operation since 1831. The interior is designed in a historical style with elements of classic Italian decor, preserving the charm of an old establishment. The menu offers a variety of Italian dishes, snacks, sweets, and desserts, as well as a wide selection of coffee, tea, and other beverages. The staff is friendly and attentive.

Prices vary, but typically range from €5 to €15.

MID-RANGE RESTAURANTS

Bisteccatoscana

- **Address:** Via Sant'Andrea, 30, 51100 Pistoia, Italy
- **Phone:** +39 328 438 2056

Bisteccatoscana is a Tuscan restaurant with a strong emphasis on meat dishes. The wine list features a selection of Tuscan varieties. The interior is cozy and elegant, decorated in a way that highlights the Tuscan style. The staff is attentive and professional.

Prices vary but generally fall within the medium to high range. The average check is approximately €25-50 per person.

Rosso Veneziano

- **Address:** Via Piero della Francesca 200, 51100 Pistoia, Italy

- **Phone:** +39 0573 33329

Rosso Veneziano is an intriguing establishment that may pique your interest for my next guidebook. This restaurant is renowned for its unique offerings of Venetian cuisine. The menu features a variety of Venetian dishes, such as risotto, seafood, polenta, and other specialties. Additionally, it offers a range of pasta, meat, and fish dishes. The interior is stylish and contemporary with Venetian accents, creating a cozy and refined atmosphere. The staff is courteous and professional, with a good knowledge of the menu and helpful recommendations.

Prices are in the moderate range. The average check is approximately €20-40 per person, depending on your choice of dishes and drinks.

Il Giardino del Vinaino

- **Address:** Via di Stracceria 13, 51100 Pistoia, Italy
- **Phone:** +39 327 265 3651

Il Giardino del Vinaino is a traditional Tuscan restaurant that enjoys popularity among locals. The menu features classic Tuscan dishes such as pasta, meat dishes, antipasti, cheeses, and desserts. Local wines are also offered. The restaurant's interior is cozy and authentic, reflecting a traditional Tuscan atmosphere. The staff is polite and attentive, with a good knowledge of the menu and helpful recommendations for selecting dishes and wines.

Prices are in the moderate range. The average check is approximately €20-35 per person, depending on your choice of dishes and drinks.

HI-RANGE RESTAURANTS

Manzoni

- **Address:** Via Salvatore Quasimodo, 34, 51100 Pistoia, Italy
- **Phone:** +39 0573 28101

Manzoni is a restaurant with an elegant interior and a contemporary take on Italian cuisine, featuring a creative approach. The menu offers a range of modern Italian dishes, including pasta, meat and seafood dishes, as well as unique appetizers and desserts. A diverse selection of wines is also available. The staff is professional and attentive, with a solid understanding of the menu and good recommendations for dishes and wines. Reservations may be required.

Prices are in the mid to high range. The average check is approximately €30-60 per person, depending on your choice of dishes and drinks.

Incipit Ristorante

- **Address:** Via Francesco Crispi, 8, 51100 Pistoia, Italy
- **Phone:** +39 375 747 3062

Incipit Ristorante is an excellent choice for those seeking to enjoy modern Italian cuisine in a stylish and elegant setting. The restaurant offers a diverse menu with high-quality and innovative dishes, as well as a wide selection of wines and cocktails. The atmosphere is chic and suitable for various occasions, whether a romantic dinner, business meeting, or special event. The attentive and professional staff ensures a pleasant dining experience, though prices are high and there may be queues during peak hours.

Prices are in the mid to high range. The average check is around €30-60 per person, depending on your choice of dishes and drinks.

MUSEUMS OF PISTOIA. LIST AND INFORMATION

TEATRO MANZONI

- Corso Antonio Gramsci, 129, 51100 Pistoia PT
- +390573991609
- teatridipistoia.it/teatro-manzoni

HOURS:
Tuesday, Thursday and Friday 16-19
Wednesday 11-15
Saturday 10-13
(Monday closed)

CATHEDRAL OF SAN ZENO

- Piazza del Duomo, 51100 Pistoia PT
- +39057325095

Active Catholic church. May not always be available for visiting

MUSEUM OF THE ANTICO PALAZZO DEI VESCOVI

- Piazza del Duomo, 7, 51100 Pistoia PT
- +39 0573 974267
- info@pistoiamusei.it

Timetables:
From April to October, Wednesday-Sunday, 10 am to 7 pm. From November to March, Wednesday-Sunday, 10 am to 6 pm.

BAPTISTERY DI SAN GIOVANNI IN CORTE

- Piazza del Duomo, 51100 Pistoia PT
- +393341689419

OPENING HOURS
From Thursday to Monday 10-13 and 15-18. Closed on Tuesdays and Wednesdays

BELL TOWER OF THE CATHEDRAL OF SAN ZENO

- Piazza del Duomo, 51100 Pistoia PT

The bell tower of the Cathedral of San Zeno stands at 66 meters high. Climbing to the top to admire the view of the city is an unmissable experience
OPENING HOURS
From Wednesday to Monday 10-13 and 15-18. Closed on Tuesday
Visit only with an accompanying person. Please note that the ascent consists of 200 steps. There is no elevator. Not recommended for visitors with mobility difficulties, heart patients, asthmatics, those who suffer from vertigo and claustrophobia. Children under 18 must be accompanied by an adult.

PALAZZO DEGLI ANZIANI. CIVIC MUSEUM OF ANCIENT ART IN THE TOWN HALL

- Piazza del Duomo, 1, 51100 Pistoia PT
- +39 0573 371296

Accessibility
The museum is accessible.
Admission is free for the disabled person and their companion.

SHRINE BASILICA OF OUR LADY OF HUMILITY

- Via della Madonna, 51100 Pistoia PT
- +39057322045

OPENING HOURS
Mon-Fri 8:30-18:00, Sat-Sun 8:30-19:00

ENTRY
Free

PALAZZO GANUCCI CANCELLIERI

- Via Curtatone e Montanara, 51, 51100 Pistoia PT

MUSEO DELLO SPEDALE DEL CEPPO

- Piazza Papa Giovanni XXIII, 14, 51100 Pistoia PT
- +390573371023

Opening hours
Winter (September 30, 2023 / June 2, 2024)
Tuesday to Friday 10:00/14:00
Saturday, Sunday and holidays 10:00/18:00
Christmas and New Year's Eve 16:00/19:00
Monday closed
Summer (June 4 / September 29, 2024)
Tuesday to Friday 15:00/19:00
Saturday, Sunday and holidays (July 25 and August 15),
Friday July 26 and August 16 11:00/19:00
Monday closed
The ticket office closes 30 minutes before.

PISTOIA SOTTERANEA (PISTOIA UNDERGROUND)

- Piazza Papa Giovanni XXIII, 15, 51100 Pistoia PT
- +39 0573 368023
- irsapt.it/it/pistoia-sotterranea

Access is accessible to people with motor disabilities with access ramps and an experimental system of Braille panels with diagrams of the underground plan for the blind.

MOBILITY TIPS

FLORENCE AMERIGO VESPUCCI AIRPORT

- Via del Termine, 11, 50127 Firenze FI
- +39 055 306-18-30

Florence Airport, named after the famous explorer Amerigo Vespucci, is located in the Peretola district northwest of the city centre.

Taxi

The taxi rank is located next to the exit of the passenger terminal. There is a fixed rate to the city center - 22 EUR on weekdays, 24 EUR on weekends and 25.30 EUR at night. Luggage is paid additionally - 1 EUR per piece.

BUS

Vespucci Airport is well connected to Santa Maria Novella train station in Florence itself. It can be reached in just 20 minutes by the Volainbus bus line of the Sita/Ataf company. The express bus departs every half hour from 6:00 to 23:30 (from the city - from 5:30 to 23:00) and takes passengers to the square in front of the station. The fare is 6 EUR, tickets can be bought at the ticket office at the airport or from the driver.

PISA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

- Piazzale D'Ascanio, 56121 Pisa PI
- +39050849111

It may happen that you arrive at Pisa Airport. Here, you have two options: 1. Buy the second book in the series, or the complete edition, and start by exploring Pisa, then travel to Florence. 2. Head directly to Florence.

How to get from Pisa airport to Florence

To reach you have three transfer options from Pisa Airport to Florence; taxi, bus or train. Taking an airport taxi or private transfer is your quickest transfer option, with a journey time of 1 hour and 20 minutes and a cost of around €170. Taking the Sky Bus Lines Caronna bus will take around 1 hour 30 minutes to reach Florence but will cost just €15. Taking the train from Pisa Airport to Florence is your cheapest transfer option, with a cost of €14 and a journey time of 1 hour and 30 minutes.

How much is a taxi from Pisa Airport to Florence?

The local taxi drivers don't offer an official set fare for the journey from Pisa Airport to Florence. Having said this, the average fare they will give for up to 4 people will be €170.

If you'd prefer the peace of mind that comes with a fixed fare, we suggest booking your airport transfers in advance with Welcome Pickups.

Where do I find a taxi at Pisa Airport?

The taxi rank is located directly outside of the Arrivals Hall of the main Terminal Building at Pisa Airport.

Convenience

If you're looking for a completely private and direct way to get from Pisa Airport to Florence and your hotel, taking a Pisa Airport taxi is the best transfer option. Your journey time will be just 1 hour and 20 minutes and your driver will drop you off at the very door of your hotel safe and sound.

How to get the Pisa Airport to Florence bus?

Sky Bus Lines Caronna runs a Pisa Airport to Florence bus daily. The journey time on the bus will be around 1 hour and 30 minutes and the cost of a one-way ticket will be €15 during the day and €25 at night.

How much is the Pisa Airport to Florence bus?

The cost of a daytime ticket will be €15 and the cost of a nighttime ticket will be €25. You can purchase your tickets online in advance or from the bus driver.

Where do I find the bus at Pisa Airport?

As you step out of the main Terminal Building, you will see the bus stops located in front of you. The Sky Bus Lines Caronna bus is bright orange in colour.

Convenience
Taking the bus is much cheaper, but not the best option. The bus will arrive at Florence Airport, from which you will need to travel to the city and then to your hotel.
Train
I think the train option isn't even worth considering. There is no direct train from Pisa Airport to Florence, and you will have to make transfers, which is very inconvenient with luggage.

FLORENCE SANTA MARIA NOVELLA (TRAIN STATION)

- Piazza della Stazione, 50123 Firenze FI
- Trenitalia.com

From this station, you will head to the next stop on our journey: Pistoia. The ticket costs €5 on the carrier's website, and the travel time is about half an hour. You can also buy the ticket at the station, either at the ticket counter or from a machine. The ticket will be valid for one day. To activate it, you need to validate it before boarding. You don't need to validate your electronic ticket. You just show the QR code from the mail or the ticket code from the SMS to the conductor.

PISTOIA (TRAIN STATION)

- Piazza Dante Alighieri, 51100 Pistoia PT

CAR RENTAL

Book your car online, right after you buy your tickets. This will help you save some money.
In order to rent a car in Italy, you will need 3 documents.
Passport
Bank card
Driver's license.
As a rule, you must be under 25 years old
If your name in the documents is translated from your native language into English, make sure that the spelling is the same
Some companies do not accept debit cards, only credit cards. When using a debit card, an increased deposit is possible. Also, my recommendation is to take out full insurance for the duration of the rental.

TAXI

You can order a taxi through the application, or find it at special parking lots. As a rule, near railway stations, metro, shopping centers, airports. The cost of boarding is 5 €, then 1 km. approximately 1.35 €

MY PEARL, LUCCA!



"From afar you can see the gray olive groves

That vaporize the face of the hills, o Serchio,

And the city with the tree-lined circle,

Where the woman of Guinigi sleeps."

This is how the well-known Gabriele d'Annunzio wrote about Lucca in his poem "The City of Silence." Indeed, this city has nothing more to say to us. Over the course of its long history, it has witnessed everything. It was here, in 55 BC, that Gaius Julius Caesar, Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus, and Marcus Licinius Crassus met to form the first triumvirate and divide among themselves the governance of the provinces of the Roman Republic. Lucca was, in its time, one of the strongest and most important fortresses in Italy, and it

remained so even during the rule of the Lombards and the Byzantine Greeks in the 5th and 6th centuries AD.

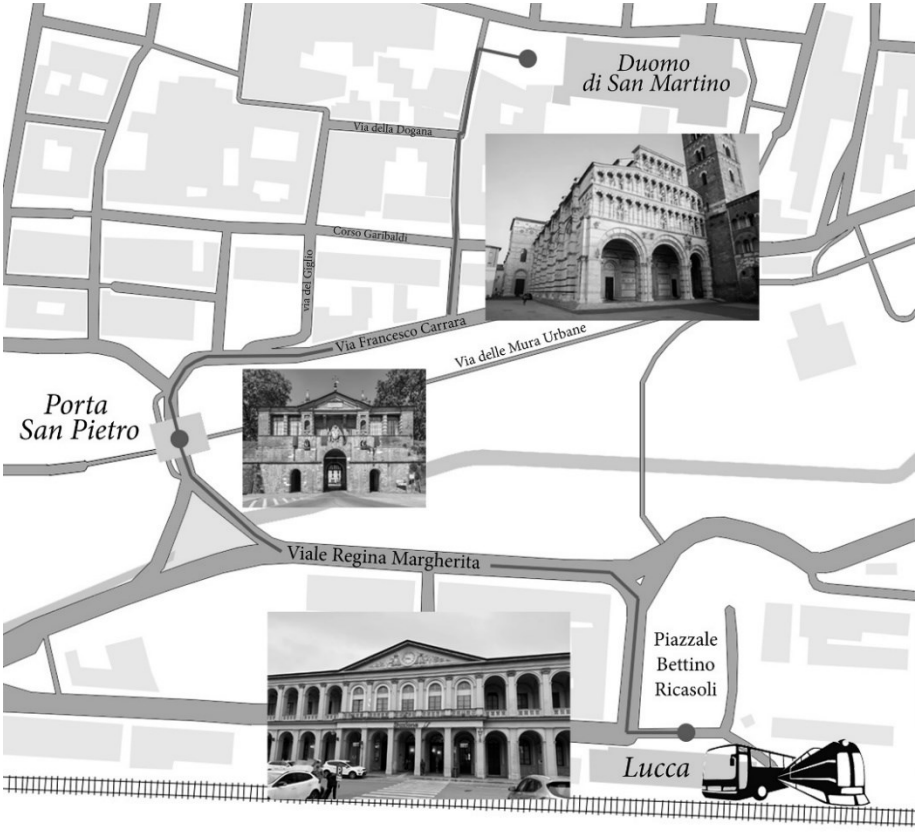
Lucca was also a medieval centre of pilgrimage, thanks to the principal relic of the Cathedral of San Martino – the Holy Face, believed to have been carved from Lebanese cedar by an angel who descended from the heavens in the night. Lucca grew wealthy, trading in silk that surpassed the quality, fineness, and elegance of the silks of all its Tuscan neighbours. Clothed in such silks, dynasties of Luccan merchants flourished. The city became a mother figure to the heartbroken Dante, who had been exiled from his beloved Florence, and one of the native sons of "the City of Silence" managed to defy the all-powerful Medici when, with their might, they tried to sweep away the formidable walls of Lucca. Those walls still stand today – a symbol of the freedom of this small town. Who else, besides Lucca, can boast of walls that have survived in their former glory to our less illustrious times? Perhaps only Grosseto – Tuscany's brother to Lucca – "the City of Four Walls," and to the north, only Ferrara and Bergamo.

Nature itself also guarded Lucca's freedom: The now tranquil Serchio River, flowing near Lucca and mentioned by d'Annunzio, once unleashed its fury on the Medici troops who came to conquer the city again in 1429. The Florentines tried to dam the Serchio to flood Lucca, but apparently, due to a technical error, instead of "strangling" the city with the river, the Medici drowned their own troops in it. The Genoese subsequently defeated the remnants. Thus, this small city maintained its independence until January 22, 1799, when the troops of Napoleon Bonaparte – not yet an emperor but already a conqueror – entered through the ancient gates, which had never known an enemy spear. He soon transformed Lucca into a principality and gifted it to his sister, Elisa. From then on, the city became a "pawn" in the political manoeuvrings of European royal houses. After the Napoleonic Wars, Lucca became the capital of a duchy, "given" to the House of Bourbon-Parma in exchange for the Duchy of Parma, which they had relinquished to Napoleon's widow, Empress Maria Luisa. After Maria Luisa's death in 1847, Parma was returned to the Bourbons, and Lucca was given to its eagerly awaited Florence – more precisely, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. Despite all these changes of crowns, flags, and monarchs,

Lucca carried on through the centuries almost unchanged from the days when the renowned master Jacopo della Quercia worked there, breathing the words of ancient Greeks into the mouth of one brave son of Lucca, the great and formidable Michelangelo, in his “Life of Castruccio Castracani.” However, now there is silence. Everything this city wanted to tell you has already been recorded by many hands in the twists of its narrow, medieval streets, in the reliefs of its heavy walls, in the marble façades of its churches, and, ultimately, in one word – “Libertas” – inscribed above the entrance to Lucca on the gates of San Pietro. The only question left to answer is: “Who is this woman of Guinigi?” Now, the master of Italian decadence has led us to the Cathedral of San Martino, not far from the gates of San Pietro.



THE CATHEDRAL OF SAN MARTINO, ITS BELL TOWER, AND ITS MUSEUM



Above the entrance sits Saint Martin in an extremely awkward pose: He has just cut off a part of his cloak with his sword to clothe a beggar. This is a replica; the original, installed on the cathedral's facade in 1204, is now kept inside the cathedral to protect it from adverse weather. Behind Saint Martin, intriguing details of a bas-relief can be seen: a kneeling figure gathers grapes, while another, in the same area, thrusts a sword into the chest of a lion rearing on its hind legs as his loyal dog bites into the nape of an unfortunate cat. This bas-relief is likely contemporary with the original sculpture of Saint Martin, but the creator of these works remains unknown.

Can a pair of marble sculptures and a classic medieval bas-relief amaze those who are already accustomed to Florence? Probably not as much as a far less noticeable, seemingly incidental, labyrinth carved into a marble block to the right of the cathedral portal. The labyrinth is accompanied by an inscription, which seems even more incidental, presenting these hypnotic lines with a Latin commentary:
"Hic quem Creticus edit Daedalus est laberinthus de quo nullus vadere quivit qui fuit intus ni Theseus gratis Ariane stamine jutus" ("This is the labyrinth created by Daedalus of Crete, from which no one who entered could exit, except Theseus, thanks to Ariadne's thread.")



Yes, a distinctly pagan, ancient Greek labyrinth found new meaning in medieval Christian philosophy. While the centre of the Minotaur's labyrinth represented death and chaos (embodied by a terrible anthropomorphic monster, the defeat of which allowed Theseus to undergo spiritual rebirth, gain love, and return home to claim his place as a wise king), Christians in the Middle Ages regarded the labyrinth as a symbol of the soul's wandering in search of salvation.
For example, a very similar small labyrinth carved in marble can be found in a fresco in the Monastery of Saint Francis in Alatri. The centre



Domenico Ghirlandaio. Self-portrait. Detail from the painting "Adoration of the Magi" from the Ospedale degli Innocenti gallery in Florence.

of this labyrinth depicts Jesus Christ pointing with his right hand to the entrance to the labyrinth, from which the Christian is to find their own way out. Another well-known example is the now-lost labyrinth of Reims Cathedral in France; it was once laid out in white and black stone near the entrance to the temple. Due to its size (10.36 by 10.36 metres or 33 by 33 feet), it was used for many years for an unusual ritual in which worshippers knelt and traversed the labyrinth while reciting special prayers.

Inside the cathedral, two main attractions stand out. The first is a panel by one of the masters of the Italian Renaissance, Domenico Ghirlandaio, titled “Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints” (one of the earliest known works by the artist). The second is, of course, the Chapel of the Holy Face, which houses the city of Lucca’s most significant relic: the Holy Face of Jesus Christ, part of a carved crucifix. According to legend, Saint Nicodemus, a disciple of Jesus who, along with Joseph of Arimathea, laid the Saviour’s body in the tomb, sought to carve a wooden crucifix depicting the crucifixion of Christ. However, upon reaching the face, he realised that he could not portray it faithfully. After several unsuccessful attempts, he fell asleep. At that moment, an angel descended from heaven and completed the work for him.

To avoid accusations of idolatry and protect the miraculous “not-made-by-human-hands” image of the Saviour’s face, Nicodemus entrusted it to God’s will by placing it aboard a ship sent adrift on the Mediterranean without a crew. After a long voyage, the ship appeared off the coast of Tuscany in the Tyrrhenian Sea. The vessel could not be boarded or

brought into the port of Luni until the bishop of Lucca, Giovanni I, arrived and prayed. Only then did the ship carrying the crucifix enter the harbour by itself.

When the crucifix with the Holy Face was unloaded, the bishop ordered that it be placed on a cart yoked to oxen. He then allowed God to guide them to the location where the relic was to be housed. According to tradition, the oxen stopped at the site where the future Cathedral of San Martino was founded – built from the outset as the sanctuary of the Holy Face of Jesus Christ, which, as mentioned earlier, became the main relic of the city of Lucca.

To this day, every September 13, the city celebrates a festival commemorating the "miraculous journey" of Nicodemus's crucifix and its arrival in Lucca. While radiocarbon dating conducted in 2020 confirmed earlier hypotheses by art historians about the later origin of the crucifix (the wood dates back no more than 1,200 to 1,300 years, meaning it was created in the 8th or 9th centuries AD), the crucifix preserved in this magnificent chapel remains one of the oldest surviving wooden depictions of Jesus Christ in Europe.

Now, let us proceed to the sacristy of the cathedral, where lies the "woman C," immortalised by d'Annunzio. Here she is – a vision of tenderness in marble, the delicate hands of a young lady, the weightlessness of silk, the serene expression on her face. In life, she was known as Ilaria del Carretto Guinigi. Her father, Carlo del Carretto, was the ruler of the town of Zuccarello in Liguria and held the title of Marquis. Her husband, Paolo Guinigi, a member of one of the wealthiest silk merchant families, served as the Lord of Lucca for 30 years, from 1400 to 1430.

Ilaria was likely destined for a secure, relatively carefree, and long life as the matriarch of a noble family. However, fate had other plans. After giving birth to her first son, Ladislao, Ilaria became pregnant again but died during childbirth, leaving behind a daughter named in her honour: Ilaria Minor (Ilaria the Younger). She was only 27 years old, and her sudden death was a profound blow to Paolo Guinigi. Immediately after her burial, he commissioned this sarcophagus from the renowned marble sculptor Jacopo della Quercia. The work was completed in just two years.

The monument is not overloaded with intricate details; rather, it is elegant and restrained. At her feet lies a dog gazing hopefully at the peaceful face of the woman, who appears to be sleeping – a common symbol of marital fidelity in medieval effigies. The bas-reliefs adorning the four sides of the sarcophagus have a turbulent history. Twenty-one years after Ilaria's death, her widower, Paolo Guinigi, entered an alliance with Francesco I Sforza, Duke of Milan. In response, the Medici of Florence, long-standing enemies of Milan, made two attempts to seize Lucca. Both sieges failed due to the support that Lucca received from Milan and Genoa. However, the citizens of Lucca, angered by Paolo Guinigi's short-sighted policies, which had led to war with Florence, revolted against him and his family.

As a result, in 1430, the Guinigi family was exiled from Lucca. All their possessions were confiscated, and the city reverted to a full republican system, undoing the quasi-monarchical structure established when Paolo Guinigi became Lord of Lucca in 1400. During the unrest, Ilaria's sarcophagus suffered: The side bas-reliefs were removed, the tomb was opened, and, eventually, it was moved from its original location in the main body of the cathedral to the sacristy.



The Tomb of Ilaria del Caretto. John Ruskin, 1874

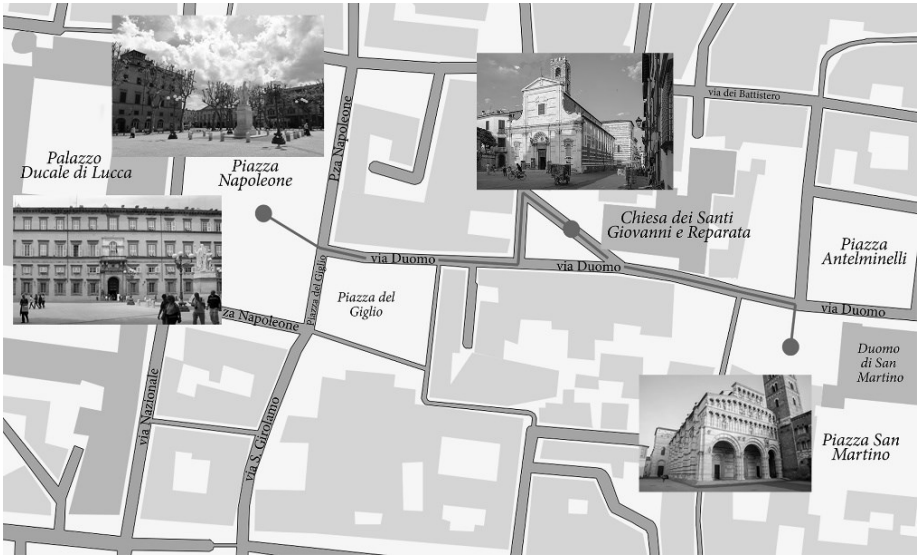
Not until 1488 did several artisans attempt to restore the sarcophagus's decorations. Shortly thereafter, Jacopo della Quercia's original bas-reliefs were rediscovered and reinstalled on the sarcophagus, which was then moved to the cathedral's transept. This place of honour and prominence was its home until the extensive restoration of the cathedral

in the 21st century. At that time, the decision was made to return the sarcophagus to the sacristy.

But what of Ilaria's remains? Did they travel with the sarcophagus throughout this time? Fortunately, the peace of the unfortunate woman was never disturbed. As investigations conducted in 2012 revealed, the sarcophagus was empty from the very beginning. Ilaria's body was interred in the Church of San Francesco, not far from here. Her remains rest there to this day, alongside those of Paolo Guinigi's two subsequent wives, Piacentina da Varano and Jacopa Trinci.

Located on the right side of the façade of the Cathedral of San Martino, the bell tower is the tallest structure in Lucca to this day. It is 60 metres (196 feet) tall, and the lower part is significantly older than the upper section. Likely, the construction of the bell tower began during the episcopate of Anselmo da Baggio, the future Pope Alexander II, in the 11th century, while the upper part probably dates to the 13th century. To this day, one of the tower's seven ancient bells strikes 12 times to mark each new midday. Perhaps the most delightful news is that, following the extensive restoration of the belfry in 2016, visitors can climb to its summit, where a breathtaking view of ancient Lucca and its surroundings awaits.

THE DUCAL PALACE AND NAPOLEON SQUARE



Via Duomo leads us away from the Cathedral of San Martino, past the beautiful Church of Saints Giovanni and Reparata, to Napoleon Square. Yes, this is the very same Napoleon Bonaparte – unique, though not the only one (at least if we count his nephew, Napoleon III, who was emperor of the French from 1852 to 1870). Long ago, this site was home to the grand and pompous residence of Castruccio Castracani, a member of the influential Antelminelli family in Lucca. In 1316, he was proclaimed the city's lifelong ruler with the title of First Consul, and in 1327, he became Duke of Lucca, only to die unexpectedly a year later from malarial fever. Duke of Lucca, only to die unexpectedly a year later from malarial fever.

His fortress, known as "Fortezza Augusta," was reportedly constructed under the supervision of none other than the great Giotto di Bondone. Once complete, the citadel covered nearly one-fifth of Lucca and was among the largest fortresses in Tuscany at the time, fully earning its nickname "Augusta" – "The Great." Castracani intended its walls to secure his rule over Lucca against external threats (and there was no



Castruccio Castracani degli Antelminelli. Illustration from a 17th century manuscript.

shortage of aspirants to power in medieval Tuscany). However, the fortress ultimately backfired on his own heirs. After the untimely death of Lucca's sole duke, the city was conquered by the troops of the Holy Roman Empire, who reinstated the republican government. Ironically, it was the walls of Fortezza Augusta that prevented Castruccio Castracani's sons from reclaiming Lucca and restoring their father's crown.

Later, in 1370, the Council of Elders, which governed the Republic of Lucca, decreed the fortress's demolition shortly after the city gained independence from the Holy Roman Empire in 1369. By that time, Castracani's citadel had become firmly associated with the empire. On August 1, 1370, in the courtyard of Fortezza Augusta, all the citizens of Lucca solemnly swore allegiance to the new constitution of their Republic. This marked the beginning of the slow demolition of the citadel. However, the demolition was never fully completed: The central part of the fortress was adapted for government meetings, and the dismantling of the walls ended with the outer ramparts.

In 1400, Paolo Guinigi, whom we already know as Lucca's lifelong ruler, decided to repurpose the partially dismantled fortress for his residence. Under his commission, the palace of the republican government was once again restructured and furnished with great taste and luxury. However, all of this was sold off or destroyed following Guinigi's expulsion from Lucca 30 years later.

Through numerous reconstructions and additions, the main palace of the former Fortezza Augusta, which again became the residence of the government of the Republic of Lucca, survived until the early 19th century, when this town became the capital of the small Duchy of Lucca



Elisa Bonaparte Baciocchi. Portrait by Joseph Franque, 1812

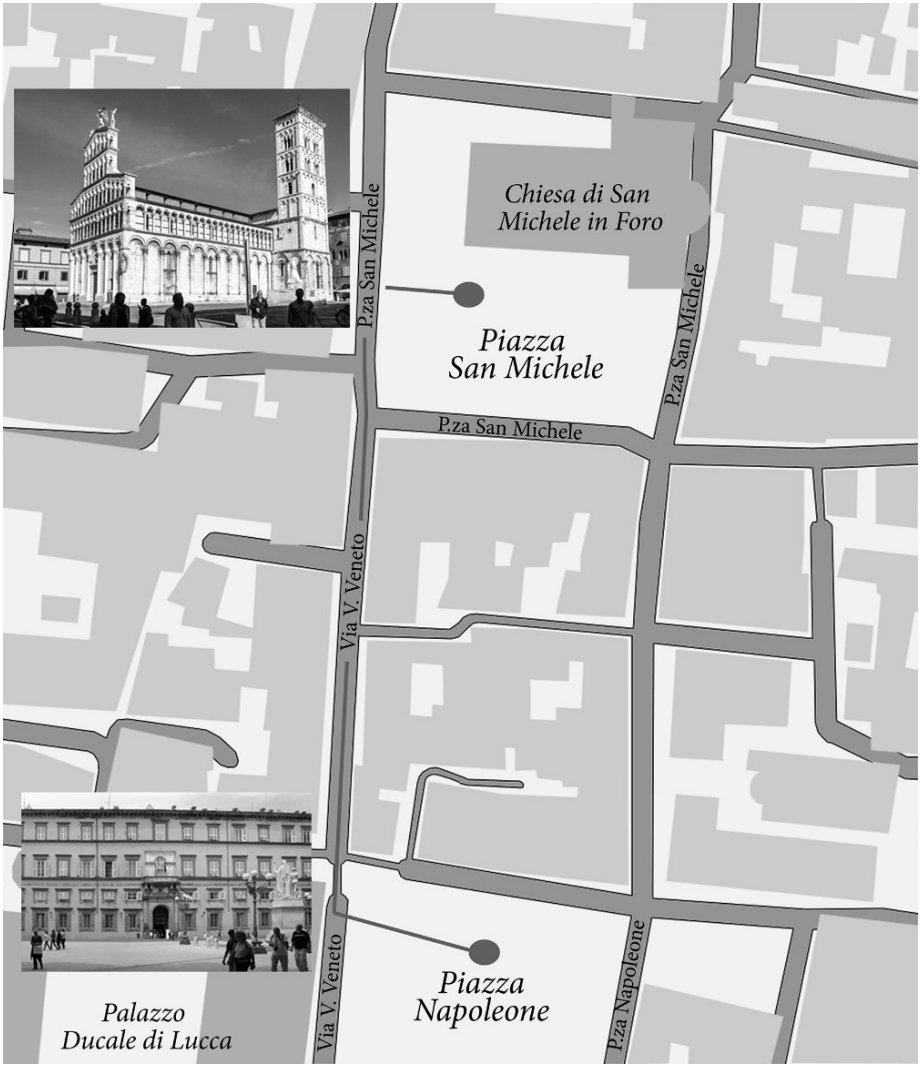
and Piombino. The Duchy was created by Napoleon Bonaparte on territories in Italy conquered by France for his sister, Elisa, and her husband, Felice Baciocchi, a Corsican nobleman, divisional general, and senator. This state, which lasted nearly 10 years, was not granted any substantial sovereignty. Except for the fact that its residents were exempt from military conscription in Napoleon's army and thus did not participate in his campaigns, life in Lucca and Piombino was not much different from life in the neighbouring departments of the French Empire. The greatest changes in the city during Princess Elisa's reign were the creation of this very square, named in honour of her famous brother. To develop the square, the ruler of Lucca and Piombino ordered the demolition of several dozen houses, the post office building, salt warehouses, and the ancient church of San Pietro Maggiore. (The same fate befell the old Church of Saint Peter in the town of Massa, also part of Elisa's domains, where the princess decided to create a square "in the Parisian style"). The changes made to the government palace remain unknown, as its new owner "found it completely unsuitable for residence and state affairs." In any case, its facade probably remained intact and now faced the new Napoleon Square, in the centre of which Elisa Bonaparte-Baciocchi erected a statue of her brother during his lifetime.

After the fall of Napoleon's Empire in 1814, Elisa attempted to save her duchy, but the British troops that entered Lucca determined its fate. As a result of the Congress of Vienna in 1815, Lucca was handed over to the control of the Duchy of Parma and the House of Bourbon. The new ruler of the city, Duchess Maria Louisa, ordered the demolition of the

Napoleon monument and the erection of a monument to herself (the very modest duchess). This monument still stands opposite the "Duke's Palace," as the government residence of Lucca has been known since then. The palace, in turn, is now the Risorgimento Museum, dedicated to the Italian War for unification. With extensive collections of weapons and documents from that era, it tells the story of the Italian people's struggle for a unified state. Of course, in addition to the museum's collection, you can enjoy the stunning interiors of the Duke's Palace, whose decor mostly dates back to the 18th and 19th centuries.



SAINT MICHAEL'S SQUARE AND ITS TREASURES



Via V. Veneto takes us from Piazza Napoleone to the neighbouring, much older, and distinctly more Tuscan Piazza San Michele, named after the church of the same name, which dominates the square. However, if you briefly take your

gaze away from this marvellous basilica and turn to the building on your right as you exit the square, you will see the splendid Palazzo Pretorio – the former building of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Lucca, constructed in 1370 and converted into the residence of the republican government in 1492.
In the early period after this "transformation," the building was inhabited by the podestà – the already familiar elected civic official. After him, the building was transferred to the management of the commander of the city militia – the bargello. Of course, the most outstanding feature of this building is the magnificent Baroque-style clock, which was recently renovated and still marks every minute of the city's time.



This square itself is located on the site of the ancient Roman forum of Lucca. It was here that the two main streets of the city – the cardo and the decumanus – intersected. Also, it was here, at the heart of ancient Lucca, in the 8th century, under the rule of the Lombards who governed the fortress, that a church was built in honour of Archangel Michael – one of the most venerated saints by this Germanic-speaking people. However, little of this church has survived. In 1070, by the will of Pope Alexander II (the already familiar native of Lucca, Anselmo da Baggio),

the reconstruction of the church began, transforming it into the three-nave basilica that we see today. These works continued until the 14th century. During that time, a bell tower was added to the current basilica, which was originally much taller. In 1364, it was "shortened" by the ruler of Pisa, Giovanni d'Agnello, because the sound of the bells from this tower could be heard even in his city, which, in his opinion, "showed the superiority of Lucca over Pisa." However, shortly after this, d'Agnello was overthrown for attempting to turn the Pisan Republic into his hereditary principality, and the bells in the San Michele bell tower were hung once again.
The facade of this basilica speaks of its connection to the Pisa Cathedral (which we will visit shortly). Incidentally, many scholars tend to believe that the author of this masterpiece in the Pisan style was Buscheto, the architect whose life is regrettably little known, considering that he was the one who built the Cathedral of Pisa.



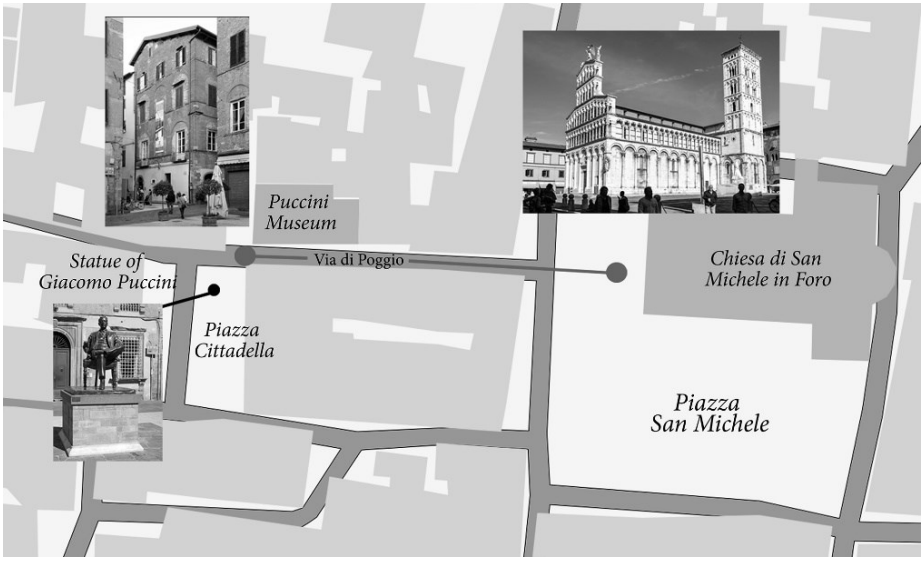
It is also interesting that instead of a cross, the Basilica of San Michele is crowned with a sculptural representation of the Archangel striking the devil with a spear. According to legend, when lit correctly, a greenish beam emanates from this sculpture. It is said to be the glow of an emerald

hidden within Saint Michael, though this emerald has never been found during any of the basilica's restorations.

The central feature of the church's interior is a rather unsettling relic. Lying in a glass coffin in the altar area is a shrivelled corpse, its bony hand slightly raised as though beckoning to a caregiver. It grins at any visitor who enters. This is none other than Saint Davino, one of the most venerated saints of Lucca. According to his hagiography, Davino was Armenian, likely not from modern-day Armenia in the Caucasus but from Cilician Armenia, which is now part of Turkey. Before embarking on his first and final pilgrimage, he gave all his belongings to the needy. Then, he left his native town on foot to venerate the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, the tombs of Saints Peter and Paul in Rome, and the shrines of Santiago de Compostela in Spain. On his way back from Rome, Davino stopped here in Lucca, where he was struck by a severe illness. On June 3, 1050, the Armenian pilgrim died in the city's hospital, which was located near the Basilica of San Michele. This could have been the end of the story of this stranger from a distant eastern land, and his name might have been lost to history if not for the miracles that, according to reports, began to occur for those who visited Davino's tomb to show respect for his Christian devotion. (After all, making such a long journey without the aid of "Emirates" was no small feat.) When these miracles – particularly healings – became widespread, the Bishop of Lucca decided to canonize Davino and move his remains to the basilica, where they continue to alarm us to this day.



THE STREET WHERE GIACOMO PUCCINI WAS BORN



Via di Poggio, which runs from the Piazza San Michele directly opposite the facade of the church of the same name, soon leads us to Piazza Cittadella – a small and cosy part of Lucca where Giacomo Antonio Domenico Michele Secondo Maria Puccini, the greatest Italian opera composer (after, perhaps, Giuseppe Verdi), was fortunate enough to have been born. He himself preferred to omit everything between "Giacomo" and "Puccini," so we know him best by his first name and surname alone.

The famous composer's ancestors moved into the house now on our right in 1815, after the sudden death of Domenico Puccini, Giacomo's grandfather. A passion for music was, in a sense, in Puccini's blood: His great-grandfather, also Giacomo Puccini, was a well-known musician in 18th-century Lucca. In the early 19th century, on the ground floor of this house resided the brother of Domenico Puccini's widow, Signor Arcangelo Cerù. This family – reasonably wealthy, with servants and influence in the city – likely played a decisive role in determining Giacomo Puccini's destiny long before his birth.

Giacomo Puccini was born right here, in this house, on December 22, 1858. On the very same day, by special permission, he was baptised by a priest who arrived from the Church of Saint Michael, as his parents were seriously concerned for the newborn's life. The names he received at baptism reflected his ancestry: Giacomo and Antonio after his great-great-grandfathers, Domenico after his great-grandfather, and Michele Secundo (literally: "Next Michele") after his father, who taught composition at the Pacini Music Institute. "Maria" was given to Giacomo Puccini in accordance with the common Catholic tradition in honour of the Virgin Mary. This was how the story of one of the greatest Italian (or, rather, primarily Tuscan) composers of the 19th century began.
At the age of five, he lost his father. When Puccini turned 26, his mother, Albina, passed away. The cruel irony is that, not long before her death, the young composer, who had already made a name for himself, had signed a contract with Italy's largest music publishing house, Casa Ricordi. This collaboration would last his entire life.



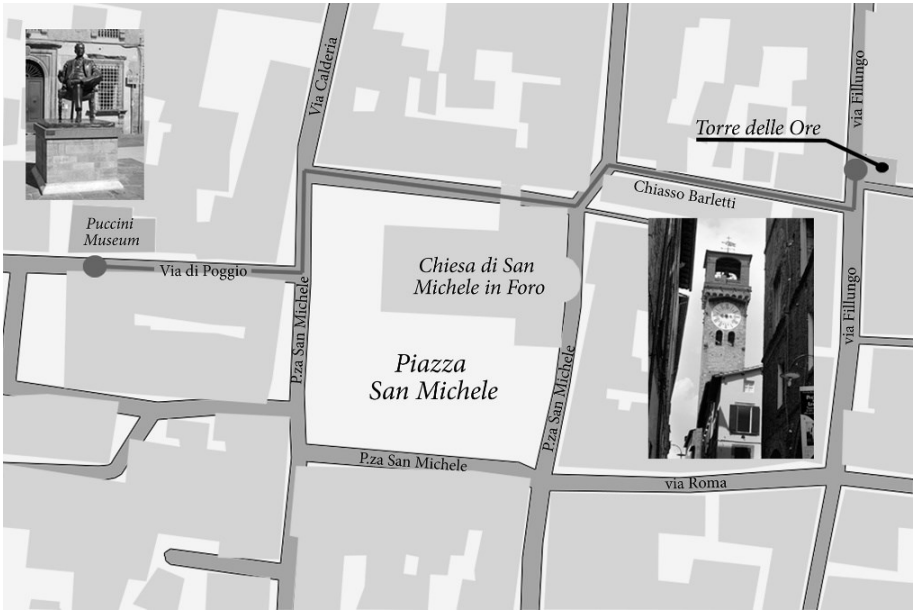
After Albina Puccini's death, her sons and heirs – Giacomo and Michele Jr. – sold their parents' house to their brother-in-law, Raffaello Franceschini, but stipulated in the contract the right to repurchase the



Giacomo Puccini in 1907

house at any time. Over the years, while under Franceschini's ownership, the house significantly deteriorated, and Puccini repeatedly wrote to his relative demanding that the façade and interiors be restored. None of these requests were met. In 1891, Michele Jr. passed away in South America. Not until three years later, after the success of the opera "Manon Lescaut," was Puccini able to repurchase his parents' house from Franceschini, using the money from the royalties he received for his work. However, the composer never lived in the house again and continued to rent it out until his death in 1924, when the rights to the property were inherited by Puccini's only son, Antonio. When Antonio passed away childless in 1946, the property went to his widow, Rita Dell'Anna. She, in turn, transferred the house to the municipality of Lucca in 1974 with the intention of establishing a museum dedicated to the great composer. Today, every Friday from June to September, at 12:00 noon, a guided tour of the Puccini House Museum in English is available for all interested. This tour is included in the regular ticket price. It is recommended to book the tour and tickets in advance (preferably a week ahead of time) on the official Puccini Museum website.

CLOCK TOWER (TORRE DELLE ORE)

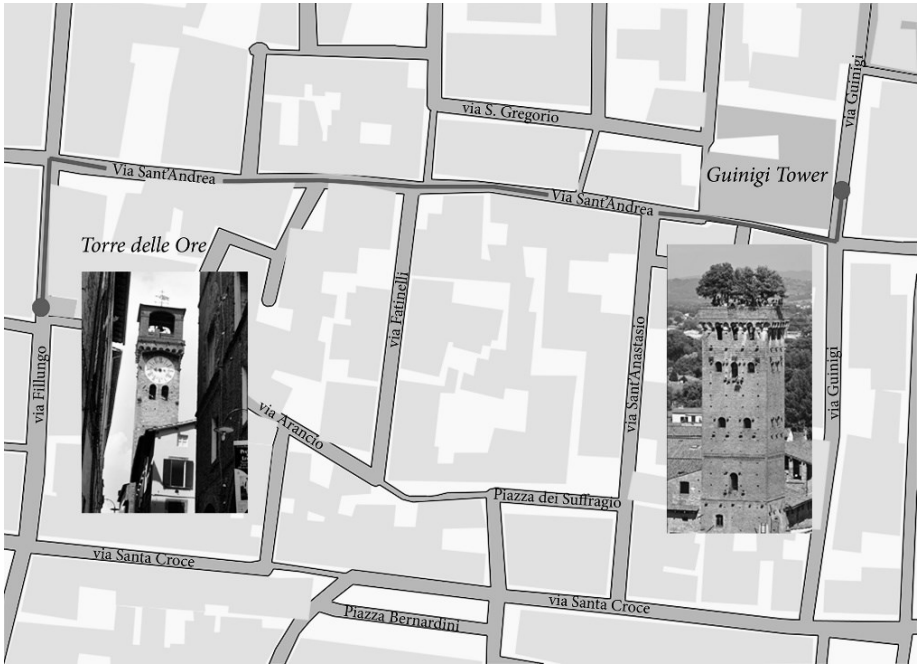


If you return along via di Poggio back to Piazza San Michele and walk through it, bypassing the cathedral on the left-hand side, you will find yourself on a narrow and rather charming street: Chiasso Barletti. Soon, it will lead you to via Fillungo, and right in front of you will be the Clock Tower of Lucca – yet another iconic landmark of this delightful Tuscan town. It rises above the ancient terracotta roofs, almost as if it is having a dialogue with the bell tower of San Michele. This conversation has been going on for almost 800 years, since the 13th century, when it was part of the residence of the wealthy Quartigiani family, yet without a timepiece at its summit. After this family was almost entirely wiped out in the early 14th century because of a conflict with their relative, Castruccio Castracani, who refused to share power with them, the palace and the tower attached to it were sold several times. Eventually, in 1390, the municipality of the town decided to lease the building. As stated in documents that have survived to this day, the municipality leased the tower to "set up a good clock, one that was sufficiently convenient and divided the time by

hours." This tower is situated in the heart of old Lucca, and it would have been hard to find a better building for the town's main clock. The first timekeeping mechanism, marking the hours according to the Roman custom (from one to six strikes, four times a day), appeared on this tower probably at the beginning of the 15th century and likely without a visible clock face. The creator of this mechanism was the well-known clockmaker Labruccio Cerlotti, whose family later acquired the tower and maintained the clock mechanism for almost a century until the municipality of Lucca purchased the tower from the Cerlotti family for perpetual public ownership. At that time (i.e., the end of the 15th century), the first clock face appeared. Thus, it became possible to tell the time not only by the bell chimes. The current clock, which marks the time we spend in the welcoming hills of Tuscany, was installed on the tower in 1754 and crafted by the French master Louis Simon and his assistant, Lucca-born Sigismondo Caturegli. You can climb to the top any day of the week from May to October for just €4.00. Unfortunately, the tower is closed from November to February.



GUINIGI TOWER



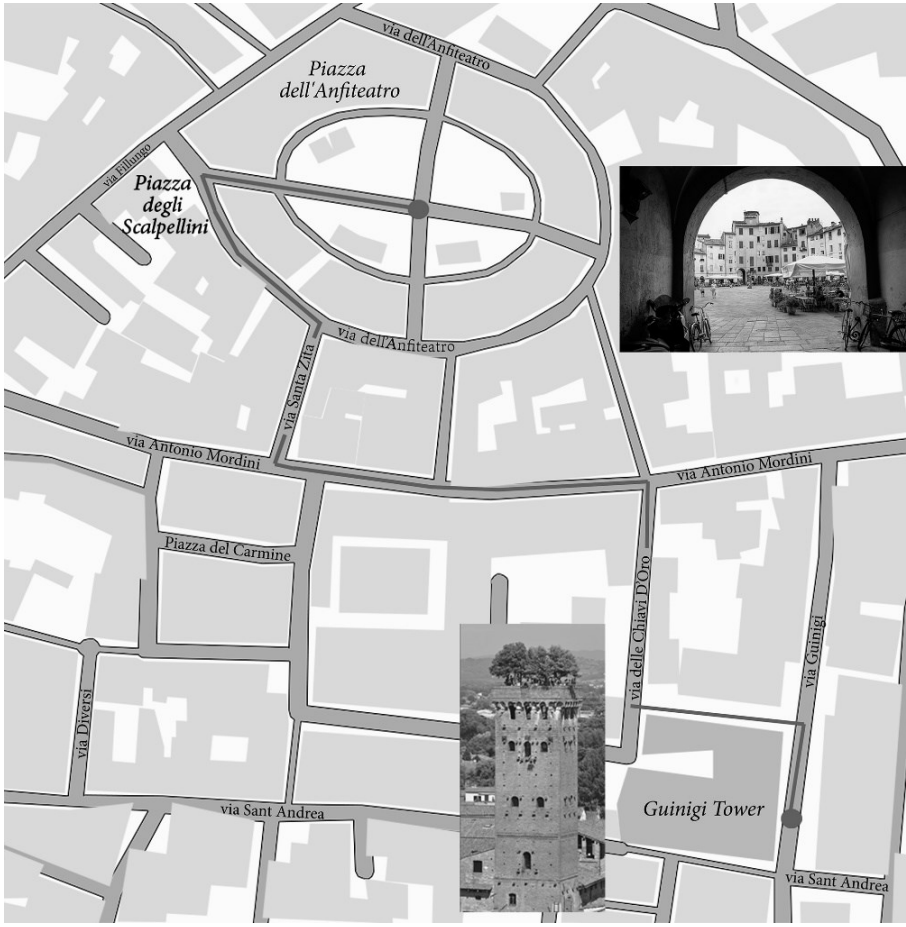
Now, it is time to head toward perhaps the most famous landmark of Lucca: the tower that once belonged to the Guinigi family, which, as we already know, also owned the city for a time. Yes, in those days, when the name of this family was spoken either proudly and loudly or with caution and in whispers, there were 250 towers of various heights rising above the banks of the Serchio River, each trying to outdo its neighbours. Lucca, like many Italian cities in the Renaissance era, was a medieval Manhattan – or, rather, Manhattan is a modern reflection of medieval Tuscany. Every patrician family in this blessed land sought to announce its wealth as loudly as possible as soon as enough gold accumulated in their hidden rooms and cellars; one way to do this was to build tall towers from which the proud owners of stone palaces could observe the unnoticed lives of their less fortunate fellow citizens. The Guinigi family, as we know, was one of the wealthiest in Lucca, and for this reason, they decided to go further than the others. A regular tower was not enough for them; now, on top

of the tower, there would have to be a garden. This construction seemed to combine the ancient legends of Babylon: The tower and the hanging gardens, when combined, would display the power of the Guinigi family to all the residents of Lucca. It will soon stand before us; we just need to walk along the winding Via Arancio to the turn onto Via Fatinelli and, after turning onto the latter, continue to the very end, where this street meets Via Sant'Andrea. It is here, turning right, that we will find the very tower, crowned with an oak crown, and the adjacent Palazzo Guinigi. Two hundred and thirty-three steps and €4.00 separate us from a breathtaking view of the city and the Serchio River valley. However, unlike at the clock tower, the ancient oaks here offer pleasant shade.

Unfortunately, the Palazzo Guinigi is not in the best condition. At the time of publication of this guide, only a few rooms of the palace were open for visiting. Admission to them is free, but they represent only a small part of the historical treasures of the residence of one of the most famous and influential families in Lucca.



AMPHITHEATRE SQUARE (PIAZZA DELL'ANFITEATRO)



A narrow corridor of Via delle Chiavi D'Oro, separating the Palazzo Guinigi with its famous tower from the house at number 12 – a typical Tuscan residential building of the 15th to 16th centuries – leads us to Via Antonio Mordini. We must turn left and walk along it until we reach the turn to Via Santa Zita, named in honour of Saint Zita. She was born in the village of Monsagrati, not far from Lucca, and is venerated in the Catholic Church as the patron saint of maids and domestic servants. According to her biography, Zita was



Leon Biedronski's «Saint Zita», 1889

born in 1212 and worked as a maid in the home of the wealthy patrician Fatinelli family. In the early years of her service, the family treated her terribly: Zita was daily subjected to abuse and beatings and locked in the cellar for the slightest misstep. She could be left without food for days. However, the young Tuscan woman endured these trials with great dignity and humility, which impressed the Fatinelli family. Having developed respect for Zita, they stopped tormenting her and soon made her the head of the household staff. When Zita died at the age of 60, on April 27, 1272, the Fatinelli family venerated her as the protector of their household and established a chapel in her honour, even though the Church had not canonised her. In 1580, during an exhumation of her remains, it was discovered that her body, which had been buried for over 300 years, had remained incorrupt. The Bishop of Lucca considered this to be a sign of her sanctity. Zita's relics were then transferred to the Basilica of San Frediano in the old town, and in 1696, she was officially canonised as a saint by the Catholic Church. Ironically, it was in honour of the patron saint of servants and maids, who had become so venerated in Lucca, that Princess Zita of Bourbon-Parma – the daughter of the deposed Duke of Parma, Robert I, who was ousted during the unification of Italy in 1861 – received her first baptismal name. She became crown princess in 1912 and, in 1916, the last Empress-consort of Austria and Queen of Hungary as the wife of Emperor Charles I from the Habsburg-Lorraine family. Zita was born not far from Lucca at the Villa Pianore, the property of the Duke of Parma's family.

Via Santa Zita leads us to Via dell'Anfiteatro. From the name, you can tell that we are very close to our destination. Turning left again and walking to Piazza degli Scalpellini, on our right, we will see a large arch. Passing through it, we will find ourselves in a large, almost perfectly oval-shaped square whose history is briefly described on several small Italian plaques. It was laid out in the 19th century by architect Lorenzo Nottolini on the foundation of a Roman amphitheatre from the 2nd century AD. However, these plaques provide only a summary and can even mislead you. Do not think that Signor Nottolini demolished the ancient Roman amphitheatre – far from it.



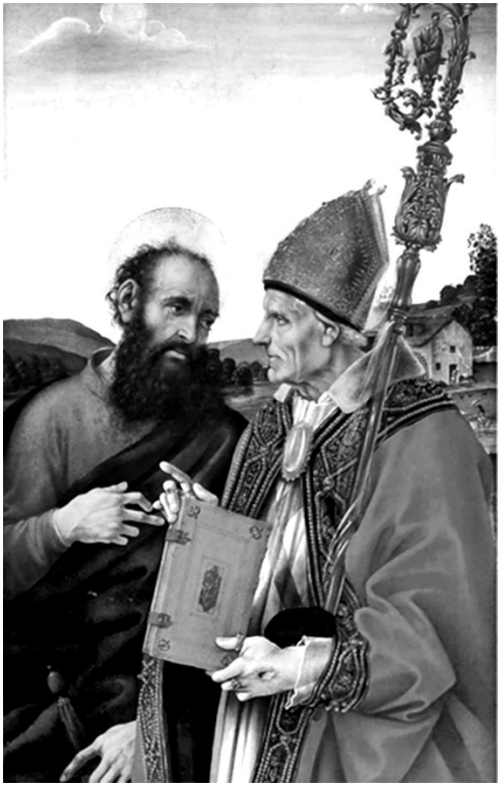
That was done by other professionals long before the 19th century. Indeed, after the fall of the Roman Empire, there was no longer a need for amphitheatres. Early medieval Christians did not favour theatrical arts or gladiatorial games, and in the times of ancient Rome, these amphitheatres served precisely those purposes. The old name of this square, "Parlascio," is an Italian distortion of the Latin word "paralisium" (amphitheatre), related to the Italian verb "parlare" (to speak), thereby reflecting the new use of the old theatre during the Middle Ages. It was

here that public assemblies of the townspeople were held for several decades until the ruins of the amphitheatre were covered with residential buildings and commercial shops. This square remained built over and unseen until the beginning of the "Romantic era," that is, the early 19th century. At that time, the Tuscans, fascinated by their ancient history, commissioned Lorenzo Nottolini – the chief architect of the Duchy of Lucca – to "reveal" the outline of the ancient Roman amphitheatre, clearing the central part of the square of "unnecessary" buildings. This is how the current main tourist attraction of Lucca – the Piazza dell'Anfiteatro – came into being.

SAN FREDIANO BASILICA (BASILICA DI SAN FREDIANO)



This basilica is located not far from the Piazza dell'Anfiteatro; we just need to leave the piazza through the same arch we entered, turn right onto Via Fillungo, and, almost immediately after that, turn left. Then, the elegant facade of the Basilica of San Frediano will appear before us at the end of the street. Like most ancient churches in Tuscany, the basilica has a history dating back long before the current temple structure standing on this square. As early as the 6th century, this was the site of a church dedicated to Saints Vincenzo, Stefano, and Lorenzo, and the basilica's foundation is linked to the name of Frediano – another saint revered in Lucca. Tradition states that he was the son of the King of Ulster (modern-day Ulster in Northern Ireland), and his birth is dated to the early 6th century, with his real name likely being Finnan. After receiving his religious education at the new monasteries of Ireland, where Christianity had arrived at the dawn of the



Saints Paul and Frediano. Fra' Filippino Lippi, 1482

5th century, Frediano was ordained a priest and went on a pilgrimage to Rome, never to return to Ireland. On his way back, he decided to become a hermit in the mountains of Monte Pisano. Living a devout and solitary life in daily prayer, Frediano soon became known in the surrounding areas. When word of him reached Pope John III, the latter offered the pious Celt the vacant episcopal seat in Lucca. Agreeing, Frediano arrived in the city and, as reported by Pope Gregory the Great, performed a real miracle. For a long time, the city's inhabitants had suffered from floods caused by the Serchio River flowing too close to the city walls. When the citizens asked for help from their new bishop, he is said to have taken a rake and walked along the river, tracing the land with it. As soon as he did so, the river flowed along the new course he had set. Of course, there were likely no miracles at all, and the bishop's merit lay in the prosaic instruction to dig a new channel for the river and redirect its waters from the walls of Lucca. However, the legend was accepted as truth in the official life of Saint Frediano and became one of the main arguments during the process of his canonisation. It was he, this Irishman, who founded the church of Saints Vincenzo, Stefano, and Lorenzo, in which, after his death on March 18, 588, he was buried. After being rebuilt in the 8th century, the church was named in honour of the Virgin Mary for a time, and a crypt was built to house the relics of Bishop Frediano. It was rebuilt again in 1112, and in 1147 it was consecrated by Pope Eugene III, taking a form closer to its present one: a three-nave basilica. The wooden trussed



Jacopo della Quercia

ceiling, which we can view from the inside, as well as the mosaic ornament, appeared somewhat later, in the 13th century. This mosaic, incidentally, clearly shows the influence of Byzantine artistic tradition on Italian Renaissance art. Built according to the canons of Greek iconography, the mosaic depicts Jesus Christ in the so-called "vesica piscis" – the "Fish's Bladder," consisting of two arcs supported by angels. This symbol refers the viewer to the early Christian Greek acronym for the Savior, "ΙΧΘΥΣ," which is literally translated as "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior." Below the image of Christ, we see the 12 Apostles and a pointed window. When it was opened, a fragment of the mosaic depicting the Virgin Mary was destroyed.

The bell tower, rising from behind the "back" of the cathedral – almost contemporary to the church, built in the 12th to 13th centuries – is topped with battlements in the shape of "swallowtails," which you might have already noticed on other towers and bell towers in Lucca. The shape of the battlements is not accidental: Traditionally, such battlements decorated the walls of fortresses and towers of the Ghibellines. As we remember from our journey to Florence, during the long-standing battle for power between the popes and the Holy Roman Emperors, the Ghibellines were the members of the Italian nobility who supported the pope, while the Guelphs supported the emperor. The latter, unlike their opponents, adorned their fortress walls with simple, square battlements. Historically, Lucca was predominantly a Ghibelline city, so the prevalence of "swallowtails" is no coincidence.

One of the main works of art in the cathedral is a worn and almost imperceptible fresco, depicting the martyrdom of Saints Lorenzo,

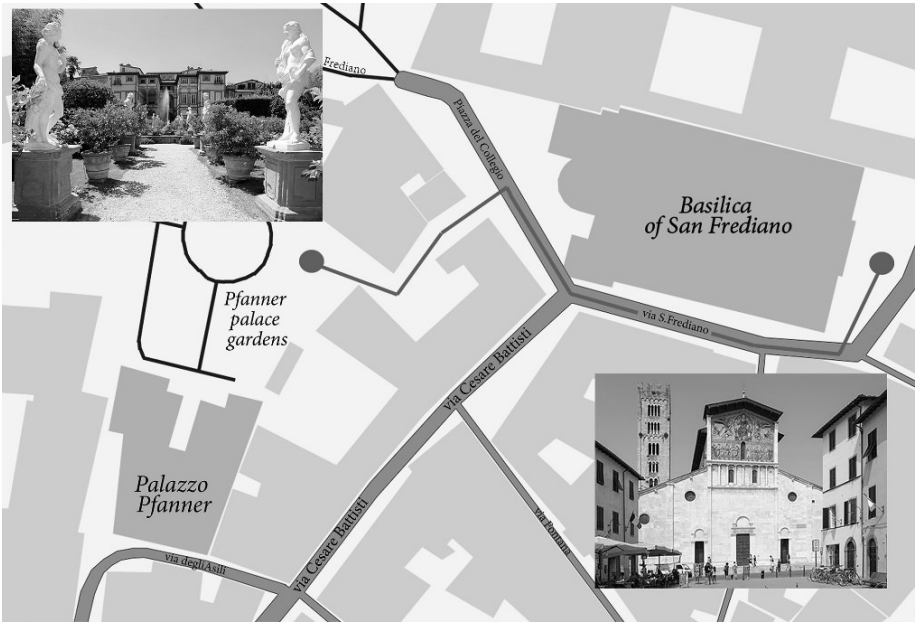
Vincenzo, and Stefano, on the right wall of the central nave. It dates back to the early 12th century and is perhaps the oldest example of medieval painting in Lucca. Another notable feature of the church's decoration is the masterful altarpiece by Jacopo della Quercia, depicting the Madonna and Child surrounded by Saints Frediano, Orsola, Lorenzo, Girolamo, and Riccardo. It is located in the chapel of the Trent family, whose members commissioned the altarpiece from the artist. In front of this altarpiece are the tombs of the donor – Lorenzo Trent – and his wife.



Of course, the baptistery font of the Basilica of San Frediano deserves mention. It is a true masterpiece of Romanesque sculpture and was likely not originally intended as a baptismal font but, rather, as a vessel for holy water. It was made no earlier than 1150 but no later than 1173, when historical records first mention it. Standing 330 cm (10.9 feet) tall, with a lower bowl diameter of 255 cm (8.4 feet), it is a unique work in its own right. Originally, water for baptism was meant to flow from the upper bowl to the lower one through the base of the first mask, placed in a circle around it. Modern research has shown that at least three different masters worked on the font, though time has erased the names of all but one of them: "Maestro Roberto," who created seven figures of prophets

and the Good Shepherd at the base of the large bowl, each under an arch. Another master, working on the lower bowl, depicted the story of Moses in bas-reliefs: the Egyptian bondage, the appearance of God to Moses, the crossing of the Red Sea, the receiving of the Tablets of the Law, and so on. The third master depicted, on the lid of the upper bowl, personifications of the 12 months: Janus (January); a man with a plant (February); a man removing a splinter from his foot (March); a man with a flower (April); a rider (May); a man reaping wheat (June); a peasant threshing wheat (July); a man on horseback (August); a man treading grapes (September); a man gathering fruit (October); a man ploughing with oxen, accompanied by two cherubs (November); and a man slaughtering a pig (December).

PALAZZO PFANNER



Finishing our journey through the city where Lady Guinigi rests, I invite you to walk from the Basilica of San Frediano, through Piazza del Collegio, to the entrance of the gardens of the Palazzo Pfanner – one of the most famous and elegant mansions in Lucca. Some of you might know this palace from the film "The Portrait of a Lady" – the adaptation of the eponymous novel by Henry James, directed by Jane Campion and starring Nicole Kidman and John Malkovich. "I call people rich who are able to realise the impulses of their imagination," writes James in his novel. And what is the Italian Renaissance if not an attempt by the medieval Tuscan aristocracy to prove to themselves and each other that each of them could realise their boldest fantasies by paying the right amount to the right master? In part, Palazzo Pfanner is an echo of the faded Renaissance in Lucca. Its construction began in 1660 by the merchant family Moriconi, who were engaged in the silk trade, but they never managed to make the palace their main residence. In 1680, their business went bankrupt, and the Moriconis were forced to sell the unfinished mansion to their



Portrait of King Frederik IV

competitors, the Contorni family, which had recently been granted nobility. The latter gave the palace the shape it has today. The luxurious garden in front of the mansion was designed by one of the brightest representatives of the late Baroque: Abbot Filippo Juvarra. Shortly after working on this garden, he went to Piedmont and built the Superga Basilica, which has served as the burial place for members of the House of Savoy (the ruling dynasty of the Kingdom of Sardinia and, from 1861, the Kingdom of Italy) for the last three centuries. The residence turned out to be truly magnificent. It was here that the 21-year-old Danish Crown Prince Frederick, future King Frederick IV of Denmark, chose to stay when passing through Lucca in 1692 during his Grand Tour of Italy. At a formal reception in this palace, held by the Contorni family to celebrate His Royal Highness's arrival, the Crown Prince danced with the young Lucchese noblewoman Maria Maddalena Trent – a descendant of the very Lorenzo Trent whose tomb, by Jacopo della Quercia, we saw in the Basilica of San Frediano. The mutual flirtation between the young people was given too much importance by the citizens of Lucca, who even gossiped about the engagement between the Lutheran heir to the throne and the provincial Tuscan Catholic noblewoman, which was, in those times, a complete absurdity. No, Crown Prince Frederick left Tuscany with a different love – for Italian Baroque. In this style, he ordered the construction of two royal residences: Frederiksborg and Fredensborg, the second of which, similar in some elements to Palazzo Pfanner, is still an official residence of the Danish Royal Family.

The Contorni family's economic prosperity – though longer-lasting than that of the palace's founders, the Moriconi family – did not last forever. From the early 19th century, the owners began renting out their mansion. During this period, in 1845, the Duke of Lucca, Carlo I of the House of Bourbon, decided to invite an experienced brewer to his small state to produce the now beloved frothy drink. The response came from Felix Pfanner, a native of the Austrian town of Hörbranz, who rented the Contorni palace and set up "Pfanner," the first brewery of its kind in Tuscany and all of Italy. Soon, the profits from the brewery allowed Felix to buy the mansion from the old owners. Thus, the Contorni Palace became the Pfanner Palace. The restaurant operating alongside the brewery became one of the main meeting spots for Lucca's residents and also an attractive place for foreigners and visitors from other cities. The family brewery ended up closing under Pietro Pfanner – a surgeon and patron who, toward the end of his life, became the mayor of Lucca. Nevertheless, this fact had little impact on the family's wealth, and they still own the palace today.

The palace is open to visitors, and it contains a permanent exhibition of the personal belongings of Pietro Pfanner – the most famous member of the family. Additionally, in its old stables, one will find the L'imbuto restaurant, which appears in the Michelin Guide thanks to its chef, Cristiano Tomei, who offers his patrons the chance to enjoy true masterpieces of the virtuoso Tuscan cuisine.



WHERE TO STAY IN LUCCA

B&B HOTELS:

B&B The Gem of Helen (Hotel La Gemma Di Elena Lucca)

- Address: Via della Zecca, 33, 55100 Lucca LU
- Tel: +39 0583 492146
- Free Wi-Fi, breakfast included, family rooms, pets allowed, parking available

This small and cosy guesthouse is in the historic centre of Lucca. It offers rooms with simple but pleasant décor and all necessary amenities. Some rooms are small. The breakfast is tasty and varied. There is no lift in the building.

B&B Antica Residenza Santa Chiara

- Address: Via Santa Chiara, 12, 55100 Lucca LU
- Tel: +39 0583 464633
- Free Wi-Fi, breakfast included, family rooms, air conditioning, bicycle rental available, free parking

The hotel is in a historic building, which gives it a special charm. The rooms are cosy and comfortable, with traditional décor. Its central location means that all the city's attractions are easily accessible. The staff is polite and friendly, and the breakfast is tasty. Overall, it is a good value for money. However, there might be some inconvenience due to street noise and the lack of a lift.

B&B Le Violette

- Address: Via della Polveriera, 6, 55100 Lucca

- Tel: +39 340 533 2684
- Free Wi-Fi, breakfast included, family rooms, air conditioning, non-smoking rooms

A cosy and welcoming house in the heart of Lucca. The rooms are comfortable and convenient, though small. The furniture is slightly outdated, and there might be noise from the street. However, this is compensated for by the delicious breakfast and friendly staff. Overall, it is a good value for the money.

MID-RANGE HOTELS:

Hotel Palazzo Alexander

- Address: Via Santa Giustina, 48, 55100 Lucca
- Tel: +39 0583 583571
- Accessibility features, room service, private parking, airport transfer (for a fee), free Wi-Fi, breakfast included, coffee/tea maker in all rooms, family rooms, cribs (on request), air conditioning, non-smoking rooms

The hotel is in a historic building and offers elegant rooms with antique furniture and modern amenities. It combines the charm of the past with modern comfort. Excellent service. The staff is polite and friendly. A varied and delicious breakfast.

Hotel Ilaria

- Address: Via del Fosso 26 – 55100 Lucca
- Tel: +39 0583 47615
- Free Wi-Fi, breakfast included, bar and lounge area, non-smoking rooms, family rooms, air conditioning, free bicycle rental, parking (for a fee), laundry and dry-cleaning services, airport transfer (for a fee)

The hotel is in a 13th-century building in the heart of Lucca. Like the previous one, it offers a unique combination of historical charm and modern conveniences. The rooms are comfortable and elegant. The staff is polite and friendly. The hotel offers a delicious and varied breakfast. Some downsides include possible street noise and the parking fee, which might seem high. However, the hotel offers a high level of comfort and convenient access to all attractions.

Albergo San Martino

- Address: Via della Dogana, 9, 55100 Lucca
- Tel: +39 0583 469181
- Free Wi-Fi, breakfast included, bar, non-smoking rooms, air conditioning, laundry services, parking (for a fee), bicycle rental

A small boutique hotel located in a historic building. It offers cosy and beautifully decorated rooms. The hotel is just a few steps from the San Martino Cathedral and other major attractions of Lucca. The staff is polite and friendly. The breakfast is tasty. Some downsides include possible street noise and the high parking fee. However, the hotel's advantages outweigh these minor inconveniences.

HIGH-RANGE HOTELS

Grand Universe Lucca, Autograph Collection

- Address: Piazza Del Giglio, Piazza Napoleone, 1, 55100 Lucca
- Tel: +39 0583 40041
- Free Wi-Fi, breakfast, restaurant and bar, non-smoking rooms, air conditioning, fitness centre, laundry services, airport shuttle (for an additional charge), parking (for an additional charge), concierge services, bicycle rental

This hotel is in a building that is part of Lucca's architectural heritage. Originally built as a palace for the Giglio family in the 13th century, it has been extensively renovated over time. In the mid-19th century, the building housed the Teatro Nobile. At the beginning of the 20th century, it was converted into a hotel. In recent years, the building has been carefully restored and updated to preserve its historic charm while adapting it to modern comfort standards. In 2020, the hotel became part of the Marriott Autograph Collection and was renamed Grand Universe Lucca. The restoration has preserved many original architectural elements, such as frescoes, antique staircases, and marble floors. The hotel staff is professional and provides a high level of service. The spacious and elegant rooms and terrace offer views of the city. One downside is potential parking difficulties.

Palazzo Dipinto

- Address: Piazza del Palazzo Dipinto 27, 55100 Lucca
- Tel: +39 0583 582873
- Free Wi-Fi, breakfast included, bar and lounge area, non-smoking rooms, air conditioning, laundry services, airport shuttle (for an additional charge), parking (for an additional charge), bicycle rental

This hotel is in a carefully restored historic building in the centre of Lucca. The rooms are comfortable and decorated in a distinctive style. The interiors combine history with modern design. The staff provides high-level service. A delicious breakfast is included in the room price. You can also rent a bicycle free of charge, thereby exploring the city more comfortably.

San Luca Palace

- Address: Via San Paolino, 103 Lucca (LU) - Toscana 55100
- Tel: +39 0583 317446

- Free Wi-Fi, breakfast included (or available for an additional charge), restaurant and bar, non-smoking rooms, air conditioning, fitness centre, laundry services, conference rooms, airport shuttle (for an additional charge), parking (for an additional charge), concierge services

San Luca Palace Hotel is in a historic building that has been carefully restored to preserve many original architectural elements. The hotel offers elegant rooms and a high level of service, as well as a convenient location in the city centre. Breakfast is included (or available for an additional charge), and the hotel provides various amenities, including a fitness centre and conference rooms.

WHERE TO EAT IN LUCCA

STREET FOOD AND INEXPENSIVE CAFES:

Pan di Strada

- Address: Corso Garibaldi 34 Vicino Porta S. Pietro, 55100, Lucca
- Tel: +39 0583 391240

Pan di Strada is a good choice for those who want to enjoy traditional Italian cuisine in a cosy and casual atmosphere. The establishment offers a varied menu with popular Italian dishes, and the quality of its food and service is a pleasant surprise. It is an ideal spot for lunch or dinner, although it can be quite busy during peak times, which might result in slower service.

In Pasta - Cibo e Convivio

- Address: Corso Giuseppe Garibaldi 50, 55100, Lucca
- Tel: +39 0583 082966

In Pasta - Cibo e Convivio offers delicious, fresh Italian dishes with a focus on pasta. The restaurant has a cosy atmosphere and friendly service. It can be a bit noisy during peak times, and there might be a wait for service.

Da Ciacco

- Address: Piazza Napoleone 10, 55100, Lucca
- Tel: +39 0583 570444

Da Ciacco is a great place for those who want to enjoy quality wines and tasty snacks. The wine bar offers a good selection of wines and a pleasant atmosphere for tasting and socialising. Reviews highlight the high quality of the wine and snacks, although the restaurant can be crowded during peak hours, and service might be slow. Overall, it is a great place for wine lovers and those wanting to spend an evening in a cosy setting.

MID-RANGE RESTAURANTS

Osteria Da Pasquale

- Address: Via del Moro 8, 55100, Lucca
- Tel: +39 0583 496506

Osteria Da Pasquale offers traditional Italian cuisine, focusing on fresh and seasonal ingredients. The establishment has a cosy atmosphere and attentive service. The friendly staff is ready to assist with selecting dishes. The restaurant features a wide range of Tuscan wines and non-alcoholic beverages.

Trattoria L'Angolo Tondo

- Address: Piazza Dell' Anfiteatro 51, 55100, Lucca
- Tel: + 39 0583 989892

This establishment is unique in that its menu changes several times a year. Only local, fresh products are used in the cooking. The staff is friendly and professional, and the service is excellent.

Osteria da Rosolo

- Address: Corte Campana 3, 55100, Lucca
- Tel: +39 0583 312037

Osteria da Rosolo offers traditional Italian dishes, including pasta, meat and fish dishes, appetizers, and desserts made from fresh local ingredients. There is a wide selection of local wines, coffee, and soft drinks. The establishment has a cosy and welcoming atmosphere, making it popular with both locals and tourists.

HIGH-RANGE RESTAURANTS

L'Imbuto

- Address: Piazza del Collegio, 7, 55100, Lucca Italy
- Tel: +39 331 930 8931

I think the best description of this establishment comes from the Michelin Guide:

"One of the most talked about and controversial chefs in Italy, thanks to his creative dishes and original combinations, Tomei has made his home in the former stables of the 17th-century Pfanner palazzo-museum. Here, guests choose the number of courses they want, let the chef know if they have any allergies, and then sit back and enjoy whatever surprising dishes he creates for them."

All'Olivo

- Address: Via Arancio, 38, 55100, Lucca
- Tel: +39 335 756 0488

Another restaurant that has received attention from the Michelin guide:

"Situated in one of the typical squares of Lucca's beautiful historic centre, this restaurant boasts four dining rooms – the central room is adorned with shelves of wine bottles, while the others are decorated with drawings by authors who have visited the legendary Lucca Comics

festival. The cuisine is regional, with fish and meat dishes featuring on the menu, plus there's an attractive outdoor space for summer dining."

Enjoy!

MUSEUMS OF LUCCA

Museum and Archaeological Complex of the Cathedral of Lucca

Address: Piazza Antelminelli 55100 Lucca
Tel: +39 0583 490530
Fax: 0583 919175
Mail: info@museocattedralelucca.it

Tickets:
Combined Ticket:
Archaeological Area Cathedral + Belltower + Museum + Church of Saints Giovanni and Reparata with Baptistery
Adults: €10.00
Reduced price: €7.00 (groups of 10+ and students aged 6 to 25)
Family ticket: €20.00 (parents with children more than 6 years old)
Pilgrims with pilgrim passport and residents of Lucca: €5.00
Free: Children under 6 years old; disabled people and accompanying person; tour guides; military personnel; individual priests and men and women religious

Cathedral and Ilaria del Carretto
Ticket: €3.00
Free: Children under 6 years old; disabled people and accompanying person; tour guides; military personnel; residents of Lucca; individual priests and men and women religious; pilgrims with pilgrim passport

Cathedral Belltower
Ticket: €3.00
Free: Children under 6 years old; disabled people and accompanying person; tour guides; military personnel; individual priests and men and women religious

Cathedral Museum

Ticket: €4.00
Free: Children under 6 years old; disabled people and accompanying person; tour guides; military personnel; individual priests and men and women religious

Church of Saints Giovanni and Reparata
Church + Archaeological Area + Baptistery + Saint Giovanni Belltower
Ticket: €4.00
Free: children under 6 years old; disabled people and accompanying person; tour guides; Military personnel; individual priests, men and women religious

All major credit cards are accepted.

Palazzo Ducale di Lucca

Address: Cortile Carrara, 55100 Lucca
Tel: +39 0583 4171

Museo del Risorgimento

Address: Cortile degli Svizzeri, 18, 55100 Lucca
Tel: +39 0583 417894
Price: Free

Barsanti and Matteucci Museum

Address: Via Sant'Andrea, 58, 55100 Lucca
Tel: +39 0583 467870
Price: €3.00
Children under 12 years old: Free

Paolo Cresci Museum for the History of Italian Emigration

Address: Cortile Carrara, 1 Palazzo Ducale 55100 Lucca LU
Tel: +39 0583 417483
Price: Free

Birthplace of Maestro Giacomo Puccini

Tel: +39 0583 584028
Price:
Full: €9.00
Reduced: €7.00 (children under 18 and those over 65, students up to age 26, residents of the Municipality of Lucca, disabled people, ICOM members, institutions, organizations, and affiliated associations)
Free: Children up to 10 years (excluding schools), accompanying persons for disabled visitors, journalists, tourist guides
Families: €13.00 (two adults + a minor between 11 and 17 years, for each other minor €3.00)
Groups: €5.00 per person (min 10 / max 25 people, one free guide for every 10 paying guests)
Schools: €3.00 per student (min 10 / max 25 people, one free chaperone for every 10 paying students)
Guided tours by reservation (mandatory for groups and schools):
€50.00 / €70.00 in addition to the ticket price
€50.00 in addition to the ticket price (from 1 to max 9 people)
Duration of the visit: about 45 minutes
€70.00 in addition to the ticket price (from 10 to max 25 people)
Duration of the visit: approximately 1 hour
€4.00 including the ticket price for student groups and schools
Duration of the visit: approximately 1 hour

Clock Tower (Torre delle Ore)

Address: Via Fillungo 24, 55100 Lucca LU
Tel: +39 0583 48090
Price: €8.00

Guinigi Tower

Address: Via Guinigi 29, 55100 Lucca LU
Tel: +39 0583 48090
Prices: €8.00

San Frediano Basilica (Basilica di San Frediano)

Address: Piazza S. Frediano, 55100 Lucca LU
Tel: +39 3498 440290
Price:
White ticket: Free. Reserved for disabled people and their companion, children up to 11 years old, and residents of the Province of Lucca
Bordeaux ticket: €2.00. Reduced price. Reserved for students and groups of more than 15 people
Green Ticket: €3.00. Full price
Basilica + Bell Tower Full Price: €7.00
Basilica + Bell Tower Reduced Price: €4.00
Bell Tower Residents of the Province of Lucca: €4.00

Palazzo Pfanner Art Museum

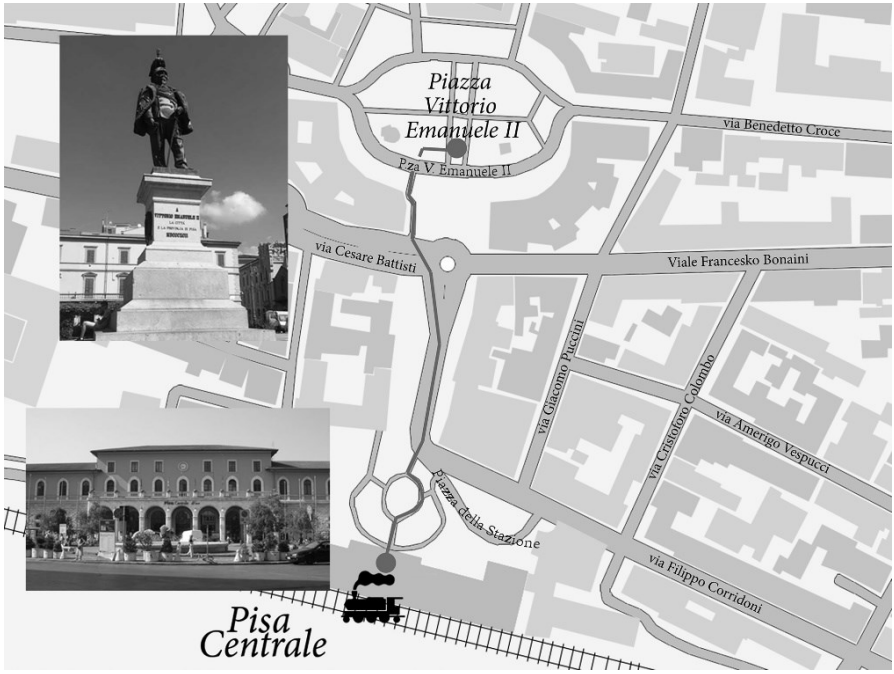
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THE CANDID PISA

Yes, the Leaning Tower of Pisa will come, but not right now. Running straight to Piazza del Duomo upon arriving in Pisa is like losing your queen at the very start of a chess game: Of course, the game will continue and, depending on your skill, it might even become exciting and successful for you, but why create difficulties for yourself? And it's not that the Leaning Tower, the cathedral, and the Baptistery of Saint John (the classic triad of Tuscan city landmarks, as you've already noticed) overshadow all the other sights of this city. It's simply that good wine should not be consumed in one gulp, and certainly not from the neck of the bottle. That is why we will start our exploration

of Pisa from the other side of the Arno River – the very side on which you find yourself when you step off the train at "Pisa Centrale" station.



Here you are, standing in Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II, in front of the monument to the first King of unified Italy, whose hat, as the people of Pisa believe, was purposely adorned with such a long feather as to somehow complement the nearly perfect circumference of His Majesty's body. You wonder: "What revelations await me in Pisa?" (apart from the obvious fact that the Leaning Tower does not fall, of course). Allow me to offer you this:

Ah! Pisa, thou opprobrium of the people
Of the fair land there where the 'Si' doth sound,
Since slow to punish thee thy neighbours are,
Let the Capraia and Gorgona move,
And make a hedge across the mouth of Arno
That every person in thee it may drown!

Dante, Inferno: Canto 33, lines 79-84. Translation by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1867.



Quite the surprise, isn't it? Why did Dante have such a grudge against the people of Pisa? If we look at the history of this city, we will not find anything that seems, on the surface, particularly reprehensible, at least from the perspective of medieval and Renaissance morality. Founded as a naval base of Rome as early as the 3rd century BC, Pisa was, by the 7th century AD, in possession of a strong fleet and had assisted Pope Gregory I in his struggle against the Byzantine Empire, which controlled several large colonies in Italy. From the 9th century, Pisa was considered the leading trading port on the Italian coast of the Tyrrhenian Seal; all commerce connected with Corsica, Sardinia, and French Provence passed through it in one way or another. This situation helped shape the future structure of the Pisan Republic: In a city that lived solely on maritime trade, there was little room for craftsmen, unlike in inland Florence. As a result, by the beginning of the 11th century, the patrician families of Pisa, increasingly involved in the lucrative shipping business, had formed a solid class of urban aristocracy. When the Arabs, who had been wreaking havoc in the Mediterranean since the 7th century and regularly plundering and conquering port cities, islands, and entire regions of present-day Italy, began troubling Pisa, the Pisans did not hesitate. In response to the devastating Arab raids on the city in 1004 and 1011, the Pisans allied with the Genoese and, in 1016 to 1017, destroyed an Arab pirate base on the island of Sardinia. In 1035, the



Emperor Henry IV, whose conflict with the Pope began the struggle for investiture

Pisan fleet defeated the Muslims off the coast of North Africa and took Carthage. Thus, the foundation was laid for the future power of the Pisan maritime state, which for some time controlled all trade in the Mediterranean west of the Apennine Peninsula.

Thanks to the Pisans, in 1063, Sicily was completely freed of the Arabs. Shortly thereafter, Pope Urban II confirmed Pisa's authority over the islands of Sardinia and Corsica. By that time, the city had all the classic governing bodies known to us: the Council of Elders, which included representatives of patrician families, the consuls elected by them (as formal leaders of the republic), and, of course, the outsider podestà (as the supreme arbiter and guarantor of the protection of supreme authority in the city from being usurped by any clan). All this became possible because, in the ongoing Investiture Controversy (the well-known conflict between the pope and the Holy Roman Emperor), Pisa supported the emperor and, in return, received the right to self-govern within the Tuscan marquisate. Taking advantage of this, Pisa pursued its own policy during the Crusades: In 1098 to 1099, the city outfitted 120 ships to transport the Crusaders from Europe to the Holy Land and, throughout the campaign, supplied European knights with provisions and weapons. In payment for its services, the Pisan Republic received the unique right to trade with the states founded by the Crusaders: the Kingdom of Jerusalem, the Principality of Antioch, and others. Thus, Pisa established colonies in Jaffa, Tripoli, Ascalon, and Tyre (modern-day Israel and Lebanon).



Ugolino della Gherardesca. Portrait from the book «Frammenti di fisiognomica» of J. K.

Moreover, after the First Crusade, Pisan merchants rebuilt almost the entire city of Jaffa.

Another turning point in Pisa's development and the accumulation of wealth came with the fall of the Canossa family. (As we recall from our journey to Florence, this dynasty ruled Tuscany in the 10th to 12th centuries.) After the death of the last Margravine of Tuscany from this line (Matilda the Great), who bequeathed all her possessions to the Catholic Church, the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa generously rewarded the loyal Ghibelline city: Pisa received ownership of the entire Tuscan coastline up to the city of Civitavecchia, half of Palermo, half of Naples, Messina, and Salerno. Furthermore, it received a trading street in each major city of the Kingdom of Sicily. Thanks to these gifts, the Pisan Republic could completely monopolize trade in the Tyrrhenian Sea and compete on equal terms with the already rising Venice, "lord of the Mediterranean." Yet, despite some disagreements and even military conflicts, these two republics ultimately united against a common enemy: the ever-growing power of Genoa.

Gradually, contradictions arose within the Pisan Republic itself. (After all, the city's history cannot consist solely of victories and territorial acquisitions, can it?) By the early 13th century, when the struggle between the Guelphs (supporters of the pope) and the Ghibellines (supporters of the Holy Roman Emperor) intensified, the ruling class of Pisa also split. It is worth noting that Pisa was the only city in Tuscany that had firmly stood by the emperor until that point, while its neighbours

– Lucca, Genoa, and Florence – had long since sided with the Papacy. Here, perhaps, we are getting closer to the answer to the question of why the great Dante Alighieri, in his "Divine Comedy," calls for the waters of the Arno to drown Pisa along with all its inhabitants. As we remember, the patriarch of Italian literature was exiled from his native and beloved Florence because he belonged to the Guelph faction: supporters of the pope. When the contradictions between the Pisan aristocratic Ghibellines and their Guelph rivals became insurmountable (in the 1270s), a certain figure named Ugolino della Gherardesca, a representative of one of the oldest Italian families, already influential in Tuscany, emerged on the historical stage and, from the outset of the conflict between the popes and the emperors, took the side of the latter. Despite this, Ugolino changed his political orientation fairly early. Having been appointed governor of the island of Sardinia, part of the Pisan Republic, he married off his sister to the local nobleman and regional leader Giovanni Visconti. (This Visconti family should not be confused with the one that ruled Milan: Their familial connection was never proven.) The Pisan Visconti belonged to the initially small but by then quite significant faction of the Guelphs, and, apparently for pragmatic reasons, Ugolino della Gherardesca himself became a supporter of the supremacy of the Papal spiritual authority over the secular power of the emperor. Thus, after the wars with Genoa over control of Sardinia, in which Ugolino distinguished himself as a brave and skilled military leader, and after his return to Pisa, he led several large uprisings of Guelph aristocrats against the emperor's representative: the podestà. These uprisings, however, were unsuccessful; Ugolino was imprisoned, and his brother-in-law Giovanni Visconti was expelled from Pisa and died a year later. After Visconti’s death, Ugolino della Gherardesca was also exiled from the city, but he was not so easily defeated. Securing the support of the podestà of Florence, Charles of Anjou (who was also King of Sicily and one of the most devoted supporters of the pope), Ugolino gathered an army and besieged Pisa. After the city surrendered, he forced its government to officially pardon all Pisan Guelphs. Following this dramatic return, della Gherardesca was appointed commander of the Pisan Republic’s fleet and was perhaps responsible for the crushing defeat that Genoa inflicted on

this same fleet during yet another conflict between Genoa and Pisa for control of the Tyrrhenian Sea. On August 4, 1284, in the naval battle of Meloria, the Pisan fleet, commanded by della Gherardesca, was destroyed: Seven ships were sunk and 28 captured. Eleven thousand Pisans, including the ruler of the republic, the podestà, were taken prisoner by the Genoese. This defeat is considered the greatest in the history of the city, and it marks the beginning of the decline of the Pisan Republic, which ended in 1399 with the sale of impoverished Pisa to the Duke of Milan for 200,000 florins. However, that would come later; for now, after the Genoese defeat of the Pisan fleet, Ugolino della Gherardesca, having abandoned his fleet, returned to Pisa. Taking advantage of the general confusion (or panic) in the city, he seized power. (In connection with this fact, many contemporaries believed that della Gherardesca intentionally led the republic's fleet to defeat in order to facilitate his path to power over Pisa, eliminating the podestà and disposing of most of the army.) Thus, in 1284, Ugolino della Gherardesca became the new podestà of Pisa. Two years later, he also took the position of Captain of the People – an arbitrator between the middle and upper classes of the republic, with the power to control the actions of the podestà and represent the interests of the bourgeoisie, in contrast to the ruling patriciate. The de facto dictator of Pisa shared the latter post with his nephew, Ugolino "Nino" Visconti. Immediately after his usurpation of power, della Gherardesca entered into peace negotiations with Genoa and neighbouring Lucca, which was preparing an invasion of Pisa. The new ruler of the republic did not hesitate to concede the most important Pisan fortresses – Asciano, Avane, Ripafratta, and Viareggio – to Lucca, and this step undoubtedly helped, albeit briefly, to reconcile Guelph Lucca with the intrinsically Ghibelline Pisa. At the same time, Genoa offered to exchange all the Pisan soldiers it had captured for the fortress of Cagliari, which was under Pisan control. To the great indignation of the Pisans, della Gherardesca refused this proposal. The reason was that among the prisoners whom Geneo had captured were many prominent Pisan Ghibellines who, if given the opportunity to return home, would have instantly raised an armed uprising against della Gherardesca and his nephew. Therefore, the

shrewd usurper allowed Genoa to rid itself of its prisoners and kept the fortress of Cagliari for himself.

As John Dalberg-Acton said, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Ugolino della Gherardesca, having felt the full extent of the power he had gained over the republic, soon decided to rid himself of his co-ruler, Nino Visconti. As a result of intrigues, della Gherardesca won over the members of the old Ghibelline nobility from the Gualandi, Sismondi, and Lanfranchi families. In alliance with them, he forced his nephew to renounce his position and leave Pisa. Meanwhile, the city began to suffer from rising food prices, which threatened the Pisans with a real famine: The lower classes could barely afford a loaf of bread. Paying little attention to these insignificant problems, Ugolino della Gherardesca, who had proclaimed himself the lord of Pisa, continued to eliminate those members of the city's aristocracy who, in his view, threatened his power. The next victims were the members of the degli Scornigiani family, connected by kinship



Dante and Virgil in Hell meet Ugolino della Gherardesca. Unknown author, mid-19th century

to the Pisan bishop Ruggieri degli Ubaldini. The bishop's response was swift: He won over the Gualandi, Sismondi, and Lanfranchi families and staged a coup, during which the self-proclaimed lord of Pisa, Ugolino della Gherardesca, was arrested and, after a public trial in which he was found guilty of treason, imprisoned in the Tower of the Muda, once located in the centre of Pisa, along with his two nephews and two grandsons. Bishop Ruggieri degli Ubaldini threw the keys to the tower into the Arno River. Thus, he condemned della Gherardesca and his clan to a long and torturous death, which, after several weeks, was announced by the most famous of the bells of the Leaning Tower of Pisa: Pasquareccia.



Knights, soldiers, archers and foot soldiers of the Republic of Genoa, 1300-1339. The knights in the centre are dressed in the heraldic colours of Admiral Benedetto I Zaccaria.

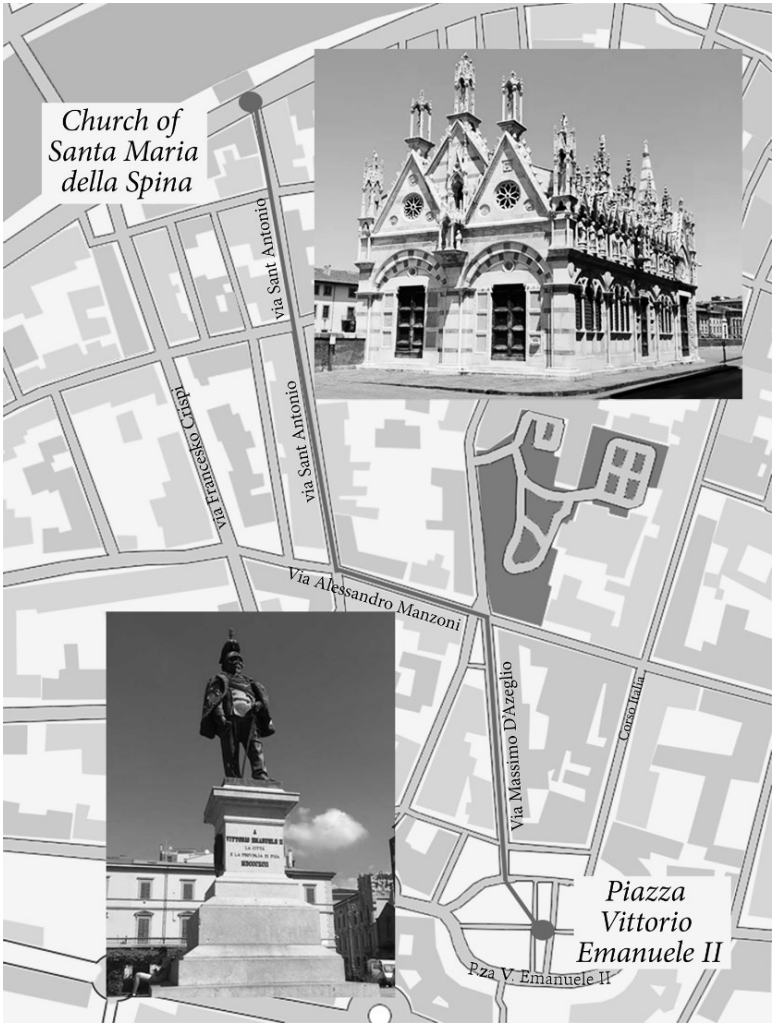
When Dante Alighieri, together with his timeless friend Virgil, descended into Hell, on the ninth circle, where all the traitors and betrayers of mankind are frozen in ice up to their necks and condemned to eternal suffering, he encountered Ugolino della Gherardesca. The former ruler of Pisa "covers" his former accomplice in the betrayal of his country, and later his bitter enemy, Bishop Ruggieri degli Ubaldini, with

his cap, and sinks his teeth into his head, tearing off pieces of flesh from the place "where the brain connects with the neck." Here, it should be noted that the bishop appears to us as a greater criminal than the usurper and tyrant della Gherardesca, for it was with the silent consent of degli Ubaldini that the former fleet commander seized power in Pisa. (Thus, the bishop became no less of a traitor to the state than della Gherardesca.) Later, degli Ubaldini betrayed Ugolino and condemned him to a painful death by walling him up in the tower, thus making the bishop a double traitor.

In his text, Dante also hints that, while in prison in the Tower of the Muda, Ugolino della Gherardesca likely ate his grandsons and nephews. This widespread legend, reflected – among other things – in a sculpture by Auguste Rodin displayed in the Orsay Museum in Paris, was disproved at the beginning of this century. At that time, paleoanthropologist Francesco Mallegni investigated the remains of Ugolino della Gherardesca and his grandsons by exhuming them from the tomb of the still-existing family. According to the results of the study, Ugolino’s bones contained almost no zinc, which indicated the absence of meat in his diet in the months before his death. Moreover, traces of blows on the skulls of the prisoners of the Tower of the Muda showed that Ugolino, his nephews, and his grandsons did not die from hunger. Rather, they were killed, although they were already in an extreme state of exhaustion.

Thus ended one of the most striking chapters in the history of Pisa, immortalised forever in Dante Alighieri's "Divine Comedy." Although the waters of the Arno did not drown all the inhabitants of Pisa, the city found another path to redemption.

CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA DELLA SPINA



Here we are, in this city filled with the ashes of extinguished passions. Before us stands a true masterpiece of Pisan Gothic architecture, respectfully bordered by an almost invisible asphalt road – a reminder of how much time has passed since this church first opened its doors to worshippers. Its patrons were members of the Gualandi family, already known to us as participants in the bloody scenes of Pisa's medieval history. When it

was first consecrated in 1230, the so-called “New Bridge” stood nearby and gave the church its original name: Santa Maria di Pontenovo (Our Lady of the New Bridge). However, in the 15th century, the bridge collapsed, though the thorn, said to have been taken from Christ’s Crown of Thorns and kept in the church since 1333, remained. This relic, one of Pisa’s most revered, eventually gave the church its new name: Santa Maria della Spina (“Spina” meaning “thorn” in Italian).



Its ornate exterior is the result of nearly half a century of work by marble craftsmen, chief among them Lupo di Francesco, whose hand also contributed to the comparatively restrained interior of the church. His works include the sculptures of the Madonna and Child, Saint Peter, and John the Baptist located in the altar area.

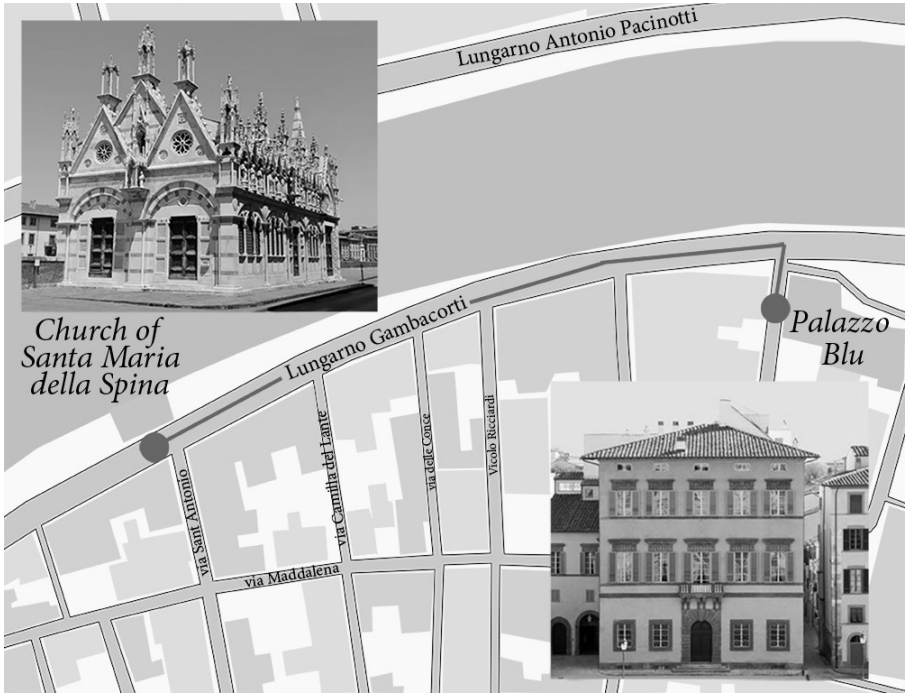
Due to its location on the bank of the Arno River, the church often required fortifications and restorations. The most extensive of these took place after the unification of Italy, in 1871, when the authorities of Pisa decided to eliminate Santa Maria della Spina’s tendency to “slip” into the Arno. They dismantled it, raised and reinforced its foundation, and then reassembled the church in a higher, more secure location. Such significant intervention, of course, left its mark: Many sculptures and

decorative details from the church's exterior were destroyed and replaced with copies, while some, for better preservation, were moved to the San Matteo Museum of Sculpture and Painting, where they remain to this day.

Following another restoration in 2015 to 2016, the church now serves as an exhibition hall where contemporary art exhibitions are occasionally held. (Some of the exhibitions can seem rather primitive, especially against the backdrop of Santa Maria della Spina's lavish Gothic décor.) This fact speaks volumes about the crisis of faith that confronts not only the Protestant congregations of Northern Europe but also Mater Ecclesia itself: the Roman Catholic Church.

Ah, yes. The thorn from the Crown of Thorns is, of course, no longer kept in this church. During the extensive restorations of the 1870s, the relic was relocated to the Church of Santa Chiara, just a few steps from Pisa's famous Piazza del Duomo.

PALAZZO BLU AND THE CHURCH OF SANTA CRISTINA



Following the picturesque Lungarno Gambacorti promenade against the flow of traffic, you will soon spot on your right a bright blue, almost sky-coloured, three-storey palazzo (weather permitting, of course). Its current name speaks for itself: Palazzo Blu. However, its former name is less self-evident: Palazzo Giuli Rosselmini Gualandi. As one might guess, this name reflects (albeit somewhat imprecisely) the history of the building's ownership by successive members of the Giuli, Rosselmini, and Gualandi families. Besides these families, the "Blue Palazzo" also belonged to Pisa's wealthy Sancasciani family, during whose tenure in the 16th century the medieval building took on its current shape. Later, under the Del Testa family, it acquired features resembling its present façade.

The palazzo's striking colour dates back to the 18th century under circumstances that remain unclear. What is known is that during this

period, the building was owned by the Agostini family, which rented it out to Cesare Studiati, an Italian architect working in Russia. This connection, it seems, might explain the choice of the palazzo's colour: Sky blue was very common in Russian Baroque, a style created by Italian architects such as Bartolomeo Rastrelli the Younger, Giuseppe Valeriani, Antonio Peresinotti, and Francesco Fontebasso. Among the most notable examples of this Italian style in the former Russian Empire are the Winter Palace in Saint Petersburg, the Mariinsky Palace and Saint Andrew's Church in Kiev, and the Grand Catherine Palace in Peterhof. All these architectural masterpieces feature, among other things, blue façades, which makes the theory of a "Russian influence" on the Blue Palazzo in Pisa quite plausible.



It is worth noting, however, that the connection between Palazzo Giuli Rosselmini Gualandi and the landmarks of Kiev and Saint Petersburg is not limited to the façade colour. In 1774, this very building hosted "Princess Elizaveta Alekseyevna," a highly intriguing and enigmatic figure. This young woman of still-undetermined origins passed herself



Princess Tarakanoff» by Konstantin Flavitsky, 1862.

off as the "secret daughter" of Russian Empress Elizabeth I and her "secret husband," Count Alexei Razumovsky. In reality, of course, Elizabeth I was never married and had no children.

The interest in her personality among European high society arose primarily due to her extraordinary qualities. An exceptionally beautiful, dark-skinned brunette (which probably revealed her Italian or Southern French origins), “Elisabeth Alexeyevna” was fluent in French, English, Italian, and German, was well-versed in matters of etiquette, possessed letter-writing skills, and played the harp beautifully. This impressive set of qualities contradicted the assumptions of Russian agents in Italy, who had studied the identity of the impostor "princess" and thought she came from "the family of a Nuremberg baker" or "a Prague innkeeper." However, there is no doubt that this cunning adventurer had no political goals; her only wish was to enrich herself through influential admirers (among whom, in time, were the wealthiest Polish magnate Prince Karl Stanislaus Radziwill and Count Alexei Orlov). Incidentally, Orlov organised the kidnapping of "Princess Elisabeth" and her transportation to Russia on the orders of Empress Catherine II, who feared that the Italian impostor would lay claim to the Russian throne and could attract influential people to her cause. This abduction occurred shortly after the "princess" left the “Blue Palace” in Pisa and went to Livorno. Count Orlov tricked her onto his ship and arrested her there to avoid protest from the government and citizens of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, who believed the young woman was of royal descent and treated her accordingly. The unfortunate adventurer’s fate was grim: For several months, she was kept in horrendous



Presumed lifetime portrait of Princess Tarakanoff. Marble bas-relief from the collection of Grand Duke Nikolai Mikhailovich.

conditions in a dungeon, where she developed tuberculosis. "Princess Elisabeth" died on December 4, 1775, without revealing the truth about her origins to any of the royal officers who interrogated her.

The mansion itself was used several more times by members of Russian missions as their residence when the Russian Imperial Fleet was based in Livorno (during the wars between Russia and the Ottoman Empire). From the end of the 18th century, the palace changed owners many times until, in 1861, the Giuli family bought it. The family carried out extensive restoration work on the palace, giving it its final shape and making it their main residence until 2001. At that time, it was transferred to the municipality of Pisa to be turned into an art museum.

Today, in the halls of the "Blue Palace," one can see masterpieces by painters such as Benozzo Gozzoli, Orazio Gentileschi, Cecco di Pietro, Taddeo di Bartolo, and many others. Additionally, the museum is home to an extensive collection of coins, engravings, woodcuts, and lithographs. You can find the hours of operation and book tickets on Palazzo Blu's official website.

On the left side of the Blue Palace is another remarkable building: the ancient Church of Saint Christina, which, until 1028, was dedicated to Saint Bartholomew. However, the current building contains few reminders of that ancient church. In 1115, it was destroyed by flooding; three years later, it was restored. Its current peculiar appearance,

combined with the house of the parish priest, was only achieved in 1816. For Catholics, this church is important because it was here, according to tradition, that Saint Catherine of Siena prayed before the Crucifix on April 1, 1375, at the very moment when three rays of light, in the form of crosses, pierced her hands and heart, leaving stigmata on her body. In memory of this miraculous event, the portal of the Church of Saint Christina was crowned with an inscription: “S. Catharina virgo senensis hic recepit stigmata Christi.” In addition, to the right of the main altar was a painting by the famous Italian mannerist Domenico Cresti, better known as Passignano. The crucifix before which Saint Catherine prayed was moved to her birthplace of Siena, where it remains to this day in the church dedicated to her, located in the house where she was born.

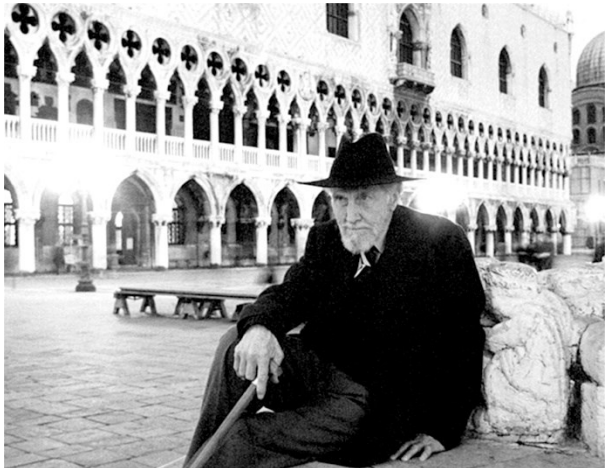
PONTE DI MEZZO



"What thou lovest well remains,
The rest is dross.
What thou lov'st well shall not be reft from thee
What thou lov'st well is thy true heritage."

Ezra Pound. "Pisan Cantos" (Canto LXXXI)

Poet Ezra Pound wrote these lines while in a prisoner-of-war camp in Pisa, where the American occupation authorities had placed him due to his active collaboration with Benito Mussolini's fascist regime. (While living in fascist Italy from 1941 to 1945, he hosted a multilingual radio programme in which he vehemently propagated anti-Semitic and eugenic ideas.) "Pretentious nonsense from



Ezra Pound in Venice, 1963.

a consummate swindler," as American writer of Russian descent Vladimir Nabokov described the "Cantos," which, nevertheless, became one of the most vivid memories of Pisa's experience of war. For these poems, Pound was nominated 13 times for the Nobel Prize in Literature, but he never won it. After his extradition from Italy in 1948, a court declared Pound mentally ill, and he spent 10 years in Saint Elizabeth's psychiatric hospital in Washington, D.C. After his release, he returned to Italy, where he settled in the Tyrolean castle of Brunnenburg, owned by his daughter (Mary de Rachewiltz, approaching 100 years old as of the date of this writing). Upon arriving in Naples, he greeted the Italian shores with a fascist salute and, in the Tyrolean mountains, sought refuge from the world he despised. In his later years, Pound became extremely reclusive, even with those closest to him, and spoke of his work as "useless and meaningless." Eventually, he, along with his long-time lover and unofficial second wife, pianist Olga Rudge, settled in Venice. In 1966, he once again found himself in a psychiatric hospital, exhausted, suffering from insomnia, in deep depression, and with a suspected bipolar disorder. Six years later, in 1972, Pound passed away at the age of 88, having never completed his "Cantos."

The madness that afflicted the mind and soul of this American poet, who adored Mussolini and Hitler, was well known to his contemporaries. A great many of them suffered from the same affliction. However, unlike the author of the "Cantos," these people knew how to pretend to be sane. I would not be mistaken in saying that throughout its history as a civilisation, humanity has been afflicted by chronic tuberculosis, intermittently choking it with terrible fits of bloody coughing. It is foolish to think that this affliction left us after the two world wars. No



Ponte di Mezzo in the 19th century. Photo by Enrico van Lint

disease in the world simply vanishes because the patient stops paying attention to it. Pisa, with its bridges, squares, embankments, and palaces, knows this better than any other city in Tuscany.

Up until the 12th century, Pisa had only one bridge. It spanned the Arno River at the very spot where the Palazzo Blu and the Church of Santa Cristina now stand. This bridge had likely existed since the time of ancient Rome and, until the 1030s, was made entirely of wood. This caused some inconvenience, as the Arno River often caused severe floods in Pisa. However, even after the bridge was made of stone, the river continued its attempts to break free from its restraints, and the bridge had to be repeatedly repaired and restored. For instance, in 1388, its restoration was paid for by the Pisan patrician Pietro Gambacorti, who governed the republic from 1369 to 1392. Because his Gothic palace, which now houses the municipality of Pisa, stands at the corner of Lungarno Gambacorti and Via degli Uffizi (easily recognizable by its distinctive windows), restoring the bridge became very personal for Gambacorti. After the restoration, the bridge, which at some point became known to Pisans as the "Old Bridge," stood for three centuries, though it ultimately collapsed in 1635 under the force of nature. Not until 30 years later, after a series of scandals surrounding the appointment of the chief engineer for the new bridge's construction, was a new three-arched crossing was built over the Arno. Its entrances were adorned with four marble spheres, and its arch supports were fitted with special icebreakers. This bridge served Pisa for nearly another three centuries. In 1912, the city’s first trams began to run across it, and it witnessed the end and revival of the ancient Pisan tradition of the "Gioco

del Ponte" (which we will discuss shortly), as well as the rise and fall of Mussolini's regime. On July 22, 1944, the retreating German forces blew it up, along with all the other medieval bridges of Pisa.

Thus, for Italy, the Second World War ended. Immediately after it, another war began – one without explosions, murders, airplanes, and tanks, without bloodshed and concentration camps, but with its own tribunals, verdicts, judges, and, of course, "our good ones" and "bad foreigners." This war has been fought and continues to be fought to this day, unnoticed by most people, yet its consequences are catastrophic and affect everyone to some extent. "...A new element for pure architectural values, without any concession to that 'false' structure of the work, which was so misused by the loud names of 1920s architecture and their pitiful provincial followers – is combined with the spirit of the surrounding environment," wrote the Italian art historian and anti-fascist partisan Franco Russoli in 1946 about the new Ponte di Mezzo. Indeed, the new bridge across the Arno, like all the others built in place of the medieval bridges that the retreating Nazis destroyed, turned out to be prosaic, unremarkable, and somewhat faceless. It was these qualities, representing a kind of protest against everything "that was before" and now considered "bad taste" and "excess," that young art historians like Russoli began to promote. It cannot be said that the old bridge that stood here until July 22, 1944, was a masterpiece of architecture and engineering: three arches, four spheres, and four icebreakers. It seemed it could not get any simpler, but even in comparison to it, the Ponte di Mezzo ("Middle Bridge") appears unfinished. Despite this, the bridge we are currently on is the most beautiful of the existing bridges in Pisa because when the others were built, architects and engineers did not even consider decoration; they encased the Arno in concrete rings with something like reinforcement instead of railings. Of course, this was not new. The architecture of fascist Italy, just like that of Nazi Germany, developed from the modernism that gained popularity after the First World War, and although it incorporated some elements of classicism and empire style, it was crude and somewhat primitive (for example, the "Square Colosseum" in Rome or the House of German Art in Munich). What succeeded the totalitarian art of the 1920s to 1940s attempted to

bury all the styles that came before it. In some sense, this goal was achieved.

It is all the more amusing that on this very bridge, every year, on the last Saturday (and sometimes the last Sunday) of June, the "Games on the Bridge" or "Gioco del Ponte" festival takes place. This tradition began roughly at the same time as the establishment of the first Republic of Pisa



in the 11th century. The exact rules of the early version of these games have not survived, but it is known that citizens were divided into two teams and, armed with shields and clubs, clashed with one another at Piazza delle Sette Vie (now Piazza dei Cavalieri), not far from here. In its original form, this tradition lasted until 1406, when Florence conquered the Republic of Pisa. Since then, the "city games" have been repeatedly revived and banned, while venues, rules, and formats have been changed. The only constant was the participants' message: the sincere expression of Pisans' disagreement with and hatred of the Florentines who had conquered them. Strangely enough, these games,

with such a revolutionary undertone, once again became legal and permanent after Tuscany was proclaimed the Grand Duchy under the rule of the Florentine Medici family. Moreover, Grand Duke Cosimo I himself participated in the development of the new rules, replacing clubs and shields with wooden cudgels and spears with banners, thus symbolising each of the competing teams. Each team represented a district of Pisa; together, they were divided into "Northern" and "Southern" teams, depending on which side of the Arno River their district was located. Clashing on the ancient bridge, which stood at the site of the current Ponte di Mezzo, they engaged in a rather fierce battle, the goal of which was to push the opponent to their bank and capture the enemy's banner. The last games held under these rules took place in Pisa during the Napoleonic era, on February 6, 1807, in the presence of Maria Luisa de Bourbon, Queen Regent of Etruria. Witnessing this Pisan tradition for the first time, the tender ruler of the puppet kingdom declared, "For entertainment, it is too much, for war, it is too little" ("Per gioco è troppo, per guerra è poco"). She ordered that these games no longer be held.



This ban was observed for exactly 120 years until the fascists came to power in Italy. As previously mentioned in our discussion on architecture, they emphasised ancient national traditions. The 1927 "Games on the Bridge" consisted of a costume parade with an orchestra and banners, organised by a group of students from the University of Pisa during the freshman festival. This event caught the attention of the Pisan municipality and, through it, the government of the Kingdom of Italy. In 1935, the grand opening ceremony of the first "Games on the Bridge" under the updated rules took place in Pisa. It featured a procession of 709 participants in medieval costumes, a meeting on the Arno bridge, and the actual competition, in which each of the two teams, representing the northern (Tramontarna) and southern (Mezzogiorno) banks of the river (with about 300 people total), had to pull a seven-ton wooden cart, placed in the centre of the bridge, to the opposing side and knock over a pole with the opponent's banner. The Northern Team began its procession at Piazza dei Miracoli, also known as Piazza del Duomo – the famous square with the "leaning tower." The Southern Team approached the bridge from Piazza di San Paolo a Ripa d'Arno, where the church of the same name is located. The opening ceremony of the first official "Games on the Bridge" in 1935 was attended by many members of the Italian Royal Family, including King Vittorio Emanuele III, who was formally still head of state during Mussolini’s dictatorship. Since then, and to this day, the "Gioco del Ponte" has been held annually, attracting numerous spectators – both locals and tourists. In this quirky way, the echo of the 20th century resonates in this city.

P.S.
Pisa prepares for these games well in advance. If you plan to visit Tuscany at the end of June, you can find all the details about the festival's date on the official website of the municipality of Pisa.

CASINO DEI NOBILI AND PIAZZA GARIBALDI



The three-storey building, distinguished by its pink façade and abundant rustication, hides behind the broad, bronze back of the spirited Giuseppe Garibaldi, greeting us opposite the base of the bridge. A Major General of the Sardinian Kingdom's army, an admiral of the Republic of Rio Grande (which existed from 1836 to 1845 in what is now the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul),

an unyielding advocate for the unification of Italy, and, by nature, a committed republican, Garibaldi was rightly recognised as a national hero of this country. For this reason, most Italian cities contain squares and streets named after him.
However, during Garibaldi's lifetime, this square was known as Piazza di Ponte di Mezzo, which means "Square of the Middle Bridge." It was named after the iconic Pisan landmark we have just crossed. The square was renamed in honour of the greatest adversary of the King of the Two Sicilies after the unveiling of Garibaldi's monument here in 1892. The statue's pedestal is adorned with panels depicting the most memorable scenes from the commander's life, such as the famous wounding of Garibaldi in the leg at Aspromonte – an injury that nearly cost him his leg and turned him into a 19th-century rock star (an episode we discussed in detail in Florence, provided you have had a chance to visit the city with my guide to Dante's hometown).



As for the mansion hiding behind Garibaldi's back, it is perhaps the first bohemian club in Tuscany and possibly in all of Italy: the Casino dei Nobili. The building combines several earlier structures, including medieval ones, among which was a house belonging to monks from

Nicosia (now the capital of the Republic of Cyprus). By the mid-18th century, the aristocrats of Pisa had begun to contemplate the establishment of a social club designed for hosting events collectively funded by its members. Lavish private receptions befitting a noble's status were proving to be ruinously expensive for Pisan signori, while a club, as envisioned by its founders, would operate on the shared contributions of its members.

Thus, in 1754, a palazzo was "assembled" from properties purchased from the Nicosian monks. Soon, it became known as the "House of Nobles" or Casino dei Nobili. The membership requirements for this society were stringent: Foreign nobles (at that time, this could include aristocrats from the neighbouring Kingdom of Piedmont and Sardinia) aspiring to join had to bring an official representative to vouch for their noble lineage. Regardless of wealth, those without noble birth or a conferred title were barred from entry. These rules were strictly enforced during the first 50 years of the club's existence – a time when the upper class held a significant portion of wealth and power.

However, with the onset of the Revolutionary and later Napoleonic Wars, the social hierarchy was significantly reshuffled. It became clear that even the son of a notary could become the Emperor of France (Napoleon I), and the son of a tavern keeper could rise to be the King of Naples (Joachim Murat). During this period, the ancient Pisan aristocracy also suffered financial decline despite the club's original purpose as an "economical solution" for aristocratic entertainment. Consequently, the Casino dei Nobili grew increasingly quiet, with fewer grand parties, fireworks, and orchestral fanfares disturbing the city's peace.

Adding to its decline, a similar club opened nearby: the Stanze Civiche, or "Civic Hall." Unlike the Casino dei Nobili, it welcomed all affluent members of Pisan society, regardless of their origins. By the early 1850s, the Casino dei Nobili had fallen into disuse and was handed over to a club catering to Pisa's bourgeoisie. Today, the mansion houses the offices of the company Traent.

CHURCH OF SAN MICHELE IN BORGO



Located on Borgo Stretto, just a stone's throw from Piazza Garibaldi, the church is intriguing not so much for its interior (although the marble crucifix in the left altar is attributed to one of the great Renaissance masters, Nino Pisano) but for the two historical events associated with it. The first occurred in 1511, nearly 500 years after the church's founding. (Of course, it had been repeatedly reconstructed since, with the Gothic façade dating from the 13th to 14th centuries.) At that time, the Pisan Consilium – a large council of Catholic Church prelates – was convened here. The



Pope Julius II by Raphael, 1511.

background of this council was far from simple: By the early 16th century, the Venetian Republic had reached the height of its economic, military, and political power and was able to compete for influence in Italy with the greatest European powers of the time, even with the pope and the Holy Roman Emperor himself. Naturally, such "audacity" was unacceptable, and thus, the League of Cambrai was formed – an alliance of European states against Venice. Pope Julius II (perhaps the most warlike pope in the history of the Papacy) officially declared that "the war against Venice would be the prelude to a future crusade against the Turks." However, within a year of successful military actions against the Venetian Republic, former allies began to plot against each other. Thus, King Louis XII of France, who had decided to establish himself in northern Italy, switched sides to support the almost-defeated Venice. In response, Pope Julius II attempted to forbid all Catholic priests on French lands from conducting services. In reaction, Catholic clergy in France revolted against the pope, demanding the deposition of Julius II and the election of a new pope. They were promised assistance by Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I, who also sided with France and Venice. This incredible web of political intrigue brought several high-ranking cardinals of the Roman Church to Pisa, where, in November 1511, the Consilium was convened under the presidency of King Louis XII of France. The council discussed the possibility of deposing Julius II while he was negotiating with the Kings of Aragon and England about a union against France. Over the next year,



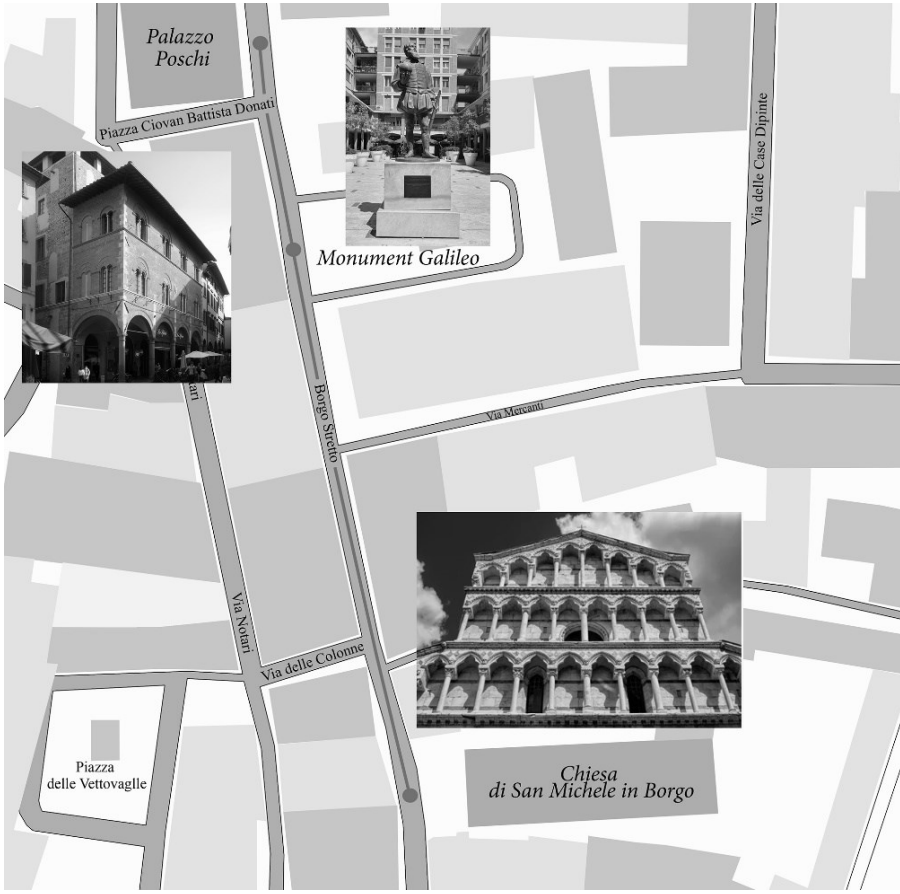
meetings of the "anti-papal" Consilium were held in Pisa, later moved from this church to the Pisa Cathedral. At the same time, in Rome, a terrified Julius II convened his great council, known as the Fifth Lateran Council, at which all members of the Pisan Consilium were declared heretics and excommunicated. These events caused the King of France to cool down, reflect, and, eventually, publicly condemn those prelates who had gathered in Pisa at his invitation. (What scoundrels they were, plotting something vile against the pontiff.)

However, in the same year, 1512, Julius II passed away from a fever caused by syphilis. (Yes, popes were not averse to anything in those glorious times when the population of the entire Earth was only slightly greater than the number of people living today in the United States alone.) For a brief period, this solved the French King's problems. However, living without problems is boring.

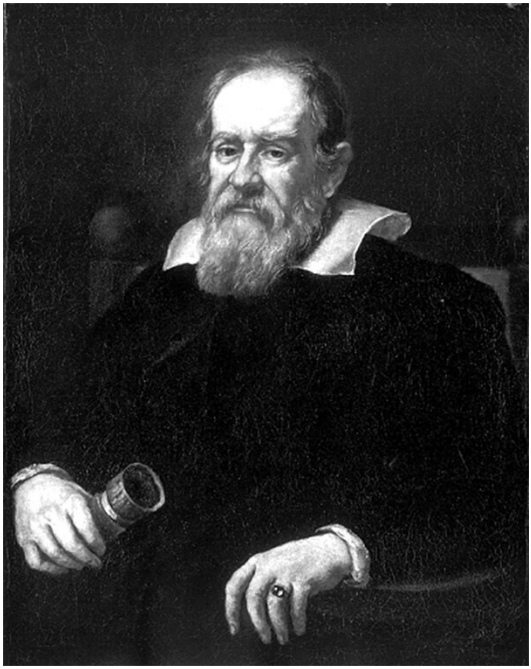
Another intriguing event occurred at the end of the same century, the 16th, when the people of Pisa were electing a new rector for their university. (At that time, this position was elected.) Here, on the facade of this church (which, like other churches in those distant times, was a regular gathering place for the residents, at least from the surrounding neighbourhoods), supporters and opponents of various candidates for the rector's position left messages for voters: a kind of precursor to election propaganda. We can now read the remnants of these inscriptions.

As for the interiors, in the 18th century, they were completely rebuilt in the popular late Baroque style of the time. However, the bombings that Pisa suffered during World War II erased the traces of these changes. Today, the interior of the San Michele in Borgo church appears rather modest.

THE MONUMENT TO GALILEO GALILEI AND PALAZZO POSCHI



Continuing along Borgo Stretto, we will soon come to a small square on our right. In the centre of this square stands a relatively new monument to the famous physicist, mechanic, mathematician, and philosopher Galileo Galilei – another Tuscan whose name is known worldwide. To be more precise, he was a Pisan, as Galileo belonged to an ancient patrician family that had provided several members to the government – the Priorate – of the Republic of Pisa. In fact, Galileo's great-grandfather, Galileo Galilei Senior, was elected head of the Pisan state in 1445. It was here, on these streets, that the



Justus Sustermans. Portrait of Galileo Galilei. Between 1636 and 1640

future great scientist spent his childhood, adolescence, and youth. He studied at the University of Pisa (at his father's insistence, he enrolled in the faculty of medicine), and it was here that he later taught mathematics. Additionally, in Pisa, on top of the famous "leaning" tower, he conducted one of his most famous experiments: dropping two balls of different masses from the last level of the cathedral's bell tower, thereby disproving the theory that heavier objects fall faster than lighter ones. This experiment is, in fact, commemorated by the ball that the bronze figure of Galileo holds in the monument.

Galileo is also credited with inventing the first telescope, with which he discovered the mountains on the Moon, realised that the Milky Way is made up of individual stars, and observed that Jupiter has four moons. These largest moons of the gas giant are still known today as the Galilean moons: Io, Europa, Ganymede, and Callisto. (Galileo himself referred to them as the "Medicean Stars" in honour of his patron, Grand Duke Ferdinand I of Tuscany.)

While living in Florence, Galileo discovered spots on the Sun and, later, its rotation around its axis. His works presented his achievements in astronomy – not a favourite subject of the clergy – in a rather provocative and, as we would say today, bold manner, which earned him many enemies. At one point, the scientist became even bolder, expressing an openly blasphemous thought in a letter to his student, Benedetto Castelli: "Sacred scripture is only applicable in matters of salvation, whereas in scientific questions it is completely inadequate." This statement in



private correspondence did not seem enough to Galileo, so he decided to publish the letter. Thus, he immediately attracted the anger of moralists and defenders of the honour of the Almighty, and they began to file denunciations with the commission investigating crimes against the faith, known as the “Holy Inquisition.” The final straw for the Holy See was Galileo’s official appeal to the pope to comment on the theory of the Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus, which stated that not the Earth (as was commonly believed at the time) but the Sun is the fixed centre of the universe, around which all other visible celestial bodies revolve. In March 1630, Galileo published his "Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems – Ptolemaic and Copernican," in which, in the form of an ancient scholarly debate between two fictional characters, he presented arguments for and against each of the two existing theories. Not only were the arguments in favour of Copernicus’s theory overwhelming, but Galileo also “dared” to publish his book in the vernacular Italian rather than Latin, as was customary. This meant that any Italian could read the “heretical doctrine of the Sun as the centre of the universe.” Contrary to the widespread belief in public consciousness, Galileo was not burned at the stake, but, of course, he suffered at the hands of Pope Urban VIII: The nearly 70-year-old scientist was arrested and brought to Rome in shackles. There, he was put on trial (some sources claim he was tortured) and found guilty of spreading books with “false, heretical, and scripturally contrary teachings” about the motion of the Earth. Galileo was sentenced to imprisonment. However, he was not kept in prison for long and was moved to house arrest in the town of

Arcetri in Tuscany. There, he spent the rest of his days under constant surveillance by the Inquisition. Yes, such were the times.



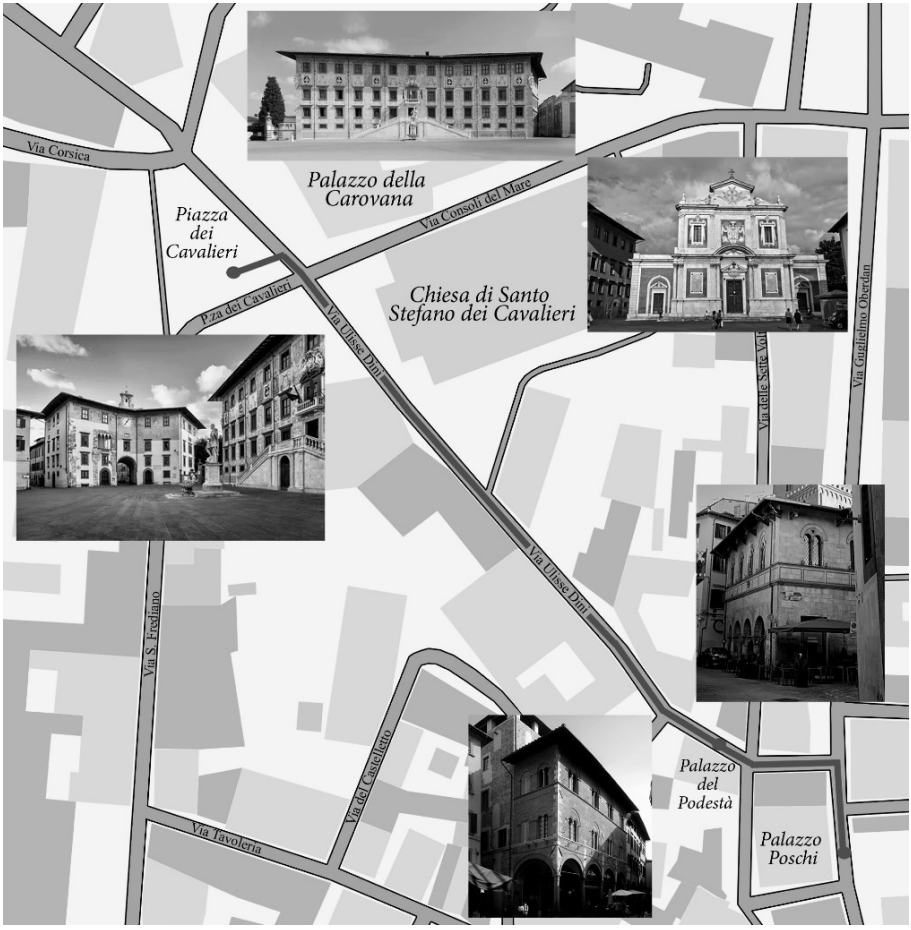
A little farther along Borgo Stretto, on our left, at the corner of Piazza Giovan Battista Donati, stands a noteworthy palace with a protruding brick facade and a loggia. Its rear part, initially inconspicuous, is set back into the narrow San Francesco street: an 11th-century tower to which, in 1496, the Poschi family added this two-storey brick extension with a loggia and 12 elegant Gothic windows. The following 350 years were prosperous for the Poschi family until one of them became addicted to gambling and squandered the family fortune to pay off his debts. Eventually, the palace was pawned. Yet, even after this, Signor Poschi still owed colossal sums to half of Pisa's aristocracy. Therefore, in 1840, he fled the city, and his palace was seized and sold at auction to pay off the debt. For a relatively modest sum by the standards of the time, it was bought by the Toscanelli family, which briefly restored the building to its original appearance, refreshing the frescoes that decorated the walls and ceilings of many of the rooms and renting out the ground floors to shops and cafes. However, maintaining the palace, even partially, had become difficult by the early 20th century (after all, the era of wealthy aristocrats and their luxurious residences was rapidly fading), and from 1905 onward, it was owned by various companies and firms that used it as office space. It is still used in this capacity today.

PALAZZO DEL PODESTÀ

If you turn right off Borgo Stretto onto Via Ulisse Dini, you will see a small red brick tower "growing" out of the roof of a low Gothic palace. Not much can be said about the former residence of the Pisan podestà. It was built in the 14th to 15th centuries by merging older medieval structures, and until the conquest of the Republic of Pisa by Florence, it housed the nominal ruler of the city. Pay attention to the ornate Gothic capitals of the bulging columns on the first floor as you walk past.



PIAZZA DEI CAVALIERI AND ITS PALACES



After Piazza del Duomo and that cursed leaning tower, this square is the most famous in Pisa. However, it would be perfectly excusable not to have known of its existence until you stepped onto its tiled pavement (which, by the way, is quite new, having replaced the ugly modernist asphalt in 2012).

For a long time, it was believed that a forum – the main city square of Pisa – stood here during Roman times. However, this belief was debunked by archaeological excavations that preceded the replacement of the asphalt with tiles. The square gained significant importance only

during the Lombard period (6th to 8th centuries), when it was the residence of the Gastaldato, the King's viceroy who governed the city in his name. Later, in 1140, the square, which had by then taken its final form, received its first name: piazza delle Sette Vie, or the "Square of the Seven Streets," because seven pedestrian routes of the city converged here in a radial pattern. (Only five of these routes have survived to this day, so the name is outdated.) Over time, the square became "adorned" with important urban institutions: The courthouse was built (naturally, by combining older structures), and the residence of the Captain of the People was constructed; it is now known as the Palazzo dell'Orologio or the "Clock Palace" and is easily recognisable by its corner shape and the ancient clock above the arch. Incidentally, this very palace was added to the famous Torre della Muda – the tower where the well-known Count Ugolino della Gherardesca was walled up with his sons and grandsons. The remains of the lower levels of this tower have been excellently preserved as part of the palace's interior.



In 1406, standing in this square before hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Pisans, a Florentine emissary declared the end of the independent Pisan Republic's history. Eighty-eight years later, when Pisa was occupied by

the troops of King Charles VIII of France, who had had a falling out with the King of Naples, the restoration of that very independence was proclaimed here. However, this would not last long: In 1509, Florence captured Pisa for the second and final time.

In the mid-16th century, the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Cosimo I de' Medici, decided to bring order to this old square with an iron hand and give it a fresh, fashionable appearance. He entrusted the task to the court architect of the Grand Duke, Giorgio Vasari, who is well-known to us for his Florentine works (if, of course, you have already been to Florence). Vasari transformed the ancient Palazzo degli Anziani into the current main landmark of the square – the ornate yet quite pleasing-to-the-eye, almost "creamy," Palazzo della Carovana. Its original purpose, as one might guess from the abundance of Maltese crosses adorning the facade, was to serve as the headquarters for the Order of Saint Stephen, founded by Grand Duke Cosimo I himself.



Portrait of the Grand Duke of Tuscany Ferdinand III in the robes of the Grand Master of the Order of St. Stephen

At that time, every self-respecting European Catholic monarch was expected to have their own knightly order. In Burgundy (and later in Spain and Austria), it was the Order of the Golden Fleece; in England, the Order of the Garter; in France, the Order of Saint Michael; and in Hungary, the Order of the Dragon. Upon becoming Grand Duke of Tuscany, Cosimo de' Medici decided that he had every right to establish his own order, marking his victory over the Sienese Republic with its foundation. According to the statutes drawn up for the order, each

aspirant (someone who wished to join the order as a knight) had to undergo a three-year "training" period, during which they learned to handle weapons. After this, they became part of special naval convoys that protected Tuscan merchant ships in the Mediterranean from Arab, Turkish, and Barbary pirates. These convoys were called "Carovana," and the order's headquarters in Pisa was named in their honour.



Of course, in addition to their role in protecting merchant ships, knights of the Order of Saint Stephen participated in more significant military campaigns for the Grand Duke of Tuscany. For example, between 1565 and 1570, after receiving formal recognition from the pope (which was necessary for the full existence of a spiritual-knightly brotherhood), the order supported the defence of Malta from the Turks and participated in the famous Battle of Lepanto (Gulf of Corinth, now Greece). In the early 17th century, the knights of Saint Stephen also provided significant support to the Venetians in defending the Greek islands of the Aegean Sea and the island of Crete from the same Turkish forces.

Although the Grand Duchy of Tuscany ceased to exist in 1860, the Order of Saint Stephen continued to exist as a chivalric organisation, headed by the heir to the Tuscan throne. In this capacity, the order was recognised by both the Kingdom of Italy and the Italian Republic that succeeded it, and the order's insignia – an eight-pointed crimson cross – is a symbol protected by European Union law. Its use is allowed only by the Order of Saint Stephen. Of course, nowadays, none of the few remaining knights embark on any campaigns against Muslims. The claimant to the title of Grand Duke of Tuscany, Archduke Sigismondo, simply awards the cross to his friends and relatives, who gather at his home once a year for a masquerade with elements of historical reenactment.



As for this building, in 1846, when the Order of Saint Stephen still had an official status within the now-defunct Grand Duchy but had already completely transformed from a military-religious organisation into a closed club for Austrian-Tuscan aristocrats, the Palazzo della Carovana was handed over to the Pisan School "la Normale" – a university institution where students undergo three years of training to obtain master's degrees in political and social sciences. It still houses this institution today, which means that unless you are a student there, you cannot freely enter and enjoy the interiors of the 16th to 18th centuries



Portrait of Giorgio Vasari. Attributed to Jacopo Zucchi, 1571.

and the remnants of the wonderful frescoes by Giorgio Vasari. However, even from the outside, the palace has much to admire.

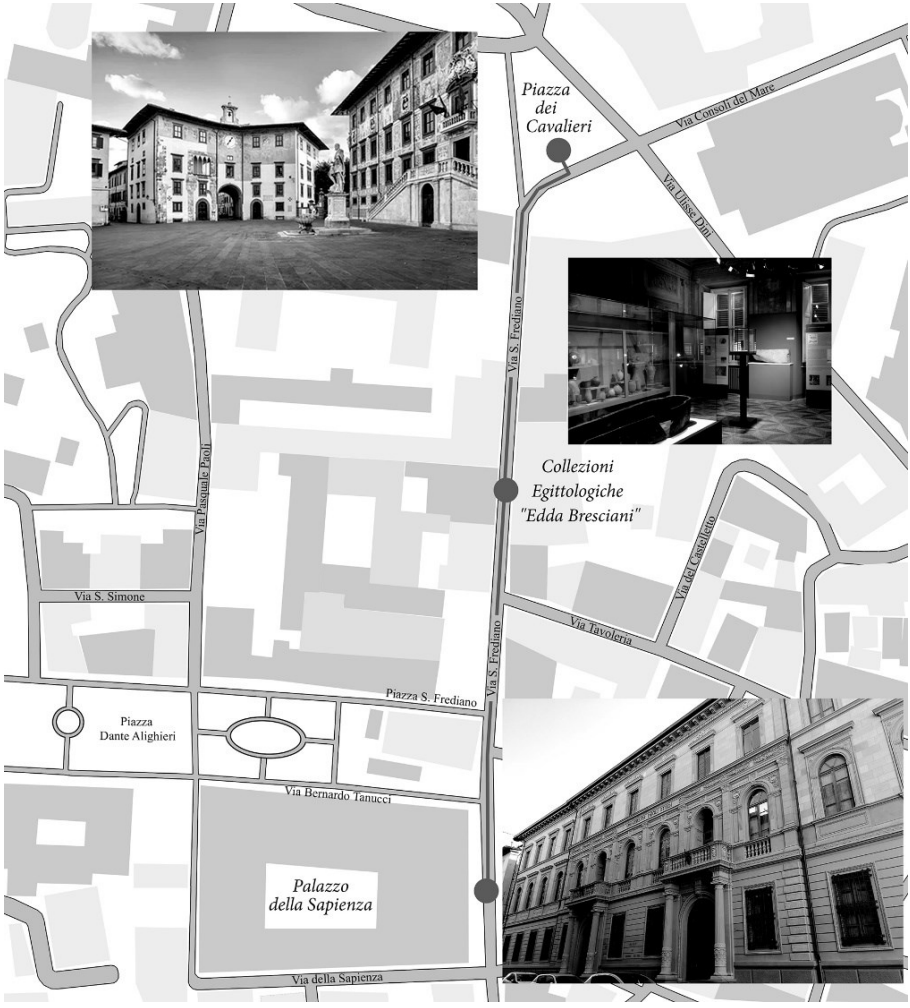
As you might guess from the same red eight-pointed crosses, the church located to the right of the palace also belongs to the Order of Saint Stephen. Saint Stephen himself was the Roman archbishop from 254 to 257 AD (he is considered the 23rd Pope in the modern sense) and, according to tradition, was beheaded during Mass on August 2, 257 by followers of the Roman Emperor Valerian, under whose reign Christians were persecuted. On August 2, 1554, Cosimo I de' Medici defeated the army of the Republic of Siena, and in dedication to the sainted martyr Pope, he chose to commemorate his victory.

The church, like the palace of the knights, was designed by Giorgio Vasari, and it was consecrated on December 21, 1569. However, despite the overall project being entrusted to the court architect of Cosimo I, the church's façade was based on the sketches of another, less famous master: Giovanni Medici, the illegitimate son of Grand Duke Cosimo I (an interesting coincidence, without a doubt). The interiors of this church are perhaps some of the most richly decorated in Pisa. In addition to the luxurious early-18th-century altar, made of polychrome marble and gilded bronze by Giovanni Battista Foggini (and which, by the way, contains the relics of Saint Pope Martyr Stephen), and the ornately decorated wooden ceiling of the single nave, the walls of the church display the captured banners of Islamic ships defeated by the Knights of Saint Stephen. Furthermore, between the windows in the upper part of

the church, you can see gilded lanterns removed from the abolished battle galleys that participated in the Brotherhood's glorious campaigns against the Muslims.
Additionally, the church is adorned with paintings by Bronzino and Vasari himself, including "The Stoning of Saint Stephen." It depicts the death of the first martyr in Christian history, who lived 200 years before the Saint Pope of the same name. On either side of the altar are the organ works designed by Vasari and created by the famous master Onofrio Zeffirini. Another of Zeffirini's works is still in excellent condition at the Santa Croce church in Florence.
Opposite the Palazzo della Carovana is another former property of the Order of Saint Stephen: the Palazzo del Collegio Puteano, which, from 1605 onward, housed a special order college for students from Piedmont. The knights retained control of the palace until 1925 (much longer than their luxurious headquarters), and today the Palazzo del Collegio Puteano is home to the research centre of the Pisa "la Normale" School.



PALAZZO DELLA SAPIENZA AND THE WAY TO IT



Let us now leave the Piazza dei Cavalieri via Via S. Frediano, which starts between the Palazzo del Consiglio dei Dodici (where the ruling council of the Order of Saint Stephen, made up of 12 elected members, once held meetings) and the Palazzo della Canonica (which housed the highest ecclesiastical authorities of the order – the prior of the Church of Saint Stephen and the chaplains – until

the order lost its position following the incorporation of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany into the Kingdom of Italy).
As we continue down this street, we will pass one of the museums of the University of Pisa: the "Collezioni Egittologiche 'Edda Bresciani'," which, as its name suggests, displays a collection of Egyptian antiquities. Most of this collection was donated to the University by Laura Birga Picozzi, a descendant of Ippolito Rossellini, who is considered the father of Italian Egyptology. Rossellini organised the famous Franco-Tuscan expedition to Nubia nearly 200 years ago (in 1828 to 1829).



Continuing farther along the street, at the intersection with Via Bernardo Tanucci, we see a large, restored palace: the Palazzo della Sapienza, or "Palace of Wisdom." Because it is the largest building in Pisa (its internal courtyard spans 300 square metres (3229 square feet) much information about it can be found on tourist websites, blogs, and even brochures advertising shopping centres, which are distributed for free at hotel receptions. Nevertheless, the key facts you need to know about this palace are relatively few.
Its construction was begun by the order of Lorenzo de' Medici, famously known as "the Magnificent," who ruled the Florentine Republic in the

late 15th century. Before that time, the city had many separate schools and institutions that taught both the fine arts and the exact sciences, such as medicine, astronomy, mathematics, and so on. Furthermore, between 1343 and 1408, Pisa was home to a university with four faculties: civil law, canon law, theology, and medicine. Lorenzo's aim was to consolidate all these schools under one roof and provide Pisan students with the opportunity to study and live in the same building. He envisioned residential rooms for students and professors to be placed above the lecture halls on the first floor.

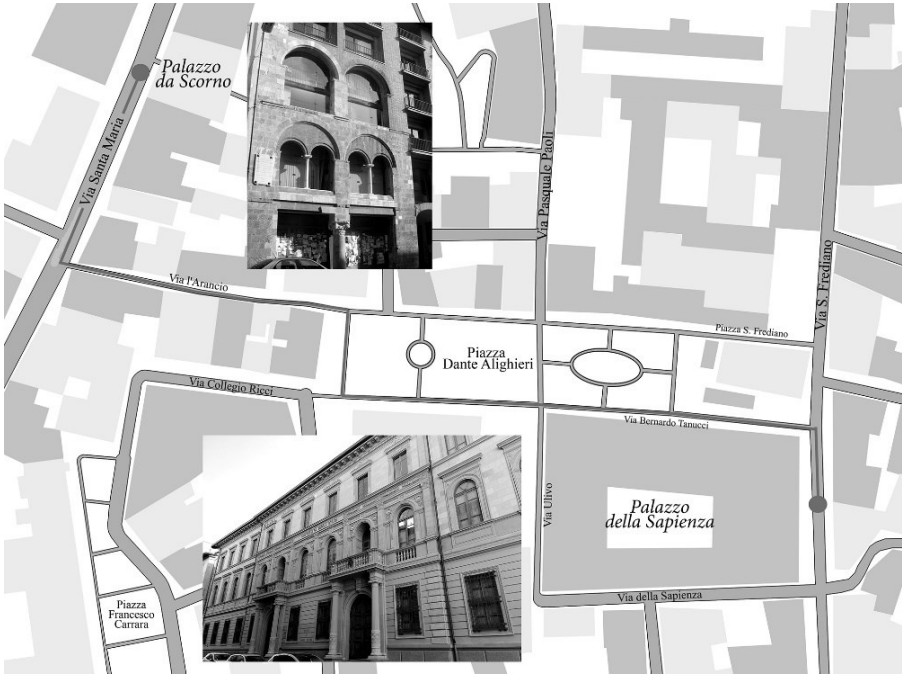
Turning this plan into reality proved difficult, especially amid the constant political conflicts and wars with neighbouring states (and beyond) that marked much of the Medici family's rule in Florence. It was only under Cosimo I, who was crowned Grand Duke of Tuscany in 1569, that the Palazzo della Sapienza was completed. By the end of the 16th century, this palace, which became the main building of the revived University of Pisa, had acquired one of the first university botanical gardens in Italy (the Orto botanico di Pisa, still located at Via Roma 56) and had become one of the most prestigious and powerful higher education institutions in Europe.

Ultimately, notable figures studied or taught in this building: Galileo Galilei and his student and frequent correspondent Benedetto Castelli; one of the first scientific surgeons, the court physician to Emperor Charles V, Andreas Vesalius; the son of the infamous Pope Alexander VI, Cesare Borgia; a descendant of the great Michelangelo, the revolutionary and bitter enemy of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Filippo Buonarroti; future popes Clement IX and Clement XII; distant relative and sworn enemy of Napoleon Bonaparte, Filippo Andrea Pozzo di Borgo; one of the "fathers of the atomic bomb," Enrico Fermi; and the renowned Italian tenor Andrea Bocelli.

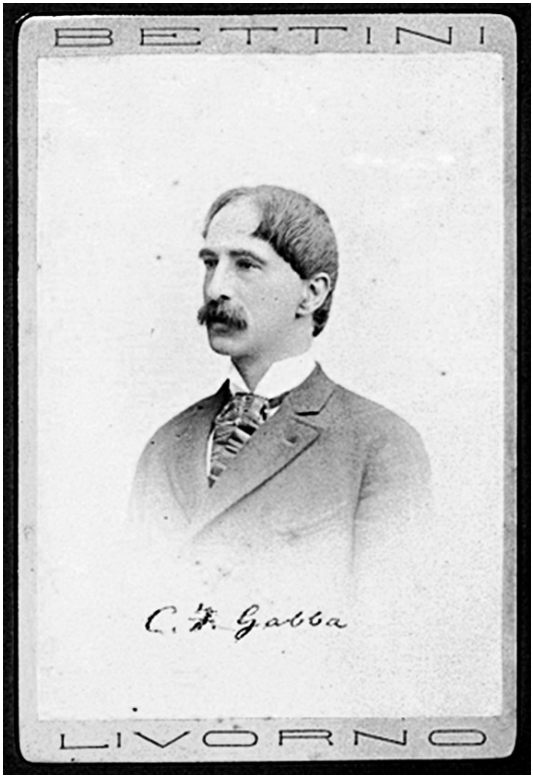
Today, the Palazzo della Sapienza is the main historical building of the University of Pisa; it houses a large library that contains, among other things, letters from Galileo and rare incunabula – printed books published before January 1, 1501. After the completion of restoration work in 2018, the arcades of the inner courtyard were returned to their original colour of "Medici White." (Prior to this, for many years, they were a golden-yellow hue.) I must also quickly disappoint you (or not):

The façades of this palace are new and were created between 1907 and 1920, during the previous major restoration led by the architect Vincenzo Pilotti.

PALAZZO DA SCORNO



As we move through Piazza Dante Alighieri and Via l'Arancio, we arrive at Via Santa Maria. Following it against the flow of traffic, we soon see on our right a building that appears as if it has been slashed diagonally by a sabre in mid-swing, with a kind of brick prosthesis attached to its remaining, pelvic-like section. This is the Palazzo da Scorno, built long before the era now known as the "Italian Renaissance." The building's oldest parts (Gothic double windows and a stout column) date back to the early 12th century. In the 17th century, several ancient structures were merged into a four-story palazzo, which changed owners many times over the centuries. A marble plaque on the facade commemorates its most famous occupant: Carlo Francesco Gabba, a lawyer, philosopher, and professor at the University of Pisa who lived in the Palazzo da Scorno for 30 years. Gabba studied the social aspects of human religiosity, equally criticising both the radical clericalism of those close to the Papacy and the near-atheism of the



Carlo Francesco Gabba

agnosticism of the new liberal elite that gained significant power in Italian society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. For his contributions, King Vittorio Emanuele III made Gabba a Grand Officer of the Royal Order of Saints Maurice and Lazarus – Italy's highest award available to commoners. (Above it was the Order of the Holy Annunciation, awarded only to members of royal families.) Then came the First World War, which marked the end of the old world. Professor Gabba did not live to see it; he died here, in this palazzo, in 1917 (perhaps fortunately for him). In 1922, the fascists came to power in Italy, and in 1939, the Second World War began. During the height of the war, an air bomb destroyed the Palazzo da Scorno, cutting it "from the right shoulder to the left thigh" and obliterating its interiors, some of which had remain unchanged since the 12th century.

When the shellfire ceased and the last royal crowns were sent to museums, the Pisa authorities turned their gaze to the remnants of the medieval walls and began a long debate on what to do with what had once been known as the Palazzo da Scorno. For some reason, restoring it to its original appearance – even if only externally (as authorities in Cologne did with the nearly destroyed Overstolzenhaus) – seemed like an unsuitable solution. Instead, the architect Piero Sanpaolesi, who was brought in to work on the "restoration" (this is how the process is referred to in all the reference materials related to the Palazzo da Scorno), "attached" a piece of a brick apartment building to the remains of the

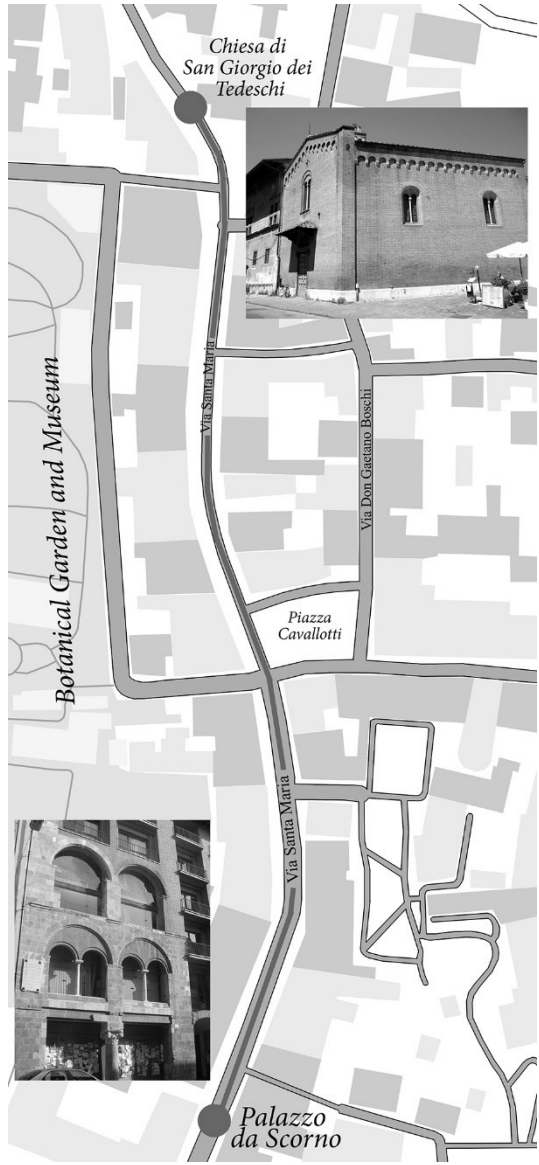


12th- to 17th-century facade, as though it had been transported from a less-than-glamorous neighbourhood in New York. Thus, perhaps intentionally, the previously inconspicuous Palazzo da Scorno, which had never been the epicentre of any dramatic events (such as, for example, the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence, which I detail in my guide to that city), became, for Pisa, a symbol of the rupture that emerged after the two world wars. This rupture severed the continuous line linking all periods of Italian history – from ancient Rome to the Risorgimento – as if it had cut off everything old for being unnecessary and overly complex. In these smooth bricks and primitive forms, in these iron bars welded together at right angles, in the neat rows of identical windows, there is no need to look closely; there is no meaning to be found here. They were not made for contemplation, just as sheep pens are not created to provide aesthetic enjoyment for sheep. The purpose of this new architecture is entirely different. Nonetheless, its emergence seems to me a rather expected outcome of the long centuries of our civilizational evolution, the peak of which we have long passed, and now dark centuries await us. These will be much darker than the time when the almost unknown architect Beduino worked. His millennium-old lions with chipped faces still watch over us from the

capitals of the last column of the Palazzo da Scorno, pressed to the ground by balconies made of welded rods and glass panels.
To avoid ending the story of this building on such a sad note, I will tell you that, most likely, there will still be enough light for our century, and the floor of the Palazzo da Scorno is home to a wonderful café – "Filter Coffee Lab" – with tasty, fresh pastries.

SAN GIORGIO DEI TEDESCHI CHURCH

Continuing along Via Santa Maria (a rather long and winding street), we will cross the road leading to the Botanical Garden of the University of Pisa, Via Luca Ghini, at the corner of which is another property of this institution: the former residence of the Archbishop of Pisa, Carlo Antonio dal Pozzo. After him, it belonged successively to several noble Pisan families, including the Boilleau family, of French descent, who held the title of barons. From these (the last private owners of the building), this palazzo received its current name: Palazzo Boilleau. Today, it houses the Department of Philology and Linguistics of the University of Pisa. Doesn't it seem that it was precisely this institution – rather than some social or economic changes in society – that displaced the aristocrats from Pisa?



In any case, if we continue along Via Santa Maria for a little while longer, we will come to a brick church with the familiar double windows,

separated by slender marble columns. Before the church, the street makes a small turn to the left, so you certainly will not pass it by. This is San Giorgio ai Tedeschi, a church built in 1316 in memory of 1,800 German mercenaries who fought on Pisa's side in the Battle of Montecatini. The army of the Pisan Republic, allied with Lucca, clashed with the alliance of Florence, Pistoia, Prato, Arezzo, Volterra, San Gimignano, and San Miniato. By some estimates, the allied army outnumbered the Pisan-Lucca forces two to one (60,000 versus 30,000 men). It was led by Philip of Anjou, the son of the King of Naples – a man of considerable influence. However, thanks to the cunning of the commander of the Pisan forces, Uguccione della Faggiola, and the bravery of the German mercenaries, Pisa and Lucca decisively defeated Philip of Anjou's army; 10,000 of his soldiers were left on the battlefield, and another 300 drowned in the Fucecchio marshes while fleeing in panic. The Pisan-Lucca side lost no more than three hundred men.



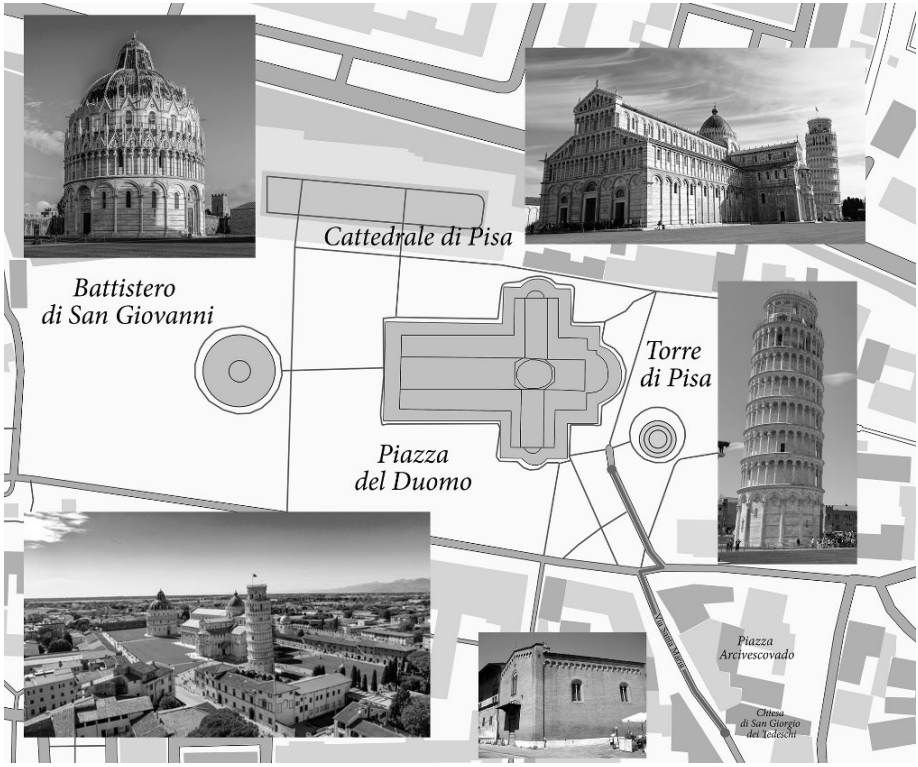
Grateful for the help, the Pisans decided to honour their German allies by erecting this church in their memory. Until the mid-17th century

reconstruction, its interiors were adorned with the knights' coats of arms. In 1414, San Giorgio ai Tedeschi became the chapel of the orphanage built next to it, which still stands adjacent to the church on its left side: the Ospedale dei Trovatelli. Because of this, since the 15th century, the church was more commonly known as San Giorgio degli Innocenti (from the Italian "Innocenti" or "the innocent," a euphemistic term used in Renaissance Italy for abandoned children, or "trovatelli"). In the 18th century, after another minor reconstruction, the church gained a bell tower, as well as a more Baroque interior, although it still contains a 14th-century wooden crucifix created for the church by an unknown German master.

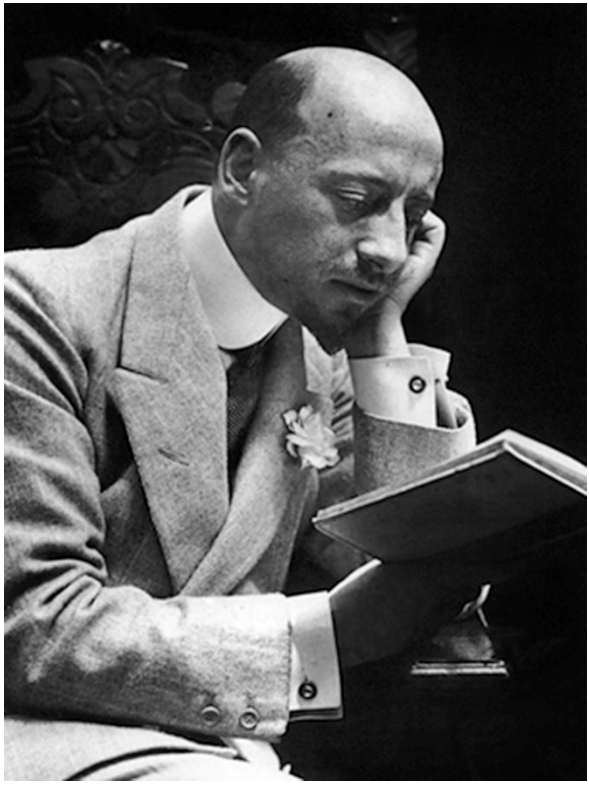
As the "hospital church," San Giorgio ai Tedeschi remained in use until 1989, when the Riuniti di Santa Chiara hospital, which had owned the church since 1784, transferred it to the care of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem – one of the first and still existing knightly orders founded by the Crusaders in the Holy Land. As far as I know, it remains under their care, although Masses have not been held there since 2013.

Incidentally, do not be confused by the fresco above the entrance to the church: It was created in 1932, although in the style of the Italian Renaissance.

THE PLACE FOR "THOSE PHOTOGRAPHS" AND ELUSIVE DETAILS OF PIAZZA DEL DUOMO



"Memento audēre semper" ("Never forget to dare"): This Latin motto is well-known among many Italians. Its author, the poet Gabriele d'Annunzio, who was mentioned several times in our journey through Tuscany, is a figure as bright and prominent as he is significant for Italian poetry and, in many ways, for Italian nationalism. Traditionally, d'Annunzio holds the honorary title of poeta-vate, which means "prophet-poet." This title was given, sometimes posthumously and sometimes during their lifetime, to a select few Italian poets, with Dante Alighieri undoubtedly being the "patriarch" of the national poetry of Italy and the father of the modern Italian literary language. Other holders of this title include Ugo Foscolo,



Gabriele d'Annunzio, 1904

Vittorio Alfieri, Giovanni Pascoli, and Gabriele d'Annunzio. Through their poetry, they became the "spiritual leaders" of the Italian people during times of profound social, cultural, and political change, such as the Unification of Italy and the First World War. In their works, the "prophets" anticipated the national rebirth, instilling hope in Italians for the victory of their spirit over external and internal enemies and forming romantic images that are essential to any national idea. Through this, they moved from the realm of cultural figures to that of political figures. However, according to some philosophers, culture and politics are inseparable.

Gabriele d'Annunzio lived an extremely fascinating and eventful life. It is quite possible that someday we will find ourselves in Brescia, by the shores of the wonderful Lake Garda – a place where a large memorial complex dedicated to d'Annunzio is located and includes his villa, a park, and even a military ship in the garden. There, we will talk in more detail about the phenomenon of "Dannunzianesimo" – a cultural phenomenon of which the poet-soldier and poet-prophet Gabriele d'Annunzio became the embodiment and "idol."

But now, to help you understand just how significant the influence of his poetry and prose is on contemporary Italian culture, I will simply mention the square that lies before us. From countless postcards and photographs, you might recognize it by its widely accepted name: Piazza

dei Miracoli. It is easy to guess that this name translates to "Square of Miracles," and, in fact, this name does not actually belong to the square.



Gabriele D'Annunzio on the plane

The nickname was first applied to Pisa's Piazza del Duomo in passing, in the text of the 1910 novel Forse che sì, forse che no ("Maybe Yes, Maybe No") by Gabriele d'Annunzio. This novel tells the complicated and even scandalous story of a love "quadrangle," one of the main characters of which is a young aviator, Paolo Tarsis, who participates in air races in his airplane "Ardea." In one chapter, Paolo flies over Pisa with his beloved Isabella. They pass over Cathedral Square and see everything we now see but from a height once accessible only to birds and God. Though this novel, in my amateur opinion, is by no means d'Annunzio's most remarkable work, his description of Piazza del Duomo is unforgettable:

"Truly, the city stood in reverent awe, burning with love at the foot of its sanctuary. Only the columns retained their majestic appearance, gleaming in the waves of light like Dante's topaz and reminding one of the white epitrachyls with their capitals. It stood in humility before the solitary vision of beauty, like the devotee at the bottom of a painting, on

which the Divine Image shines in all its glory, dressed in dark robes, with hands folded.
Ardea flew in the sky of Christ, over the meadow of miracles. It flew over the five naves of the cathedral, over the vaguely outlined top of the bell tower, leaning to one side under the trembling copper of its bells, over the tiara of the baptistery, so light that it seemed as if it would soon fly away into the air. The more the heavenly glow of the evening faded into bluish ash, the more the marble became imbued with mystical light; and it held on for so long, refusing to dull from the darkness within its white substance, that it seemed as though altar candles were glowing from within it."



From this excerpt, this almost imperceptible epithet, the Cathedral Square of Pisa has acquired its own name, distinct from all the other cathedral squares in Tuscany.
Its history began in 1063, when Pisa was ruled by Admiral Giovanni Orlandi. During this period, the Pisan Republic was waging a successful military campaign against the Muslims in Sicily. This campaign resulted in the complete defeat of the Arab occupiers and the liberation of the island. A tenth of the spoils taken from the Muslims was granted to Admiral Orlandi, who used it to fund the construction of the cathedral, intended to commemorate the Pisans' victory over the Arabs. At the same time, the Venetians decided to celebrate their naval victories by

beginning the construction of the famous Saint Mark's Cathedral. It is believed that an unspoken rivalry arose between the two greatest maritime powers of the time to build the largest and most luxurious cathedral. The original plan was for Pisa's cathedral to be built outside the ancient city walls, highlighting Pisa's newly acquired status as a city "unafraid of any enemies."



A century after the start of the cathedral's construction, the city walls of Pisa were expanded. (They are remarkably well-preserved today, although the city has long since expanded beyond them.) The new chain of fortifications enclosed the future "Square of Miracles," and today, you can still see this section of the walls on the other side of the field in front of us. At one time, the cathedral could be accessed through the "Lion's Gate" behind the baptistery, so named because of an ancient Etruscan lion sculpture once placed above the gate. It now crowns the corner of the structure.

To be honest, this lion looks more like a frightened old cat whose owners have not been careful about its diet, but let's be kind to the ancient inhabitants of Tuscany. During the reign of Grand Duke Ferdinando II de' Medici in the second half of the 17th century, the gates were



permanently closed, and the land on the other side of the walls was given to the Jewish community of Pisa to establish a Jewish cemetery, which still exists today. In exchange for these gates, new, grander ones were opened a little farther along and were adorned with the Medici family's coat of arms. These gates are still called the "New Gates" ("Porta Nuova").

During the Medici era, the square was densely built up. In addition to the main "quartet" consisting of the cathedral, baptistery, bell tower, and monumental cemetery Campo Santo (which some researchers believe, due to their odd arrangement, mimic the shape of the Libra constellation), entire neighbourhoods of residential and commercial buildings were constructed here. Even the "leaning" bell tower of the cathedral was surrounded by a low wall, with houses tightly clustered around it. This situation remained until the 19th century, when, under the guidance of architect Alessandro Gherardesca (who was not related to the ancient noble family of the Gherardesca), the square was finally opened once again.

Yes, it is now time to take the famous photograph as if you are holding up the leaning tower.



THE CATHEDRAL OF PISA



Construction of the Cathedral of Pisa was entrusted to an architect known by the nickname Buscheto (which means "Master of Bulls"). His real name remains unknown, and his nickname is likely linked to the extensive use of oxen as draught animals during the building of the cathedral. Very little is known about the biography of this architect or the early stages of his work. What we do know for certain is that Buscheto began his work in 1064, and in 1110, he was still alive and continuing his efforts. Given the average life expectancy in the 11th and 12th centuries, we can infer that he likely received the commission for this cathedral and the buildings in its complex at a very young age and dedicated his life to this masterpiece of Romanesque style. Although the cathedral was incomplete, Pope Gelasius II consecrated it in 1118. Most likely, shortly before or after this event, Buscheto passed away and was buried in the structure he had designed, as commemorated by a marble plaque on the left side of the



cathedral's facade. The inscription refers to the architect as the "New Daedalus" (an unexpected parallel to the text by d'Annunzio). The architects Diotisalvi and Rainaldo continued the work, though they undoubtedly followed Buscheto's original plan.

The cathedral was completed in 1180 and became known as Santa Maria Assunta, or the Temple of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. By this time, it was not only the Cathedral of Pisa but also the "primatial" church, as in 1092, Pope Urban II had granted the title of primate of Sardinia and Corsica to Dagoberto, the Archbishop of Pisa, in recognition of Pisa's victory over the Muslims who had long held these islands. This high honour is also reflected in the name of the organization that, since 1063, has been responsible for the construction, maintenance, restoration, and management of the Pisa Cathedral complex: Opera della Primaziale Pisana. Founded even before work on the cathedral began, this organization has existed for nearly a thousand years; it has overseen the four most recognizable landmarks of Pisa and has maintained an extensive archive of documents, including the signatures of all the heads of the organization from 1164 to the present. Since 1986, the organization has managed the Opera del Duomo museum, which houses many exhibits related to the history of the cathedral's creation and numerous restorations. The museum is located behind the Leaning Tower. Further details about it, including ticket

reservations and tours, can be found on the official website of Opera della Primaziale Pisana.

On the night of October 24 to 25, 1595, a fire broke out in the cathedral, destroying the roof and many of the ancient details of the facade. Naturally, this marked the beginning of the first major restoration of the Pisa Duomo. It could be said that during this time, the architectural masterpiece's familiar appearance was shaped: New sculptures were added, the interior was restored, and craftsmen, including students of the famous Medici court artist Giambologna, created new bronze doors for the cathedral. In the 18th century, the interiors of the Duomo were decorated with paintings on biblical themes, many of which were taken to France as part of the so-called "Napoleonic Looting" – the plundering of art from territories occupied by the French to expand the Louvre collection. Most of these items never returned to their homeland. For example, "The Triumph of Thomas Aquinas" by Benozzo Gozzoli (who is well known to us if we have already visited Florence) is still on display in the most famous museum in France.



Portrait of Cimabue by Giovanni Battista Cecchi, 1769.

After the fascists came to power in Italy in 1922, a monument known as the "Capitoline She-Wolf" was erected near the cathedral. This is a replica of the famous bronze statue that, until recently, was believed to have been made in ancient times by the Etruscans. However, it has now been established (through radiocarbon dating and the study of casting techniques) that it was created no earlier than the 10th century AD.



Nevertheless, the symbol of the she-wolf, suckling the twin brothers Romulus and Remus (the mythical founders of the Roman state), became extremely popular during the fascist era and was widely used by Mussolini, who made ancient Rome the central reference and ideal of his ideology for propaganda purposes. Near this sculpture, the government ordered the planting of 12 cypress trees in memory of the so-called "Fascist Martyrs of Pisa": 12 members of the Italian Fighting Union from Pisa who died "for the cause of fascist victory" between 1919 and 1922. Similar alleys were created in cities across Italy at that time, not only to honour the victims of the "fascist struggle" but also to commemorate Italian soldiers who died on the front lines during the First World War. When the fascist regime came to an end, the cypress trees were not cut down; after all, they were just trees.

Inside the cathedral, the impression is just as striking as from the outside. The magnificent ceiling, created using ancient coffered techniques, consists of numerous square segments of gilded wood adorned with plant motifs, images of Seraphim, and a large coat of arms of the Medici family (who else?) in the centre. This ceiling was designed by Domenico Atticciati and his assistants, who were also his son and nephew: Bernardo and Bartolomeo. In ancient Greece and Rome, this type of

ceiling had a practical function: The square coffers concealed the wooden beams that supported the ceiling structure. One of the earliest examples of this technology can still be seen in excellent condition at the fronton of the Erechtheion temple on the Acropolis in Athens.
The influence of the East does not end there. As in most medieval churches, the Pisa Cathedral features so-called matronae – galleries located above the side aisles, whose colonnades open into the central nave. This architectural element was borrowed by Renaissance masters from the Byzantine tradition, according to which women and children could not attend services in the same hall as men – a harsh reality of ancient Orthodox canon law, which never spread beyond the influence of the Constantinople Patriarchate. As such, in Italy, these galleries always remained purely decorative.
The exquisite mosaic in the apse (the projection at the end of the central nave, if you walk from the entrance to the cathedral) also recalls the art of Byzantium. This work, by the outstanding Cimabue, depicts "Christ on the throne between the Virgin Mary and Saint John." The master began work on this mosaic in 1301, just a year before his death; it was completed by two other artists: Francesco da Pisa (from Pisa) and Vinciino da Pistoia. Their work – following Cimabue's original sketches – took another 18 years and was finished in 1320. In this depiction, Christ holds an open book, on the pages of which we can read the Latin inscription "Ego sum Lux Mundi" – "I am the Light of the World." If you look closely, you will notice several unusual details near His figure, namely, two lions sleeping on either side of Christ, two dragons sitting at His feet, and two serpent-like creatures that Christ has pinned to the ground with His bare feet. The explanation for these unexpected mythical creatures in a church mosaic can be found right here, with a careful glance at the hem of the Son of God's tunic. "Super aspidem et basiliscum ambulabis, et conculcabis leonem et draconem," reads the inscription on the border. This quote from the Latin Bible, found in Psalm 91:13, can be translated as, "You will tread on the asp and the basilisk, and you will trample the lion and the dragon." These animals are believed to symbolize the devil, whom the resurrected Christ defeats. Such representations of the Saviour were quite popular in late antiquity and early Christianity. Interestingly, this mosaic is one of the few parts

of the Pisa Cathedral to have survived the catastrophic fire of 1595. Moreover, it is the only work by Cimabue whose authorship is beyond question.

If you step back from the altar and look up higher, you will see the magnificent painting of the only dome in Pisa Cathedral, which, incidentally, has an unusual elliptical shape for European architecture. It was inspired by Moorish architecture, which the Pisans encountered during their liberation campaigns in Sicily and Corsica. During the Baroque era, in the 17th century, the well-known master Horatio Riminaldi painted this dome using the ancient technique of encaustic, in which pigments are mixed with wax at high temperatures. Riminaldi, like Cimabue, did not finish his masterpiece, dying of the plague in 1630. Thus, his brother, Girolamo, completed the work of decorating the dome on his behalf.

Here also stands the so-called "Galileo's Lamp" – an incense vessel suspended on a chain from the ceiling. Its oscillations – as stated by Vincenzo Viviani, the first biographer of Galileo Galilei – were observed by the 19-year-old scientist in 1583 when he discovered the isochronism of small pendulum oscillations. In reality, the lamp that Galileo might have seen (if we take Viviani's account on trust) was long since moved to the Chapel of Aule in the Campo Santo – the memorial cemetery of Pisa just behind the cathedral. Meanwhile, this chandelier is a relatively new one, approximately contemporaneous with Riminaldi's encaustic.

It is also worth acknowledging the magnificent 14th-century cathedral pulpit by Giovanni Pisano, which also survived the 1595 fire but had long remained disassembled and even considered lost. The pulpit, in the form of separate panels and columns, lay in storage at the Opera della Primaziale for over 300 years until 1926, when, by order of the new government of the Kingdom of Italy, led by Benito Mussolini, it was reassembled and installed here. Unfortunately, no records of the original arrangement of the marble panels on the pulpit have survived, so it was impossible to restore Giovanni Pisano's original design at the beginning of the last century. Moreover, it was discovered that, over the three centuries, four of the eight caryatid columns had been lost. So, likely, was the staircase by which the priest was meant to ascend to the pulpit. As a result, today, the pulpit is supported by four original and four

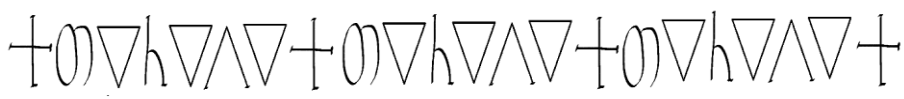
“simpler” columns – a gift from the Duce of Fascism (or, if you prefer, fascist crutches). Of course, for this priceless gift from the dictator to be more visible, the pulpit was installed with the “simpler” columns at the front, while the caryatids by Pisano “retreated into the shadows.”

BAPTISTERY OF SAINT JOHN



The largest baptistery in Italy (and the world) stands directly before you, opposite the Pisa Cathedral. It is 54.86 metres (179 feet) high, with a circumference of 107.24 metres (351 feet). Construction of the baptistery, as you might guess, began nearly at the same time as construction of the cathedral, in 1152, as noted by the inscription on a pillar to the right of the eastern entrance: "MCLIII MENSE AUG(USTI) FUNDATA FUIT H(AEC) ECCL(ES)IA" ("In 1153, in the month of August, this church was founded"). It should be noted that the date is given according to the Pisan calendar, in which the New Year was celebrated on March 25 (the Feast of the Annunciation). The date corresponds to 1152 in the Gregorian calendar. The lower tier of the baptistery was designed by an architect known only by his nickname, Diotisalvi ("The Lord praises you"). After his death, Niccolò and Giovanni Pisano continued the work. Thus, the lower and oldest part of the baptistery was built in a strict Romanesque style, while the rest of the building follows the Gothic style.

Arguably, the most interesting part of the exterior is not its sculptural decoration but, rather, the mysterious inscription on the left side of the main entrance (facing the cathedral), which is divided into three parts by Greek crosses. The inscription starts and ends with a cross, and it seems these crosses separate the words, forming a unique text. Its meaning and significance remain unknown, and no historian or linguist has offered an acceptable deciphering of the inscription. What is known for certain is that it is not much younger than the baptistery itself and was inscribed with a specific purpose. A similar inscription, composed of the same symbols, can be found on the left side of the entrance to the Church of San Frediano in Pisa. Another copy can be seen at the Pisa Museum of San Matteo on a marble slab from the now-destroyed Church of Cosmas and Damian. Three more inscriptions are found on churches dating from the 8th to the 13th centuries in Barga (Saint Christopher's Cathedral), Pistoia (Saint Peter's Church), and Lucca (Saint Pontian's Church). However, none of these facts help to clarify the meaning of these "graffiti." Whether they are meant to convey insults from a disgruntled stonemason or something else entirely, the mystery of these inscriptions sparks the imagination.



The baptistry's interior was designed to be simple and austere, reflecting both the idea of Holy Baptism and the acoustics needed for its sacred rituals; excessive decoration would have interfered with the unique sound quality. Art historians regard the pulpit – designed by Niccolò Pisano in the mid-13th century – as the first major work of the Italian proto-Renaissance, a period directly preceding the Renaissance. The pulpit can thus be considered a starting point for a new branch in the "genealogy" of the Renaissance, with roots in ancient Greek antiquity. Pay particular attention to the naked figure of Hercules, one of many decorating the pulpit. This is a truly revolutionary depiction for its time, as the naked human form, celebrated in the ancient world, was strongly condemned by the Church. The secret lies in the fact that Pisano was inspired by the details of Roman sarcophagi, which in the Middle Ages

were "recycled" for the burial of prominent Pisans in the monumental Campo Santo cemetery nearby.
The baptismal font of the baptistery was completed in 1246, and for the following 800 years, it remained without statues. However, in 1957, for reasons that are unclear, a statue was placed in its centre: one by the sculptor Italo Grizielli, famous for his work in Bolshevik Russia and for creating the "Genius of Fascism" statue depicting a young man raising his arm in a Roman salute. The figure of Saint John the Baptist is portrayed as an emaciated wanderer wrapped in a pelt and holding a cross made of two sticks – an image more suitable for a Venetian biennale than for the baptistery in Pisa. (However, this is a matter of disagreement with the municipality of Pisa.) Regardless, the dried-up Saint John the Baptist, standing in the long-dried font of the world's largest baptistery, became Grizielli's final creation, as the sculptor passed away in 1958. Incidentally, his "Genius of Fascism" was altered after the war – its hands were fitted with combat gloves (cestus), and the title was changed to the more politically neutral "Genius of Sport." The sculpture can still be found in the World's Fair district of Rome.

YES, YES, THE LEANING TOWER OF PISA



There it stands. Well, who really needs directions to the location of this landmark? It's hard to miss it here, on the Piazza dei Miracoli, which was carefully cleared of unnecessary buildings in the 19th century. Perhaps it is best to settle two of the most common questions that puzzle visitors arriving in Pisa:

1. No, it is not falling.
2. Yes, you can climb it (precisely because it is not falling).

So, what's wrong with the bell tower of Pisa Cathedral? Strangely, it is not the tower itself that's the problem; rather, the problem is the ground beneath it. The construction of the tower began on August 9, 1173 (after a certain Donna Bertha di Bernardo donated 60 soldi (Italian coins of the time) for the purchase of some stones, which are still part of the tower's foundation). As for the identity of the "father" of the Leaning Tower of Pisa, debates are still ongoing. While some researchers attribute the design to Diotisalvi, who is also known for designing the Pisa Cathedral, Giorgio Vasari (well-known to those of you who have already travelled with my guide through Florence and Pistoia) definitively credits a certain



Bonanno, for whom a tombstone was found bricked into the tower's atrium. However, Bonanno of Pisa was known primarily as a sculptor; in 1181, he decorated the cathedral with magnificent bronze doors made from 24 panels. (These doors, known as the "Porta di San Ranieri," are now on display in the Opera del Duomo museum, while a replica is displayed in the cathedral's transept.) Thus, the question of Bonanno's authorship remains unresolved.

In any case, at the time the third tier of the tower was being built, the ground beneath its foundation began to sink, causing the unfinished bell tower to tilt several degrees to the north (the opposite direction of the modern tilt). This was due to the soft clay that makes up much of the soil in what is now the Piazza dei Miracoli. In fact, all the buildings in the square's ensemble lean to some degree (either partially or completely), but the tilt of the bell tower is the most noticeable. Due to the tilt, construction of the tower was halted for nearly a century. Not until 1264 was Giovanni di Simone appointed to resume the work. In that year, 234 workers went to quarry marble, and 11 years later, in 1275, construction of three more tiers of the tower began. By that time, the tower had tilted further due to continued soil subsidence, and it now threatened to collapse to the south (which is the direction in which the tilt persists today). To "compensate" for this problem, Giovanni di Simone decided to build the remaining tiers with a reverse tilt so that the top of the tower would at least be closer to vertical, as it still had to support the bells. If you look closely, you'll notice this intentional "balancing" tilt starting from the third level of the tower.

The construction of the tower was once again interrupted in 1284 after the well-known naval battle of Meloria, in which the fleet of the Pisan Republic, commanded by Ugolino della Gherardesca, was defeated by the Genoese fleet under the command of Admiral Benedetto I Zaccaria and the ruler of Genoa, Oberto Doria. At that moment, Pisa lost all its military power and influence in the Mediterranean, and the unrest that flared up after della Gherardesca's return to the city caused the Pisans to forget about the bell tower for a long time. Only in 1319 was the seventh tier of the tower completed. In the second half of the 14th century (with different sources citing different dates, from 1350 to 1372), under the leadership of Tommaso, the son of the famous Andrea Pisano, who had worked on the campanile of the Florence Cathedral after Giotto, the final "bell" tier of the Pisa Tower was completed. This tier was designed with even more of a tilt than the previous ones by Giovanni di Simone. The bells, still at the top of the campanile, were cast at various times, and each of them had its own name and purpose.

The oldest bell (Pasquereccia) – cast in 1262 and weighing 1014 kg – rang only at Easter, as suggested by its name. A smaller bell, Terza, rang at the third hour of the day (9:00 AM according to the old Pisan time). The "Evening" bell, Vespruccio, cast in 1501, rang to call the congregation to Vespers, while the largest bell, Assunta, weighing 2400 kg, rang on the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. Additionally, the bell of San Ranieri, now located on the tower, was originally named Giustizia and was placed on the eponymous Palazzo in Pisa. The tolling of this bell announced the execution of state criminals. According to legend, this was the bell that announced the death of Ugolino della Gherardesca, who had been imprisoned in the tower. Later, however, Giustizia was recast; since 1735, it has been located on the "leaning" campanile of the Duomo.

Thus was completed the most famous landmark of Pisa, Italy, and, for those who live outside the "Old World," all of Europe. At that time, the campanile was indeed leaning, tilting more with each passing decade. By the 1990s, its tilt had increased to such an extent that the staff of Opera del Duomo feared it would collapse soon. (On average, the tower continued to tilt at a rate of 1 mm [0.03 inches] per year). As a result, a series of major restoration and reinforcement works was carried out in

the last decade of the 20th century. In 2008, it was announced that the tower's fall had ceased. In 2010, after a long period of restoration, the masters of Opera del Duomo succeeded in "straightening" the campanile by almost two degrees (its tilt angle was reduced from 5° 30' to 3° 54'). Since then, the top of the tower now leans about 4.8 meters (15.7 feet) away from the vertical axis.

CAMPO SANTO



Campo Santo or the "Holy Fields": This was the name given to the first Christian cemeteries in the world, established spontaneously on the sites of ancient circus ruins on the remains of the fading Roman Empire. This was in the era when Christian believers had just stopped being thrown to the lions for the entertainment of respectable Roman citizens. The soil of such "fields" was consecrated in a more radical manner than today, with earth brought from Palestine (the Roman name for the region now part of the State of Israel). According to legend, the location for the future cemetery in Pisa was chosen when Bishop Ubaldo de Lanfranchi of Pisa threw a handful of earth, brought from Golgotha by the Crusaders in 1204, onto the ground here, near the ancient baptistery of the even older Church of Saint Reparata. The construction of the cloister (the vast rectangular space surrounded by walls, which constitutes Campo Santo) began in 1277 under the direction of architect Giovanni di Simone. As you might have already guessed, he died before finishing the work, seven or nine years later. Eventually, the architectural masterpiece was completed in 1464.

By then, the covered galleries of Campo Santo were adorned with magnificent frescoes by the renowned masters of the time: Benozzo Gozzoli, Taddeo Gaddi, Andrea Bonaiuti, Francesco Traini, and many others. Almost all of these were destroyed in a fire caused by an Allied airstrike on the cemetery on July 27, 1944. In addition to the frescoes, many ancient and medieval sarcophagi and tombstones belonging to prominent figures of Pisa's culture, political, and art worlds were lost.



Since then, and indeed since the end of the war, work has continued in Campo Santo to restore its former grandeur and preserve the frescoes that survived the fire. The most captivating of these, in my opinion, is "The Triumph of Death" by Buonamico Buffalmacco. This fresco was created soon after the beginning of the "Black Death" pandemic in the 14th century. "We are now those whom you will be. By forgetting us, you forget yourselves," say three corpses to three young knights. This popular theme in Western Christian iconography – the encounter with one's inevitable and sorrowful future (memento mori) – takes on new meaning for those unfortunate enough to have lived in Europe in the

mid-14th century. Here they are, on the left side of the fresco: three young, rich men dressed in fine clothes, gripping the reins of their swift horses. Before them lie three corpses in coffins, in various stages of decay. A monk predicts for them what needs no prediction. Death is too close and is indifferent to everything: status, age, wealth, power, gender, the number of hunting dogs in your kennel, or the quality of the fabric woven into your gown. In the end, all that remains is the stench of decomposition, against which the poor young knight pinches his nose. The little angels in the sky were unexpectedly transferred to this fresco from nearby ancient tombs, inside which not a few noble and wealthy bodies had rotted. Where now are Buonamico Buffalmacco and the patrons of this fresco, the Dominican monks? And yet, the walls still stand, the sky above them still darkens, and the waters of the Arno River continue to flow through Pisa, just as they did before, and just as they will after. This is the grim yet hopeful truth – a truth that this city, once cursed by Dante himself, now hides from no one.

WHERE TO STAY IN PISA

BUDGET HOTELS

BonConvento Guest House by Hituscany

- Address: Via Giuseppe Garibaldi 56, 56124, Pisa
- Tel: +39 0509 336645
- Free Wi-Fi, kitchen, air conditioning, non-smoking rooms

A small but cosy hotel located in the centre of Pisa. It is housed in a historic building with simple yet comfortable rooms that capture the charm and style of Tuscany. There is a small courtyard.

Hotel Caffè Verdi Pisa

- Address: Piazza della Repubblica, 4a, 56127 Pisa
- Tel: +39 389 505 6560
- Free Wi-Fi, parking, air conditioning, non-smoking rooms, family rooms, 24-hour reception, terrace, lift

A cosy hotel in the heart of Pisa, with all the city's landmarks within walking distance. The staff is polite and friendly, and the 24-hour reception ensures convenience. There is also a 24-hour bar/café. Rooms accommodate from one to four people, and family rooms are available. It's worth noting that the hotel is in a pedestrian zone, so you will need to provide your vehicle details for access. Overall, it offers a good balance between price, service, and location.

Dimora Coccapani

- Address: Piazza della Repubblica, 4a, 56127 Pisa
- Tel: (+39) 338 732 1093
- Free Wi-Fi, parking (for an extra fee), air conditioning, no smoking, no pets allowed, cleaning at the start and end of the stay, full use of the kitchen

A cosy apartment in the centre of Pisa, within walking distance of the main attractions. The apartment is 55 square meters and can accommodate up to four people. It features a fully equipped kitchen, a balcony with a garden view, and soundproof windows.

MID-RANGE HOTELS

Hotel Francesco

- Address: Via Santa Maria, 129, 56126 Pisa
- Tel: +39 050 555453
- Free Wi-Fi, parking, family rooms, facilities for disabled guests, minibar, air conditioning

A small, cosy hotel located 100 metres from the Leaning Tower of Pisa in a historic, recently renovated building. The staff is polite and helpful. The hotel offers breakfast on the terrace, with a view of the Leaning Tower.

Bed and Breakfast Piazza Cairoli

- Address: Piazza Cairoli, 12, 56127 Pisa
- Tel: +39 331 760 1188
- Free Wi-Fi, parking, two restaurants, family rooms, breakfast, minibar, air conditioning, coffee/tea facilities in all rooms

A small hotel with six rooms, each featuring a fully equipped kitchen. It offers a varied and tasty breakfast. The hotel is in the centre of Pisa, on the Arno riverbank, within walking distance of Palazzo Blu and other city attractions.

Hotel Maria

- Address: Via Pietro Mascagni 24, 56125 Pisa
- Tel: +39 050 42596
- Free Wi-Fi, parking, family rooms, breakfast, minibar, air conditioning

A family-friendly hotel located 120 metres from Pisa's train station. The staff is friendly and attentive, and the hotel offers tasty breakfasts with pastries. There are various rooms accommodating between one and four people, along with a lovely inner courtyard. However, soundproofing and air conditioning might be an issue. Overall, this is a good option if you are travelling by train.

HIGH-END HOTELS

Turchese Suite

- Address: Via Ettore Sighieri 29, 56127 Pisa
- Entire apartment, free Wi-Fi, non-smoking rooms, private bathroom, kitchen, balcony, air conditioning, terrace

Another cosy apartment, slightly smaller than the previous one. It has two bedrooms and accommodates up to four people. Clean, spacious, and comfortable. The Leaning Tower of Pisa is a ten-minute walk away. The hosts are very friendly and responsive, and the check-in and check-out process is quick and easy. There is a small patio terrace. Unfortunately, this apartment is not available for direct booking, but you can easily find it on booking websites.

WHERE TO EAT IN PISA

BUDGET OPTIONS

I Porci Comodi

- Address: Piazza Torricelli 6, Piazza Dante 8, 56126, Pisa, Italy
- Tel: +39 392 989 3706

This popular spot in Pisa is a shining example of street food establishments. Tuscan cuisine predominates. Prices start from €3.00. Excellent quality ingredients and friendly staff. The meat and cheese boards and seafood dishes are particularly delicious. Please note that the space is small, so the wait might be long during peak hours.

We Love Pasta

- Address: Largo del Parlascio 7/8, 56126, Pisa, Italy
- Tel: +39 050 873 3227

Another vibrant representation of street food. As the name suggests, this establishment focuses on pasta. It offers fresh, homemade pasta prepared in the Pisan tradition, as well as fresh carpaccio, tuna, salmon, salads by the chef, vegan and vegetarian options, chicken, seafood, and cheese. Prices start from €5.00.

La Taverna di Pulcinella

- Address: Via Garofani 10, 56125, Pisa, Italy
- Tel: +39 050 520 2704

A popular and affordable pizzeria in the centre of Pisa. Prices start from €4.00. High-quality ingredients. The dough is made in-house, following Neapolitan tradition. A rich selection of options and recipes, including vegetarian and vegan pizzas. It’s best to book a table in advance during peak times.

MID-RANGE OPTIONS

La Cantina di Tipì

- Address: Via l'Arancio 48, 56126, Pisa, Italy
- Tel: +39 338 470 9198

A cosy restaurant in the centre with tables both inside and outside. Prices for dishes range from €10.00 to €36.00. Please note that only two people work in the restaurant, so wait times might be longer during peak hours. The dishes are delicious, offering traditional home cooking. A good selection of wines. Mr Garavelli is warm and welcoming.

Trattoria S. Omobono

- Address: Via L'arancio 23, 56126, Pisa, Italy
- Tel: +39 050 991 4244

Trattoria S. Omobono is located in the historic centre of Pisa, near Knights' Square. The restaurant is renowned for its traditional Italian dishes, including pasta, seafood, and meat. The menu often changes according to the season and availability of fresh ingredients. The atmosphere is cosy, and the staff is friendly and professional. Large and delicious portions. Please note that you might need to reserve a table.

Triclinium Taverna Romana

- Address: Piazza S. Omobono 6, 56126, Pisa, Italy
- Tel: +39 050 540847

The restaurant offers authentic dishes from Roman cuisine in a cosy and traditional setting. The menu includes a variety of pasta, meat, and fish dishes, as well as delectable desserts. The owner personally manages the restaurant and greets guests. He is an amazing chef and a great conversationalist. The dishes are very tasty and are made from fresh ingredients, providing fully homemade, rustic food.

HIGH-END OPTIONS

V Beny

- Address: Piazza Chiara Gambacorti 22, 56125, Pisa, Italy
- Tel: +39 050 25067

A cosy and authentic restaurant in Pisa that offers magnificent dishes from Mediterranean and Italian cuisine, prepared with the freshest ingredients. Special daily dishes often appear on the menu, based on the availability of particularly fresh products or the seafood catch. The wine list is impressive. A unique feature of this place is the skill of the owner or waiter in describing the dishes: Their presentations are so convincing that you'll want to try each one. The restaurant is known for its rare wines and dishes, cosy atmosphere, and impeccable service. Reservations are recommended, as it is a popular spot.

MUSEUMS OF PISA

BLU Palazzo d'Arte e Cultura

Address: Lungarno Gambacorti, 9, 56125 Pisa
Tel: + 39 0509 16950
Price:
Full: €5.00
Conventions and groups: €3.00
School groups: €3.00
Family: €9.00

Egyptological Collections "Edda Bresciani"

Address: Via S. Frediano, 12, 56126 Pisa
Tel: +39050598647
Price:
Full: €2.50
Children: €2.00
Family: €5.00

Piazza del Duomo: Cattedrale di Pisa, Battistero di San Giovanni, Torre di Pisa

A few words of advice before you buy your ticket:

For the Cathedral

Admission to the cathedral is with a free pass. If you buy any ticket, you get a free pass to visit the cathedral, not subjected to a fixed time. The fixed-time free passes for visiting just the cathedral are limited in number and available exclusively from the on-site ticket offices. Free admission without ticket is available only for disabled visitors with their helper and for visitors under the age of 11 if accompanied by an adult. Valid ID or proof of entitlement required (Italian or English).

The cathedral is a place of worship and prayer. Visitors are asked to dress and behave appropriately, respecting both the place and the people. Shawls made through an environmental sustainability and job placement project are on sale in the bookshops inside the two museums. Explanations to groups of six or more visitors can be made only with radio guides, out of respect for the silence that the sacred space requires. During Masses and special ceremonies: visitors have access to a limited area, cameras cannot be used, and guides and escorts can not give explanations.

For the Tower

Reduced-price tickets are not available.
Admission is free only for disabled visitors with their adult helper, upon presentation of suitable certification (Italian or English) to the cashier. On the site only. Due to the fixed quota and considerable influx of visitors, availability is limited to the time slots before 10:00 and after 18:00 (if the closing is 20:00), 17:00 (if the closing is 19:00), or 16:00 (if the closing is 18:00). Please contact via email at accessibility@opapisa.it at least five days in advance. Means of facilitating the free visit will be communicated.
For safety reasons, children who will not have turned eight by the end of the current year are not permitted to enter. Those under 18 must be accompanied by an adult. ID may be requested to certify the age.
Your ticket is valid on the day and at the time specified. Please check the time of your visit. If you are late, you will not be allowed in, and you will not receive a refund. Handbags/bags/luggage must be left at the cloakroom before the visit and picked up at the end of the visit.
The visit takes about 30 minutes. The climb is on foot, and there are 251 steps.
The staff will welcome visitors with a brief description of the history of the tower.

Warning!
The visit is not recommended for people with cardiovascular and muscular disorders.
The floor is uneven and slippery.

For the Baptistery, Camposanto, Sinopie Museum, or Opera del Duomo Museum (temporary exhibition)

The ticket is valid from the chosen date (not before) for one year if open and during the opening time.
Free admission without ticket only for disabled visitors with their helper and for visitors under the age of 11 if accompanied by an adult. Valid ID or proof of entitlement required (Italian or English).

Audioguide for visits to the Opera del Duomo Museum

Tickets can be purchased online, at the on-site ticket offices, or at the museum. A sanitised device with disposable earphone can be collected at the museum entrance by providing the ticket and document. The service is available only when the museum is open. Ninety minutes of audio, 55 listening points, five languages (Italian, English, French, German and Spanish). There are 26 rooms in which to discover sculptures, sacred vestments, inlays, liturgical furnishings, and other authentic works from the Piazza del Duomo.

Price:

Comprehensive ticket for all sites and tower: €27.00
Comprehensive ticket for all sites without tower: €11.00
Cathedral and tower: €20.00
Cathedral and baptistery: €8.00
Cathedral and Camposanto: €8.00
Cathedral and Opera Museum: €8.00
Sophia Cathedral and Sinopie Museum: €8.00

DROP EVERYTHING AND GO TO SAN GIMIGNANO



Why not? Cities can be exhausting, and big cities even more so. If you share my view, I have an interesting proposal. You might have heard of this town if you have been planning your trip to Tuscany in advance. To be honest, San Gimignano is not hidden from anyone, including persistent bloggers. However, of course, we will approach this place with insight, as true travellers, rather than a crowd with smartphones.

This little town is located a mere hour and a half's drive from Pisa along the SGC Firenze-Pisa-Livorno. It is perched on a hill overlooking the picturesque Val d'Elsa valley and is home to just 7,500 people. Once, in the 3rd century BC, an Etruscan settlement stood where San Gimignano lies today, and at the decline of the Roman Empire, the nearby slopes of Poggio del Comune became favoured by Germanic-speaking Lombards. The latter built a flourishing village called Castelvecchio nearby, and it thrived until the 14th century. This beleaguered settlement was devastated by the plague in 1348 and "finished off" by an earthquake in 1450. After this, the few surviving peasants permanently left their native hills. Today, the only reminders of Castelvecchio are the foundations of residential buildings lost in dense thickets of stone oaks and the roofless ancient church of Saints Frediano and Giovanni.

The first mention of the village called San Gimignano dates back to the early 10th century. Its location foretold prosperity from the very beginning: The famous Via Francigena – the "Road of the Franks" – ran through this village, connecting Rome with Western and Northern Europe (Canterbury). Even today, thousands of pilgrims travel this route to pay homage to the relics of the Eternal City. In particular, in the 990s, the village of "Sancte Gemiane" is mentioned in the notes of an anonymous chronicler who travelled the "Road of the Franks" from England to Rome and back with Archbishop Sigeric of Canterbury, thus documenting the entire journey of the primate of England.

Likely, before the 10th century, the settlement at the site of modern San Gimignano was called Silvio, and it was renamed in honour of Saint Geminianus, the bishop of Modena (312-397). This is because, according to legend, he prevented the devastation of these lands by the Huns in the 4th century. (Note that there are no references to this in any sources other than the life of Saint Geminianus: Almost all the bishop's activity was focused on combating heretics and a single episode of the miraculous healing of the daughter of the Roman Emperor Jovian.)

Either way, Saint Geminianus, or San Gimignano, is revered as the heavenly patron and protector of the town that now bears his name.

For a long time, the town remained under the control of the bishops of Volterra and thrived thanks to the pilgrims who passed through and traded with nearby cities. By 998, San Gimignano was surrounded by a

defensive wall, which included, among other things, the hill of Montestaffoli, where a fortress of the same name was built in the 14th century; it still stands today. When the route of the Via Francigena changed and began to bypass San Gimignano, the local authorities decided to create their own trade route, which, since then, connected the fortified town with Siena, located 40 kilometres (24 miles) away. This allowed the town to maintain its economic status and, by the end of the 12th century, achieve independence from the Volterran episcopacy. Thus, it formed its own municipality.



The products that San Gimignano produced (primarily saffron) were supplied to the major city-republics (Pisa, Genoa, and Lucca). From there, they reached France, the Netherlands, and England, as well as the Middle East and North Africa. During that time, San Gimignano had already acquired all the characteristics of a classic Italian city-state, including an aristocracy divided into Guelph and Ghibelline factions: The supporters of the pope were traditionally led by the Ardinghelli family, while the supporters of the emperor were from the Salvucci lineage. However, the advantage for most of history remained on the side of the Ghibellines. Only once, in 1255, was their monopoly briefly

interrupted by the Florentine Guelphs who captured the town. By 1261, San Gimignano had regained its independence and acquired new, stronger defensive walls in place of the old ones that the Florentines destroyed.



Jacques François Carabain. Square in San Gimignano, 1917

Interestingly, on May 8, 1300, the great Dante Alighieri arrived in San Gimignano as an ambassador for the Guelph League. He had been a supporter of the Guelphs and Ghibellines in his native Florence (a fact for which the father of modern literary Italian was punished with eternal exile from Florence).

Like the patricians in other Tuscan cities, the main way for the aristocrats of San Gimignano to showcase their wealth was through the construction of tall towers. These were attached to palazzos or stood alone as the family residences of merchant families who quickly became affluent from trading with their neighbours. However, unlike in Florence, Pisa, Lucca, and Siena, this "hobby" of the San Gimignano signori went somewhat beyond the usual "entertainment for the rich." Ultimately, the small, fortified town atop a hill became a true medieval Manhattan (it would be more accurate to say that Manhattan is a modern San Gimignano), completely built up with tower houses, the tallest of which was and remains the 54-metre (177 feet) Torre Grossa. At the peak of its economic power, San Gimignano boasted 72 "skyscrapers," of which only 25 remained by the 16th century. Just 14 have survived to

this day. Thanks to this obsession of the local nobility, the town became known during the Renaissance as the "City of Beautiful Towers."

In the mid-14th century, the town was ravaged by the plague and the ensuing famine. This left the local authorities with no means of resisting Florence's desire to acquire San Gimignano. Thus, the small but proud fortified town permanently lost its independence. Contrary to expectations, joining Florence marked the beginning of an economic and cultural renaissance for San Gimignano: In the ensuing centuries, Florentine masters such as the Memmi brothers, Benozzo Gozzoli, Domenico Ghirlandaio, and Piero del Pollaiolo worked here. Nevertheless, the town's significance as a trading centre rapidly declined. Thus, the impoverished patricians – the owners of the famous towers – left San Gimignano. (The population was further reduced by two more plagues that swept through the town in 1464 and 1631.) When no one was left to finance large construction projects or commission a new tower, the town became "frozen in time." This is why San Gimignano is a rare example of a town that has changed little since the late Middle Ages.



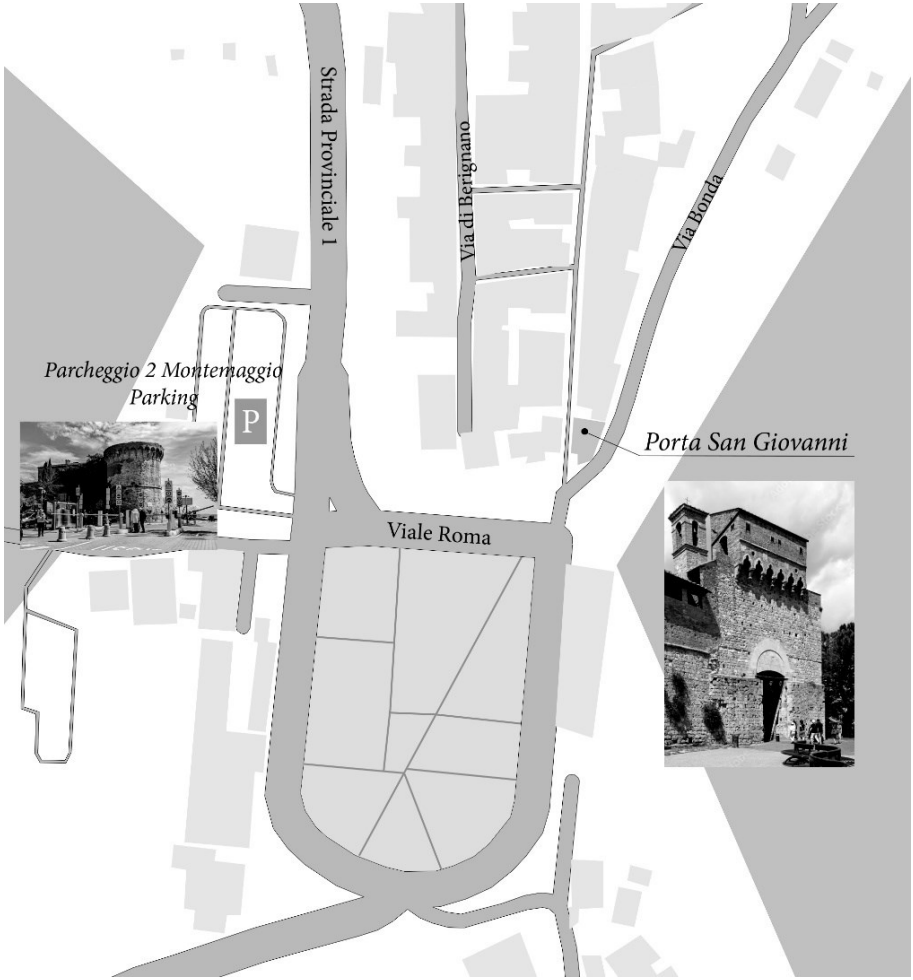
Self-portrait of Benozzo Gozzoli. Detail of the fresco "Procession of the Magi" from the Chapel of the Magi in Florence.

Over time, San Gimignano was demoted to the status of a village, and the road to it became overgrown and forgotten. It was remembered only in 1860 when a plebiscite was held in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany

regarding the state's annexation to the Kingdom of Piedmont and Sardinia. (This was the first stage in the formation of a unified Kingdom of Italy.) In that plebiscite, out of 2275 eligible voters, more than half (1153) voted against unification, but their opinion proved insignificant in the overall tally. Thus, in 1861, San Gimignano, like the entire former Grand Duchy of Tuscany, became part of Italy. Sixty years later, under Mussolini's fascist government, the historic centre of the town, miraculously preserved intact since the medieval period, was protected from any alterations and renovations by a special preservation law that remains in effect to this day. In 1990, San Gimignano was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is worth noting, however, that during World War II, the fortified town was not spared from Allied bombings: American aviators struck San Gimignano several times on market days in 1943, resulting in the destruction of the bell on the Torre Grossa, the collapse of part of the cathedral, and the loss of a residential building. Fortunately, these were the only war-related damages that the town endured.

Today, San Gimignano is known for two things: its towers and its ice cream. We will now discuss both in more detail.

SAINT JOHN'S GATE (PORTA SAN GIOVANNI)



Our journey through the city that forgot about time should begin precisely here, even if we are arriving from Pisa and approaching San Gimignano from the north. It is quite easy to bypass this little town, especially given that a convenient parking area is located by the southern gate.

Arguably, the main and most majestic entrance to San Gimignano, welcoming anyone who travelled along the Via Francigena from Siena, is the Gate of Saint John. This cannot be called overly ancient (its

construction was completed in 1262 when the town slightly expanded and was enclosed by a new ring of walls), yet, over nearly eight centuries, it has changed very little. The only notable alteration came in 1922 when the protruding nave of the church Madonna dei Lumi, which once stood behind the gate and obstructed half of the already narrow street of San Giovanni, was removed. Speaking of this church, it once housed a panel depicting the "Madonna with Child and Two Angels," created by one of San Gimignano's most famous artists, Sebastiano Mainardi. He worked in the workshop of his sister's husband, Domenico Ghirlandaio, whose influence is distinctly evident in Mainardi's works. This panel is now exhibited in the Pinacoteca Civica, the largest art museum in San Gimignano. Interestingly, another work by this master can be found not far from the gate; on Via San Giovanni, to your right, in the wall of the building numbered 45, just before Hotel Beloggiorno, you will see a tabernacle hidden behind glass in the wall of a residential building. It contains a fresco by Sebastiano Mainardi titled "Madonna with Child and Saint Bishop."



REMAINS OF THE CHURCH OF SAINT FRANCIS (FACCIATA DELLA CHIESA DI SAN FRANCESCO)

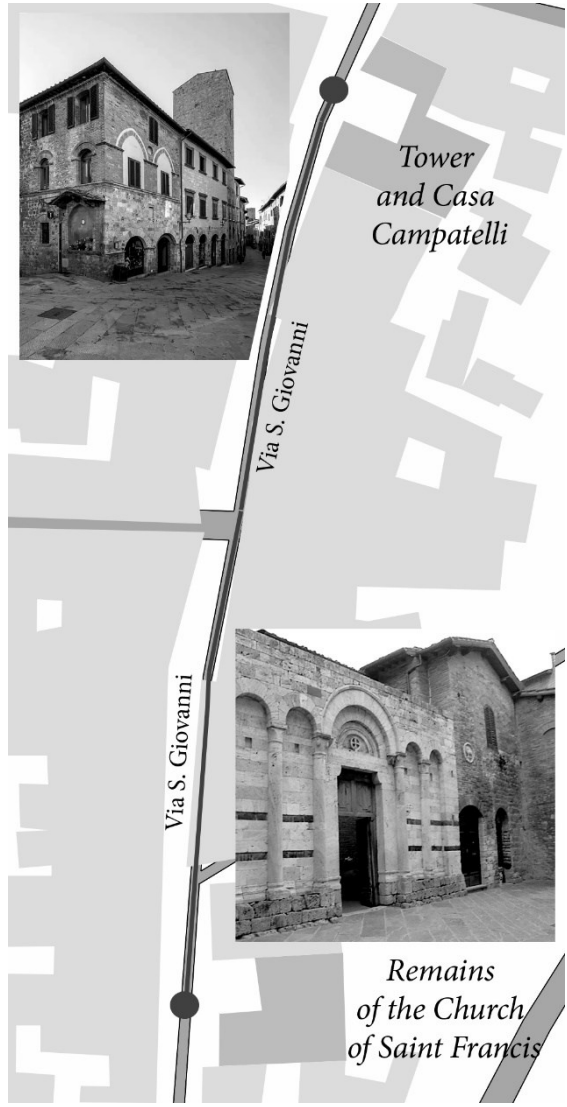


You will encounter this shortly after you begin your journey down San Giovanni Street. It will be on your right, nestled in a small recess relative to the other buildings on the street. You will immediately recognise it by its travertine facade in the classic Pisan-Luccan style. (Sounds quite impressive, doesn't it?) The truth is, there is no longer any church here, as otherwise, a cross would be towering above the facade. In 1787, a certain Salvatorelli bought the church's remaining structure, which had been left after the dissolution and closure of the Monastic Order of Saint John, and – despite his surname, which derives from the Italian word "Salvatore" (meaning "Saviour") – demolished the house of worship. He left only the facade, albeit a partially preserved one, missing its upper portion, whose original look can only be speculated upon. (For example, the Maltese cross above the door in the main portal was not there originally; it was found in a neighbouring garden and placed here solely due to the church's connection with the

Knights of Saint John). The church originated here in the 13th century when, in this part of San Gimignano, a priory of the Hospitalers of Saint John was established. This military-monastic organisation of crusader knights had, since 1099, been dedicated to protecting Christian pilgrims travelling to the Holy Land to pay homage at the Holy Sepulchre. Thanks to this order, both the street and the Gate of Saint John (San Giovanni) received their names.

As they approached death, many noble citizens of that era preferred to bequeath their property – either wholly or partially – to the church or to monastic brotherhoods like that of Saint John. This practice served as the foundation for the wealth of these institutions, and the Church of Saint Francis was no exception; by the early 14th century, when San Gimignano faced its first economic crisis due to the change in the route of the Via Francigena and a decrease in the number of pilgrims passing through the town, the community of the Church of Saint Francis was harvesting 60 maggio (approximately 9,234 kg or 20,357 pounds) of wheat from its lands. This excellent income allowed the community to maintain its prosperity even after the plague epidemic. In the 15th century, the church had a total of six altars, commissioned by patrician families living nearby, such as the Ridolfi, whose palazzo adjoins the church on the right. However, by the 16th century, the brotherhood was impoverished and initially placed under the control of the influential Florentine family Buondelmonti. Later, it was sold to Franciscan monks who "reconsecrated" the church in honour of Saint Francis in 1553. Just 20 years later, according to ecclesiastical records, only three monks and a lay brother were associated with the former Hospital of Saint John. Naturally, this gradual decline led the city authorities to abolish and sell the Church of Saint Francis, which they did in 1782. We already know the rest of its history.

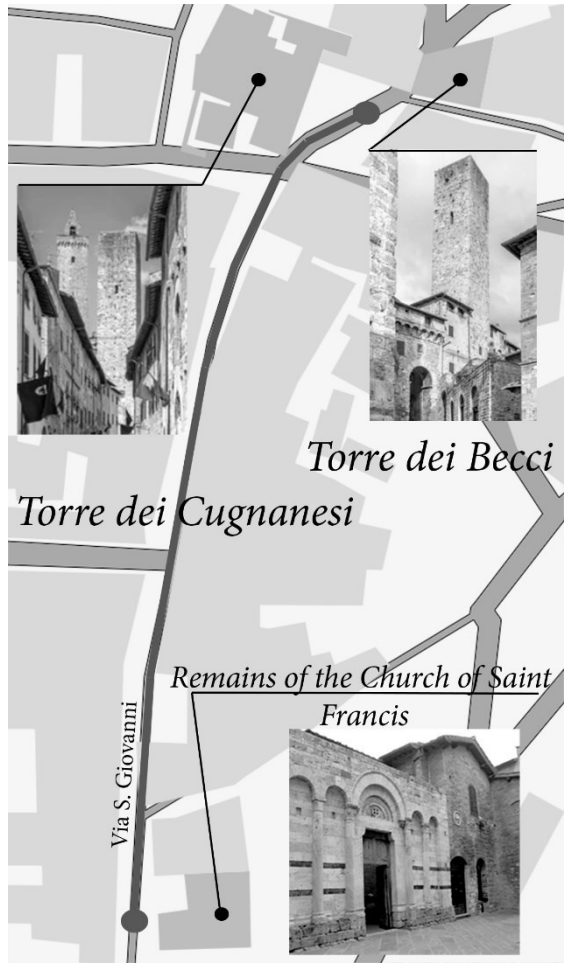
TOWER AND CASA CAMPATELLI (TORRE E CASA CAMPATELLI)



On this side of the street lies the only tower in San Gimignano that was originally intended to be completely hollow inside and that has survived to this day in pristine form: the 28-metre (98 feet and 10 inches) Campatelli Tower, adjacent to the palazzo of the same name. It belonged to the Campatelli family (who became wealthy by trading alabaster) from the 19th century until 2005. In their honour, the medieval palazzo and tower that they purchased on San Giovanni Street were renamed. Having reached the peak of its fame at the end of the 19th century, the family gradually declined after World War II. At the beginning of this century, the last representative – Lidia Campatelli – agreed to transfer her family estate to the Italian Environmental Fund (FAI) on the condition that the palazzo be turned into a public museum. Today, the museum preserves the extensive heritage of this vanished San

Gimignano family and welcomes visitors every day except Monday, from 10:30 to 18:30. In addition to a unique collection of furniture and everyday items that made up the lives of the urban patricians of San Gimignano in the late 19th century, you can explore the untouched Torre dei Campatelli, which has remained unchanged since the 12th century. Strangely enough, for the "City of Beautiful Towers," this is considered a unique opportunity, as most of the medieval skyscrapers in San Gimignano are closed to the public.

TORRE DEI CUGNANESI AND TORRE DEI BECCI

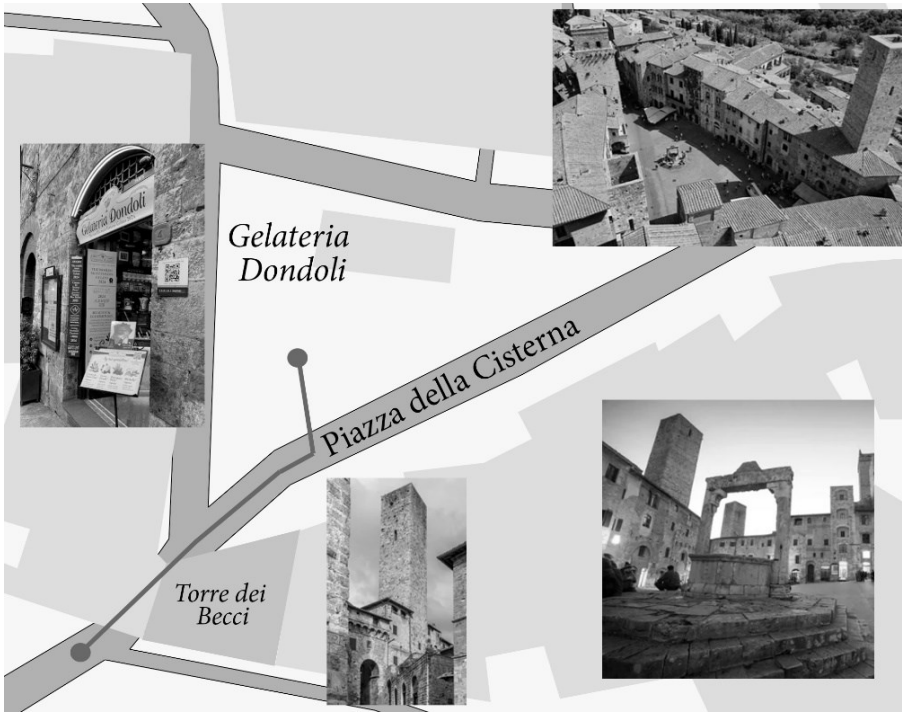


One of the tallest towers in San Gimignano is located at the end of San Giovanni Street; it becomes clearly visible when you reach the souvenir shop "Volpini." The second tower, slightly behind, to the left of Torre dei Cugnanesi, is the previously mentioned Torre Grossa. Indeed, it is the tallest tower in San Gimignano.

As you approach Torre dei Cugnanesi, you will find yourself in a small square from which a small remnant of San Giovanni Street leads to a high archway – Arco dei Becci – that resembles a fortress. This arch, along with the building to which it belongs and the tower in front of us, is part of an ancient palazzo Cugnanesi – named, as one might guess, after the family that owned it. In ancient times, when the Via Francigena still passed through San Gimignano, the boundary of the fortified town was here, and Arco dei Becci served as the main city gate – a role later taken over by the Gate of Saint John. When the town was just beginning to expand, the wealthy merchant family Cugnanesi seized the unoccupied territory without

delay and purchased the ancient bastion near the city gates from the municipality. They transformed it into their palazzo and "established" themselves here by erecting a tower that barely fell short of Torre Grossa. (Such was the law, as it was forbidden to build higher than this tower.) On the right, the ancient gate is connected to another tower: Torre dei Becci – also, of course, named after the noble San Gimignano merchant family. (The ancient city gates were later renamed in their honour.)

PIAZZA DELLA CISTERNA AND THE MOST DELICIOUS ICE CREAM IN THE WORLD.



We arrive at it as soon as we pass through the Arco dei Becci. Unlike most cities in Tuscany, which were founded during the Roman era and built according to a uniform plan (with two main streets – the cardo and decumanus – crossing at the centre, where a forum or main market square was established), San Gimignano had its own "coordinates": The ancient Via Francigena and the trade route connecting Pisa with Siena intersected right here. Therefore, when the town began to transform into a fortress, the decision was made to create a central market square at this location. The name it acquired – Piazza della Cisterna (literally meaning "Well Square") – comes from the reservoir of drinking water that was constructed beneath it in 1273, following ancient Roman models. It still lies beneath our feet: Its "lid" is a hexagon capped by an ancient well

situated at the centre of the triangular square. If you look closely at the well itself, you can easily see the coat of arms on either side, consisting of a ladder enclosed in a pear-shaped shield. This coat of arms belonged to the Malavolti family, one of whose members, Guccio, initiated the well's construction while serving as podestà of San Gimignano in 1346. When you stand next to it, take three steps to climb the worn and moss-covered steps, and glance at these three corners, at the backs of the towers, at the faded yet still elegant tapestry of facades, at the herringbone-patterned brick pavement, you will want to take a moment to consider that, over the past 700 years, this square has hardly changed. Everything that Dante did not see upon arriving in San Gimignano in 1300 – a single tower and the well that now falls outside your view – is the same. If we disregard the tourists looking at the town through the screens of their smartphones and, of course, the cafe and bank signs, we can view the town through the eyes of the author of the "Divine Comedy." This is the unique charm of San Gimignano, which for half a millennium was lost in the chestnut groves of its remote hills.



Signior Dondoli with dame Maggie Smith and dame Judi Dench

Besides Dante, this square brought together names that are more chronologically relevant to us: Franco Zeffirelli, Judi Dench, Maggie

Smith, Andrea Bocelli, Alexander Solzhenitsyn. All of them found themselves in San Gimignano for various reasons, but each of them surely visited Piazza della Cisterna and, while there, undoubtedly stopped by "Gelateria Dondoli" – an ice cream café that requires no introduction to anyone who has heard even a little about Tuscan gastronomy. According to many people whose authority is much stronger and more indisputable than that of your humble servant, the ice cream of Signor Sergio Dondoli is the best on the planet. It is therefore surprising just how unassuming his café is: It can easily be found almost in the middle of the isosceles triangle that is Piazza della Cisterna when viewed from above. A modest sign bearing the owner's surname discreetly states, in small print, that this café was the "Gelato World Champion for 2006/2007 and 2008/2009." This, rest assured, is just a small part of Signor Dondoli's accolades. Grapefruit and sparkling Vernaccia wine, gorgonzola with walnuts, ricotta and Tuscan fig from Carmignano, pumpkin cream with milk chocolate, creamy Grand Marnier cream, and the signature Crema de' Pazzi (named after the famous Florentine noble family that you know very well if you have already travelled through Florence with my guide): all of this is just a small part of the incredible pleasure that Sergio Dondoli offers to visitors in his café on Piazza della Cisterna. I must admit that my acquaintance with San Gimignano and Tuscany as a whole began with "Gelateria Dondoli": I learned about this café at the age of five or six – long before I had heard of Raphael, Dante, Gozzoli, and Filippo Lippi and perhaps even before I had learned to pinpoint Tuscany on a world map. In a sense, Dondoli and his ice cream are to blame for the fact that you are now reading my guide to the "Cities of Art."



Franco Zeffirelli during the filming of «Tea with Mussolini»

Torre del Diavolo and Palazzo dei Cortesi

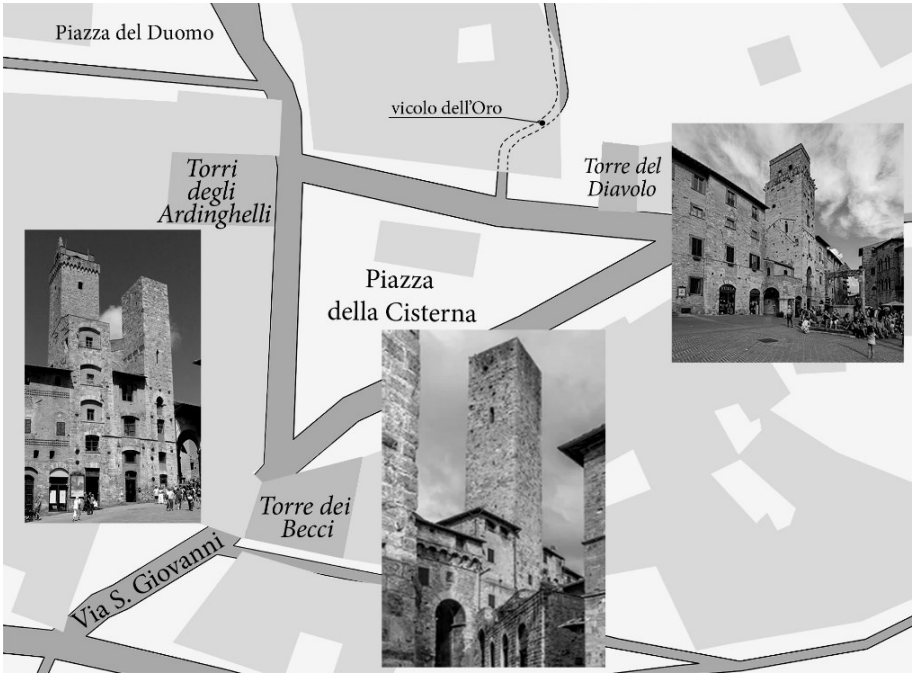


The Cortesi family is believed to have originated from Pavia, but it reached the height of its wealth and influence in San Gimignano. Members of this family established themselves firmly within the local aristocracy and, of course, seized the first opportunity to adorn their palazzo with a tower facing Piazza della Cisterna. This tower is hard to miss: It dominates the square, crowned with a row of orphaned supports from a long-vanished loggia that once encircled the upper part of the tower. The exact year of its construction has been lost somewhere between the 13th and 14th centuries, which only fuels the vivid imagination of romantic Tuscans, who gave this tower such a foreboding name: the "Devil's Tower."

The legend, which any San Gimignanese will gladly recount to you, tells of one of the heads of the Cortesi family who, having left town for

several years due to his trading business, returned home and did not recognise the tower that he had erected at his palazzo; he was sure that, upon his departure from San Gimignano, it had been significantly shorter. Unable to find a rational explanation for his false memories, Signor Cortesi attributed this marvel to the designs of dark forces. Since then, it has been customary to refer to his tower as the "Devil's Tower." In the absence of alternatives, we, too, must take this tale at face value.
The only thing we know for certain from the history of this tower is that through the portal on the first floor, one could enter a narrow alley where goldsmiths' shops were located. They crafted the finest sheets of precious metal, which were later used to create decorative panels in ecclesiastical art. The entrance to this alley now lies slightly to the left; in memory of this fact, it is called "Gold" (vicolo dell'Oro).

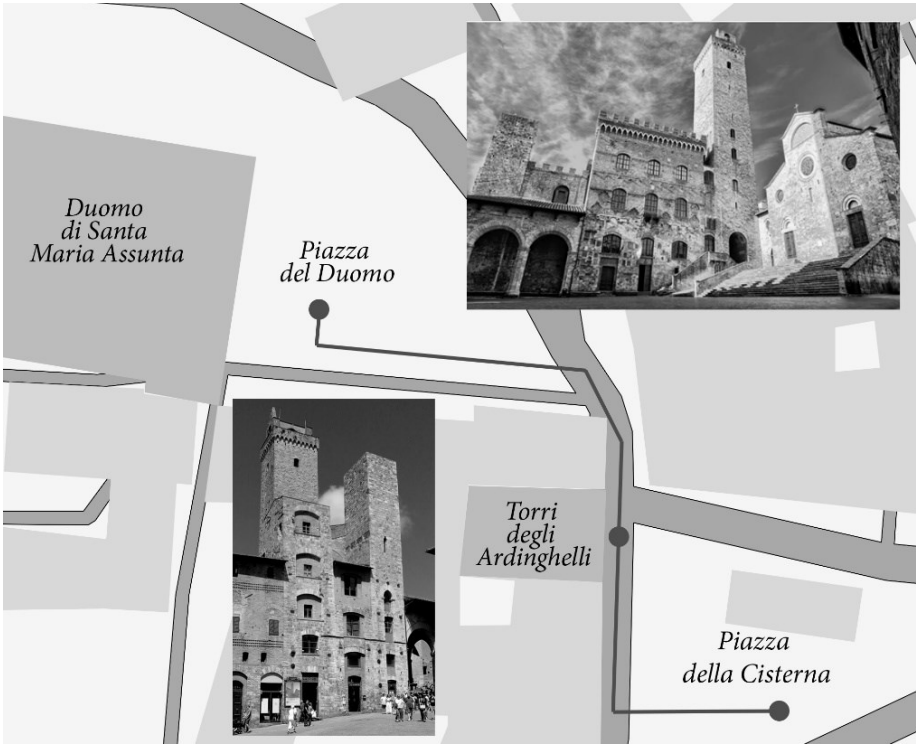
TORRI DEGLI ARDINGHELLI



At the point where Piazza della Cisterna "merges" into Piazza del Duomo stand the towers of the Ardinghelli family: one of the two most powerful families in medieval San Gimignano. Once, they led the city's Ghibelline faction – the supporters of the Holy Roman Emperor in his long conflict with the pope over the supremacy of authority. (You are already well aware of this conflict if you have travelled through Florence and Pistoia with my guide.) The Ardinghellis' main rivals, their sworn enemies, were the Salvucci – leaders of the Guelphs, that is, supporters of the pope. Their opposition was Shakespearean in its drama and, as is customary in Tuscany, passed down from generation to generation as a cherished family tradition. This rivalry manifested itself – apart from the inevitable mutual assassinations, street fights, and constant attempts to ruin each other's businesses – in the construction of towers. Given that San Gimignano is not an exceptionally large town, these sworn enemies became close

neighbours: The Salvucci towers stand almost directly opposite the Ardinghelli towers on Piazza del Duomo.
When the Salvucci dared to violate the existing ban on tower construction in San Gimignano by building a tower exceeding the 52-metre (170.7 feet) height of the torre del Podestà, the Ardinghelli responded by constructing their tower one metre (3.3 feet) taller. The city's ruler (podestà) attempted to object, but because the Salvucci and Ardinghelli held, in effect, all the economic power over San Gimignano, he could do little to impede their sharp desire to compete over tower heights. Instead, he merely, like the United Nations, expressed the "utmost concern" over the events. Thus, until the second half of the 19th century, the heights of the two Ardinghelli towers, adjoining the covered loggia on Piazza del Duomo, slightly exceeded the height of the bell tower of Palazzo Vecchio del Podestà. In 1870, for stability reasons, the city authorities decided to "reduce" it by nearly two-thirds. Nevertheless, when the Mussolini government declared the historic centre of San Gimignano exempt from alterations, except for conservation and restoration, the municipality was compelled to restore the tower, but this time in accordance with the ancient law: to a height not exceeding that of the Torre del Podestà.
The second Ardinghelli tower, to the left of the first, was originally named the Torre dei Pillari in honour of another noble merchant family that was part of the Ardinghelli consortium and that, through several dynastic marriages in the mid-13th century, merged with them. As a sign of their family union, in the 1280s, the Ardinghelli connected their tower to the Torre dei Pillari with a bridge whose traces can now be seen in the notches above the roof of the gallery joining these towers. Subsequently, both towers became known as Torri degli Ardinghelli. The name endures to this day, although the family itself has long since vanished.

PIAZZA DEL DUOMO



Tea with Mussolini" was the first film by Franco Zeffirelli that I watched. Despite the mixed reviews of this penultimate work by one of the greatest Italian directors (who was, of course, primarily a Florentine), I regard the film as an earnest and tender confession of love for one's homeland, delivered by a genius creator. This film leaves a pleasant aftertaste, like that of the berry soda your mother always bought you from the vending machine when you went shopping in town together: something sweet, yet catching in your throat like a lump, something from those distant times in your life when colours were brighter, the world was bigger, and people seemed kinder than they were in reality.

The most touching moment in this film, in my opinion, was the scene in which the British ladies, recently kept under house arrest in San Gimignano and portrayed by Maggie Smith, Judi Dench, Joan Plowright,

and others, shield the Salvucci towers on Piazza del Duomo with their delicate backs, silly hats, knitted jackets, and skirts, thereby saving them from destruction by the retreating German forces. Clinging to the fire hose with which the Wehrmacht soldiers had encircled the Salvucci towers, the elderly women delay for time until the arrival of a Scottish Highland regiment in the town. “You have no right to blow up these towers,” asserts Maggie Smith's character, shaking her finger in front of the German officer’s face. When the Wehrmacht soldiers finally leave San Gimignano, the camera takes a wide shot, and we see these small, unassuming, yet brave women along with the eternity they have saved and the ringing bell of Torre del Podestà. Sometimes, if you want to witness a miracle, you must become that miracle yourself.

As you might have guessed, it was during the filming of this movie that Dame Maggie Smith and Dame Judi Dench first visited Gelateria Dondoli. And there stand the very towers to which the English ladies almost tethered themselves with that fire hose. Those towers have been here since the 13th century. They are right there, just behind the passage between the eight-windowed house and the staircase of the Cathedral of San Gimignano, in which the heroines of Franco Zeffirelli carefully filled sandbags against the fresco depicting Saint Fina as they prepared for bombing and street fighting. Let’s start our exploration from this church.



Franco Zeffirelli and dame Judi Dench

CATHEDRAL OF SANTA MARIA ASSUNTA



The first church on this site appeared as early as the 10th century, but, of course, it took on its current appearance only in the mid-12th century, when San Gimignano was already an important trading centre on the route from Pisa to Siena. It was then, on November 21, 1148, that Pope Eugene III, in the presence of the 14 prelates accompanying him, consecrated the new cathedral church of Saint Gimignano on the square, which soon acquired the classic nickname "Piazza del Duomo." Naturally, the relics of the patron saint of the fortress town were solemnly transferred here and remain in the basilica to this day.

Over the 13th to 15th centuries, this church was enriched with new frescoes and sculptures. In 1257, the master Nicoletto da Poggibonsi created a new baptismal font for the church, while in 1264, the city municipality allocated funds to the master Ranieri da Colle for the construction of the large main staircase, which we still climb today to reach the gates of the temple.

The unusual and somewhat rough appearance of the cathedral's façade is due to the fact that, until the end of the 12th century, the entrance was located on the opposite side, and the apse (the rear part of the temple) faced this square. In the mid-13th century, however, the façade was embellished with a "rose window" containing graceful stained glass. This, unfortunately, did not survive to our day: The present-day rose window was created in 2003 by the master Marcello Aitiani.



The ever-increasing holdings of the main church of San Gimignano, whose special status and privileges were confirmed by the Roman Popes Innocent IV (in 1254) and Pius II (in 1462), as well as the income from the chapels and altars within the temple itself (which belonged to the wealthy families of the patricians of San Gimignano and systematically received donations from them), allowed for the continuous



Saint Fina in a fresco by Benozzo Gozzoli from the Cathedral of San Gimignano

commissioning of new decorations for its interior. Of course, you can see all these masterpieces of the Italian Renaissance in the Church of Santa Maria Assunta even today. As soon as you enter and turn to the counter facade, you will see the frescoes of the master of the early Sienese school, Memmo di Filipuccio. Of these, two have been fully preserved and are discernible: "The Miracle of Saint Nicholas" (in which the saint is depicted giving three bags of gold to three old maidens) and "The Martyrdom of a Saint in a Boiling Cauldron." In the central inner area of this wall is the fresco "The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian" by Benozzo Gozzoli: the master whose work in the Florentine Medici Chapel we discussed in detail in the guidebook to the city of Dante and the Medici. This fresco is placed in a wooden frame decorated with images of saints. On either side of it are two wooden sculptures by another renowned master, Jacopo della Quercia, depicting the Virgin Mary Assumpta and the Archangel Gabriel. Together, they form the composition of the

"Annunciation." Both sculptures are dated 1421, and they were coloured in 1426 by the Sienese master gilder Martino di Bartolomeo di Biago.
At the very top of the counter-facade is the fresco "The Last Judgment" by Taddeo di Bartolo, dated 1393. It is one of the most famous frescoes of the cathedral church of San Gimignano. In it, Jesus appears as the judge, standing between the figures of prophets, angels, the Virgin Mary, and Saint John.
Benozzo Gozzoli also executed the paintings on the columns to the left and right of the counter-facade. They depict the Virgin Mary in Glory, Saint Bernard and Saint Augustine (on the left), and Saint Anthony Abbot, Saint Jerome, and Saint Bernardino (on the right).
The frescoes of the left nave retell the stories of the Old Testament in chronological order in a clear and colourful manner: from the creation of the world (in which the Earth is placed at the centre of the celestial disc, divided into signs of the zodiac) to Adam and Eve tasting the forbidden fruit (from this, the uppermost register, the fresco of the "Original Sin" was lost); from the partially preserved "Expulsion from Paradise" to the life of Joseph (in the middle register) and from Joseph arresting his brothers to Job being comforted by his friends (in the lower register). All these frescoes were created by the representative of the Sienese school Bartolo di Fredi in the 1360s, and most of them have survived in excellent condition.
Continuing the retelling of the Bible, the right nave illustrates the stories of the New Testament. They were worked on by the brothers Filippo and Federico Memmi: the sons of Memmo Filipucci.
The undisputed masterpieces are the frescoes of Domenico Ghirlandaio, dated 1475. You can see them in the chapel of Saint Fina – the already-known martyr who led an exceptionally modest and pious life, leaving her home only to visit the church and being paralysed at a very young age. Refusing a comfortable bed, Fina spent the rest of her life on an oak table in prayer, stoically enduring terrible pain and longing only for the separation of her soul from her frail body and its ascension to heaven, to her Saviour Jesus Christ. Fina Ciardi became so known and revered in San Gimignano, even during her lifetime, that on the day when her martyrdom ended (March 12, 1253, when she was only 15 years old), almost the entire town came to see her off on her final journey to the

cathedral church. Due to the number of pilgrims who had travelled from all over Tuscany to worship her body, the priest had to postpone the funeral and burial ceremony several times. The Catholic Church did not canonise her until 1481, but the cult of her veneration in San Gimignano was formed immediately after her death. The townspeople attributed various miracles of healing and foresight to Fina, and it was quite natural that a separate chapel was built in the cathedral church of the city to worship her. Here, her relics were placed.

Ghirlandaio's main fresco – the burial of Saint Fina – appeared in the aforementioned film, "Tea with Mussolini"; it is this chapel that the English ladies block with sandbags while trying to protect Ghirlandaio's masterpieces during the Allied army's advance toward the German-occupied city. And it is with the scene of the "opening" of the face of Saint Fina after the liberation of San Gimignano by a regiment of Scottish Highlanders that Zeffirelli's film ends: The fresco has survived, but one must rejoice quietly so as not to disturb its sleep.

PALAZZO VECCHIO DEL PODESTÀ



Situated in front of the cathedral church of Santa Maria Assunta, this palace was built in 1239 and served as the residence of the podestà – the ruler of the city – for less than a century. In 1337, it was expanded but lost its status in favour of the new podestà's palace, built on the corner of the square, to our right when we stand on the steps of the cathedral church with our backs to its façade.

Over the following centuries, this building was owned by the municipality. In 1534, the first theatre in San Gimignano opened there. It was modelled on the Florentine chamber theatres that, in the 16th century, opened in the palaces of the most prominent aristocrats and wealthy patricians. From that time to the present day, this has been the home of the Teatro dei Leggieri – perhaps not the most capacious and pompous but certainly one of the oldest theatres in Italy. Since 1794, a

whole theatrical academy has been operating on its basis, organising a baroque music festival in San Gimignano every September and an opera festival on the square in front of the theatre every summer.
The theatre's interiors have been restored several times. The most extensive of the recent restorations took place in the late 1960s after the municipality of San Gimignano repurchased the theatre. (Following World War II and until 1967, the theatre was privately owned and had been converted into a cinema.) Today, the theatre can accommodate up to 100 spectators and has perfect acoustics for chamber performances, solo shows, and readings.
The Torre Rognosa – the bell tower adjacent to the old podestà's palace and the second tallest in San Gimignano after the Torre Grossa of the new podestà's palace – rises 52 meters (170.7 feet) over the city. In 1255, the city implemented a law prohibiting the construction of towers higher than it. (Later, this law was based on the new height of the Torre Grossa, added to the new Palazzo del Podestà.) Its current name can be literally translated as the "Tower of Troubles" and is connected to the fact that after the podestà moved to the new palace, the city prison was opened inside this tower. It is quite logical to state that those who ended up in it experienced certain troubles in their lives.

PALAZZO COMUNALE (TOWN HALL)



Construction of the town hall began in 1288. However, not until 1337 did the mayor of San Gimignano – the city's podestà – first address the gathered crowd of citizens from its wooden balcony, which once rested on the now truncated corbels visible in the wall below and above the windows of the building's third floor. This balcony – or, more precisely, gallery – had a special name: the Arengo. In a broad sense, this word was used to denote any meeting place of the population with government officials. Unlike the case with the Palazzo Vecchio del Podestà, the head of the municipal government stayed in its new residence for half a millennium, "moving out" only in 1852 when the San Gimignano City Museum opened there.

In this building, in May 1300, Dante Alighieri, the future father of Italian literature, who had arrived in San Gimignano as an ambassador of the Guelph League from Florence, delivered a speech before the members

of the city council and the podestà. The hall where this speech took place has survived to the present day in almost the same form as it was when the author of the "Divine Comedy" saw it. Today, you can visit it as part of a tour of the San Gimignano Town Hall.

From the meeting hall of the general city council, where carved seats from the late 15th century still stand, you can climb to the highest tower of San Gimignano: Torre Grossa, whose entrance is marked by a 14th-century knight's helmet. At one time, the law prohibited families, cartels, and trading companies from building towers higher than the one built next to the new Palazzo del Podestà, i.e., higher than 54 meters (177.1 feet). However, as we already know, some particularly wealthy families could easily break this law.

On the second floor of the palace is a not very large but extremely interesting art gallery. There, you can see a wooden crucifix carved by one of the precursors of the Italian Renaissance (along with Cimabue): Coppo di Marcovaldo. If you have already been to Athens with my guide, you will have no trouble determining from whom the Tuscan painters of the 13th century learned: The spirit of Byzantine icon painting permeates every detail of this work of art. In addition, this gallery houses several works by Taddeo di Bartolo. Among them, the polyptych "Saint Gimignano and the Story of His Life," dedicated to the patron saint of this small but wonderful town, is of particular interest.



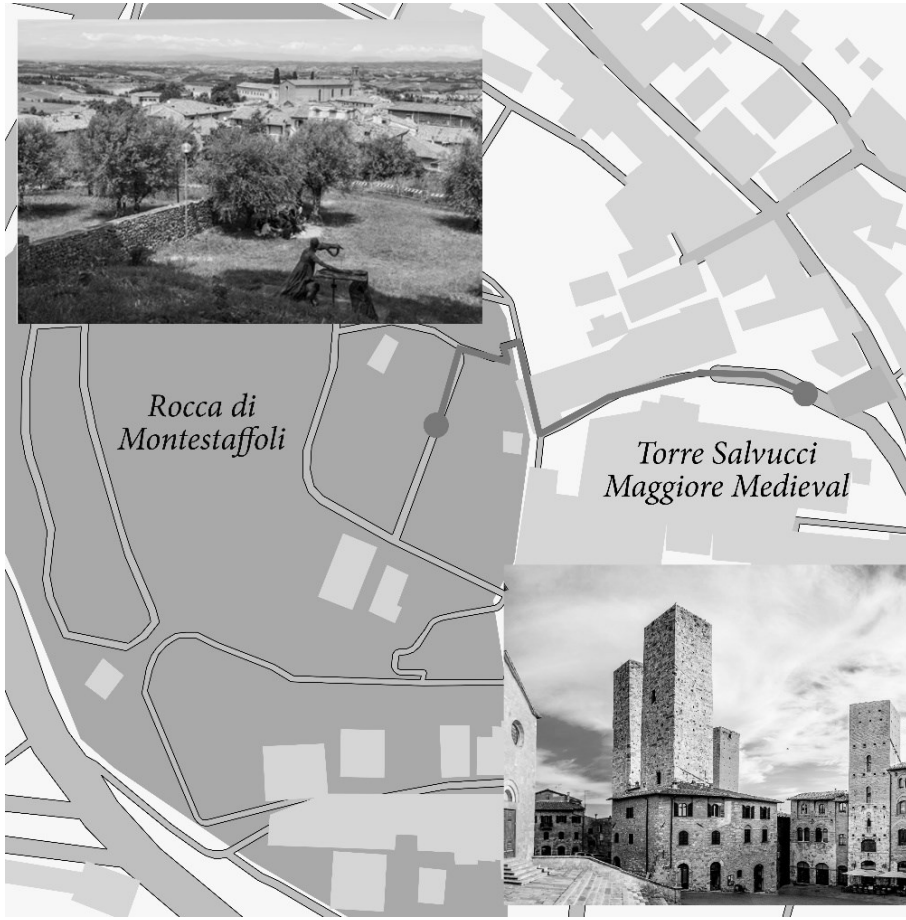
TORRI DEI SALVUCCI



The very towers "saved by English old ladies" in Franco Zeffirelli's film are just around the corner from the main staircase of the Cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta, on the second part of the Piazza del Duomo, which traditionally divides into another square: Piazza delle Erbe. Originally, both belonged to the de' Mangeri family. Through marriage, they passed to the leaders of the Guelph party, the Salvucci, whose ancient tower was nearby and was connected to the newly acquired de' Mangeri towers by a new gallery of the expanded Palazzo Salvucci. However, soon after this event, the entire noble family of the San Gimignano Guelphs almost became victims of

their own pride: In an attempt to surpass the height of their old tower with the height of the neighbouring Torre degli Ardinghelli, the Salvucci violated the city's ban and were obliged to "cut off" the extra meters of their "skyscraper." During this "reduction," the old Salvucci tower collapsed, destroying almost the entire palace of this family. Fortunately, these two towers survived the disaster and since then have remained the only towers in the possession of the wealthiest Guelph clan of San Gimignano. Moreover, the Torre Salvucci Maggiore – the tallest of the two (48 meters [157.5 feet]) – is the only inhabited one of the 14 surviving medieval towers in the town. It has 10 floors and contains exclusive apartments that you, my dear reader, can rent. (The minimum cost of staying in this tower in 2024 was €400.00 per night for the period from November to March.)

ROCCA DI MONTESTAFFOLI



A narrow street leads us directly from the Salvucci towers to the main fortress of San Gimignano: the Rocca di Montestaffoli, located on a hill that is also home to a picturesque park. From the moment of its founding and up to the "Black Death" epidemic, this fortress was under the direct ownership of the Ordinary of one of the first dioceses in Tuscany: the Bishops of Volterra. In this fortress, incidentally, was the first and, for a time, largest market in San Gimignano. It thrived thanks to the Via Francigena, which passed through these parts. When the plague devastated and almost depopulated

the city, the municipality of San Gimignano had no choice: In 1353, the fortress, together with the lands adjacent to it, including the fortress of Montestaffoli (abandoned by its inhabitants and, in fact, out of the Bishop of Volterra's control), became part of the Florentine Republic. Subsequently, there was almost no need for the fortress, which fell into decay until it was recognised as a historic monument and partially restored in the 20th century. Since then, it has become a popular place for walks among the people of San Gimignano.
In addition, part of the expanded defensive walls of San Gimignano runs here. Despite time and political circumstances, most of them are preserved to this day. This is probably the main miracle of the small town with its beautiful towers.



WHERE TO STAY IN SAN GIMIGNANO

BUDGET HOTELS

La Locanda di Quercecchio

- Address: Via di Quercecchio, 15, 53037 San Gimignano SI
- Tel: +39 3476 131891
- Free Wi-Fi, kid-friendly, family-friendly, pet-friendly, air conditioning, non-smoking rooms

The hotel is in a medieval building – reminiscent of times when a traveller needed not just a place to sleep but also protection behind sturdy walls. The rooms and common areas beautifully convey this atmosphere, while contemporary comforts are fully present. The hotel is wonderfully situated. The owner, Patricia, is very responsive and kind. Parking is available. In my opinion, this is an excellent accommodation option.

Palazzo Mari

- Address: Via S. Piero, 1, 53037 San Gimignano SI
- Tel: +39 3402 217900
- Free Wi-Fi, paid public parking nearby, pet-friendly, air conditioning, non-smoking rooms, bicycle rental

A small yet inviting hotel with only four rooms, located in a 14th-century building. The decor conveys a sense of being among the Tuscan nobility while being fully equipped with modern amenities, including a kitchen. The hotel owner is exceptionally warm and welcoming.

Hotel Leon Bianco

- Address: Piazza Della Cisterna, 13, 53037 San Gimignano SI

- Tel: +39 0577 941294
- Free Wi-Fi, paid public parking nearby, free breakfast, air conditioning, non-smoking rooms, billiards, table tennis

Staying at Hotel Leon Bianco, which has been managed by the same family for over 30 years, feels like taking a journey into the past. The hotel is situated in one of the most beautiful squares of San Gimignano's historic centre, Piazza della Cisterna, within an ancient palace surrounded by majestic medieval towers. Leon Bianco has retained the charm of its history, offering simplicity combined with exquisite taste and warm hospitality. Guests enjoy the best location in the heart of the historic centre, where they can immerse themselves in the medieval village atmosphere and explore San Gimignano, its picturesque streets, the Montestaffoli fortress, and other city wonders. Furthermore, the hotel provides convenient access to important towns in Tuscany. Guests also have the use of a jacuzzi on the terrace, a fitness room, and a billiard room.

MID-RANGE HOTELS

Hotel Sovestro

- Address: Localita Sovestro 63, 53037 San Gimignano SI
- Tel: +39 0577 943153
- Free Wi-Fi, breakfast, two pools, restaurant, air conditioning, non-smoking rooms, electric car recharge, San Gimignano shuttle, gym

An atmospheric place located 2 kilometres from the city centre. This cosy family hotel was established on a farm purchased by the great-grandfather of the current owner. The restaurant opened in 1980, and the hotel followed in 1994. The ambiance of the restaurant and the rooms allows guests to immerse themselves in the history and traditions of Tuscany. Meanwhile, everything is equipped with the latest technology, including pools, a gym, and electric car charging facilities. The hotel provides a complimentary shuttle bus to the city centre, and the rooms and terrace offer stunning views of the valley and vineyards.

Hotel L'Antico Pozzo

- Address: Via S. Matteo, 87, 53037 San Gimignano SI
- Tel: +39 057 7942014
- Free Wi-Fi, 24-hour check-in, breakfast available, non-smoking hotel, taxi service, air conditioning

Hotel L'Antico Pozzo is centrally located along Via San Matteo, within the ancient walls of the medieval old town, in a less congested part of the area, away from the daily crowds. The hotel provides a front-row seat from which to enjoy the architecture of San Gimignano with immediate access to its streets, piazzas, and churches. In addition, guests can easily retreat to the quiet intimacy of the hotel, its bar, and its private internal courtyard, where they can enjoy refreshments in a lovely setting. Palazzo Tamburini, the hotel's maternal historic family name, has been a cherished place for many years, nurturing the hopes and aspirations of the family and helping them become who they are today. They find it gratifying to glimpse the wonder that this place inspires in their guests. Three siblings (Emanuele, Elisabetta, and Mariangela), united by a passion for hospitality, each with their own personality, offer their skills to ensure a fulfilling stay for guests. They aim to provide an authentic and unforgettable experience, thus making guests feel at home, surrounded by the magical atmosphere that characterised their childhood in this special place and hoping it will accompany guests on a memorable journey to cherish in their hearts.

Boutique Bed & Breakfast Le Undici Lune

- Address: Via Mainardi 9, 53037 San Gimignano
- Tel: +39 379 246 4222
- Free Wi-Fi, breakfast available, non-smoking, air conditioning

A small boutique hotel with four rooms located in a 14th-century building. The rooms capture the spirit of Tuscany while providing modern conveniences. A traditional Italian breakfast is served. Please note that the building has no lift, and the rooms are on the third floor.

The hotel does not have its own parking, but municipal parking is available nearby.

Hotel La Collegiata

- Address: Località La Strada 27, 53037 San Gimignano
- Tel: +39 0577 943201
- Free Wi-Fi, free breakfast, non-smoking rooms, air conditioning, free parking, pool, pool/beach towels

Hotel La Collegiata is a historic property that was originally a Franciscan convent built in 1587. The building has been meticulously restored to preserve its historical charm while offering modern amenities. Its architecture reflects its origins, featuring classic Tuscan elements such as stone walls and wooden beams.
La Collegiata offers 20 rooms, including classic, superior, and deluxe options, as well as a suite. Each room is uniquely decorated with a blend of rustic and elegant styles, incorporating traditional Tuscan colours like ochre, dark green, and Bordeaux. The rooms are equipped with modern facilities, including air conditioning, Wi-Fi, minibars, and widescreen LCD TVs.
Guests can enjoy the hotel's extensive gardens, which provide a serene backdrop for relaxation. The property also features a seasonal outdoor pool, a fitness room, and a billiard room. Dining options include the on-site restaurant, which serves traditional Tuscan cuisine, often utilising ingredients sourced from the local area.
The hotel is located on the outskirts of San Gimignano and offers stunning views of the medieval town's famous towers and the surrounding countryside. Its location enables easy access to the historic centre of San Gimignano and other notable cities in Tuscany.

Torre Salvucci Maggiore Medieval Tower Experience

- Address: Piazza delle Erbe 20, 53037 San Gimignano – Siena
- Tel: +39 340 8347906

If you are seeking a memorable experience, this is the right place for you. Standing at 42 metres high, the Salvucci Tower is one of the most famous medieval towers of San Gimignano and today the only one that has been converted into a vertically spread apartment divided into 11 floors, with a total of 143 steps. A unique and timeless place, ideal for enjoying something never tried before. The tower can accommodate couples or small groups of up to three or four guests. The panoramic terrace on the top floor offers an incredibly beautiful view of the town.

WHERE TO EAT IN SAN GIMIGNANO

BUDGET OPTIONS

Dèjà Vu

- Address: Viale Roma 21, in front of the San Giovanni door, 53037 San Gimignano
- Tel: +39 0577 941817

A cosy family café with an excellent location. Beautiful and modern, it overlooks a park across the road, providing a wonderful view. The restaurant's menu is based on piadina, but it also offers sandwiches, salads, and burgers. There is a good selection of wines.

RiccaPizza

- Address: Via S. Giovanni, 94, 53037 San Gimignano
- Tel: +39 375 619 0658

A small yet cosy pizzeria opened not long ago by three friends.

Dal Toscano Bistrot Sapori e Tradizione

- Address: Vicolo Dell' Oro 2B, 53037 San Gimignano
- Tel: +39 0577 134 0619

A cosy and atmospheric restaurant in the city centre, slightly tucked away on a side street. Run by a mother and daughter duo, the restaurant has a menu that is based on Tuscan cuisine and includes handmade pasta, meat, seafood, and seasonal vegetables. All ingredients are sourced from local farmers. The decor blends classic rustic and modern styles, and the

wine list features Tuscan varieties. The proprietors are happy to guide you through the menu and suggest wine pairings. Everything is delicious and homey.

MID-RANGE OPTIONS

Spizzicheria - Le Chicche Toscane

- Address: Vicolo Dell' Oro 2B, 53037 San Gimignano
- Tel: +39 0577 134 0619

Another restaurant hidden in an alleyway. The menu is based on traditional Tuscan cuisine, and the wine list features local varieties. The staff will advise you on the menu and wine pairings.

Osteria delle Catene

- Address: Via Mainardi 18, 53037 San Gimignano, Italy
- Tel: +39 0577 941966

Just as cosy as the previous ones. Choose the option closest to you, or visit them all. The inviting atmosphere, along with Tuscan cuisine and wine, will leave you enchanted.

MUSEUMS OF SAN GIMIGNANO

San Gimignano Pass

Ticket entrance to the cathedral and civic museums
Full Price (18+) €17.00
Reduced Price (6 to 17) €14.00

Admissions

- Cathedral
- Museum of Sacred Art
- Church of San Lorenzo in Ponte
- Santa Fina Apothecary
- Town Hall
- Torre Grossa
- Archaeological Museum
- Gallery of Modern and Contemporary Art

Torre e Casa Campatelli (Torre e Casa Campatelli)

Address: Via S. Giovanni, 15, 53037 San Gimignano SI
Tel: +39 0577 941419
Price: Adults: €7.00; Children (6 to 18): €4.00

Cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta

Address: Piazza delle Erbe, 53037 San Gimignano
Tel: +39 0577 286300
Price: Full: €17.00; Children: €14.00

Palazzo Comunale, Pinacoteca, Torre Grossa

Address: Piazza Duomo, 2, 53037 San Gimignano

Tel: +39 0577 286300
Price: Full: €9.00; Reduced: €7.00 (children between 6 and 17 years old, seniors over 65)



ALL THE COLOURS OF SUNSET IN SIENA

Romulus and Remus, the grandsons of King Numitor of Alba Longa, whom Livy referred to as a descendant of Aeneas (the hero of the Trojan War), planned to establish a city near the place where, once, a shepherd named Faustulus (a resident of a small village on the Palatine Hill) discovered them suckling from a she-wolf that had come to drink. Romulus wanted to begin construction

on this hill, while his twin brother Remus advocated for the nearby Aventine Hill. Romulus wished to name the city Roma, whereas Remus preferred Remoria. Romulus believed he would be the better ruler, while Remus thought no one was more deserving than himself. When Romulus began digging a ditch for the future city, Remus, mocking his brother, jumped over the ditch. Immediately, Romulus killed him, as Remus's act was considered a grave insult. To avoid blood vengeance, the fratricide plotted to eliminate his nephews: twin brothers named Senius and Aschius. Learning of this, Remus's sons took refuge in the temple of Janus, located on the opposite bank of the Tiber, on the hill now known as Janiculus. However, they soon decided to flee to the land of the Etruscans to the north. There, they founded a city named after Senius: Siena. Because the brothers arrived in Etruria riding white and black horses, the city's emblem became a shield divided into two parts: one white and one black.



Now, knowing that the story of the founding of Rome and the biographies of the characters involved is nothing more than a beautiful fiction with only a partial factual basis, this small "addition" to the story of Romulus and Remus raises no questions for us. The truth is, the original legend of the she-wolf rearing the twins makes no mention of

any brothers Senius and Aschius. The story of their escape on black and white horses from what would become Rome is a fabrication of the state chroniclers of the Republic of Siena, first recorded in documents in the 16th century. This beautiful legend was meant to lend greater weight and some grandeur to the history of this Italian city-state and to elevate Siena above its closest neighbours and rivals, such as Florence and Venice.

Although Siena is not directly connected to Romulus and Remus, the city boasts an ancient history, perhaps without overly grand names but with substantial dates. The first settlement at the site of present-day Siena was founded by the Etruscans, likely as early as the semi-legendary Roman Kingdom (before the 6th century BC). The year 70 AD marks the first mention of Siena in Roman documents, an account worthy of being inscribed in stone: Senator Manlio Patruito complained in Rome that the Sienese had beaten and humiliated him by organising "mock" funerals for him. At that time, the city was called Saena Iulia and served as a small military colony in the Roman province of Tuscany. In response to this complaint, the Senate of Rome ordered that the instigators of the crime be located and harshly punished and reminded the inhabitants of the city in other ways that Roman authority must be respected.

After 70 AD, written sources about Siena go silent for a long time. Any emerging evidence records only legal facts, such as the appointments of bishops to the city and their disputes with neighbouring bishops of Arezzo. These disputes were sometimes interrupted by the Lombard Kings, who ruled in Italy from the late 5th century.

By the 10th century, thanks to the development of trade routes, Siena had become an important centre on the route from Northern Italy to Rome and was taking advantage of this new position. In the 12th century, Siena saw the emergence of consular self-government, similar to that which arose in many other Tuscan cities that later transformed into republics. In 1186, Emperor Frederick Barbarossa of the Holy Roman Empire recognised Siena as an independent state and allowed it to mint its own coins. A hundred years later, one of the most democratic forms of governance – the so-called "Government of Nine" – emerged there. As might be expected, it consisted of nine members elected for a term of two months. Six of them (two from each of the three districts into which

Siena was divided) were elected by the podestà (the mayor) of the city in collaboration with consuls representing Siena's trade and craft guilds. The remaining three (one from each district) were elected to their council through a general vote by the six previously elected podestà and consuls. Every citizen of the republic had the right to be elected to the government for one term and could be re-elected for a second term after a period of 20 months following the end of the previous term. Moreover, no person could be elected to this council if their relatives, business partners, or in-laws had already been confirmed as candidates for government. Additionally, members of the Nine could not include noble aristocrats, notaries, physicians, and lawyers; these citizens were deemed dangerous to the proper functioning of republican institutions. Although they were respected members of society (nobles, for instance, received the best and softest accommodations when imprisoned compared to members of other estates), they were disenfranchised in this regard.

The Government of Nine paid great attention to the idea of the "Common Good": "...I see no way in which we could govern others well if we do not first govern ourselves well..." wrote Saint Catherine of Siena to the painter and then-member of the Government of Nine, Andrea di Vanni. A significant portion of the state's income was directed toward charity and church maintenance, and the "Nine" often participated in public processions for various church festivals in full force. The few conflicts between the church and the state during the period of the Government of Nine in the Republic of Siena likely arose only in relation to jurisdictional boundaries over hospitals and the organisation of celebrations in honour of the Virgin Mary, to whom the city of Siena was officially dedicated on the eve of the famous Battle of Montaperti in 1260. There, the Guelph army of Siena faced the Ghibellines of Florence.

Thanks to this system, over 3,000 individuals passed through the council during the 70 years during which the Government of Nine existed. This period is considered the height of cultural and economic flourishing for the Republic of Siena. However, the system came to an end in part due to the plague epidemic that struck Siena in 1347: The ravaged city could no longer maintain the old system at the same level as before, and soon the republic was afflicted by new ailments: nepotism and corruption. In

the early 1350s, citizens were increasingly accusing the magistrates of favouritism and providing preferential loans to their relatives and friends. Additionally, the government proved unable to quell the disturbances, looting, and escalating violence that became common occurrences on the streets of Siena after the epidemic. The climax of this crisis was the occupation of the city by the troops of Emperor Charles IV of the Holy Roman Empire in March 1355. Under the pretext of saving the republic, he introduced a forward detachment of 150 soldiers into Siena and proclaimed the Government of Nine as his Imperial representatives. However, the imperial forces could not suppress the popular uprising that erupted; the podestà, the people's captain, the captain of the militia, the government officials, and the consuls were all expelled from Siena.

Extreme instability marked the times that followed until 1555, when Siena joined the Florentine Republic. It briefly came under the control of Aragon and Habsburg Spain.

By the mid-16th century, three major powers – Spain, France, and Florence – were competing for control of Siena, a city with significant trading ports on the Tyrrhenian Sea and generally considered prosperous and strategically located. This rivalry marked the end of the history of the Republic of Siena when the army of the Florentine Duke Cosimo I de' Medici, supported by Spain, approached the city walls on August 2, 1554, and, after nearly a year of siege, entered the city in April 1555. Subsequently, Siena became just one of many towns within the realm governed by the all-powerful Medici of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany.

It should be noted that of all the rulers of Tuscany at that time, only Ferdinand I (1549 to 1609) had any understanding of governance. The rest of the Medici focused all their attention on the "old state" within the boundaries of Florence and neglected other territories. For this reason, over the next 300 years, Siena was reduced to the status of a backwater farming town, not only forgotten by politicians but also avoiding large construction projects due to the outflow of merchants and bankers from the city. Ironically, as with San Gimignano, this fact later worked in Siena's favour: Due to the shortsightedness of the Grand Dukes of Tuscany, the city changed little since the 16th century.

It is not surprising, then, that in 1859, having been abandoned by Florentine authorities, Siena became one of the first cities to almost unanimously vote for the unification of Italy and the dissolution of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany.

Today, Siena is known primarily as a university city, home to around 20,000 students out of a total population of 54,500. This is thanks to the University of Siena, which has continuously operated since 1240 and is one of the oldest universities in Italy and the world. Additionally, in the surroundings of Siena, known as Chianti, the famous wine of the same name is grown and produced.

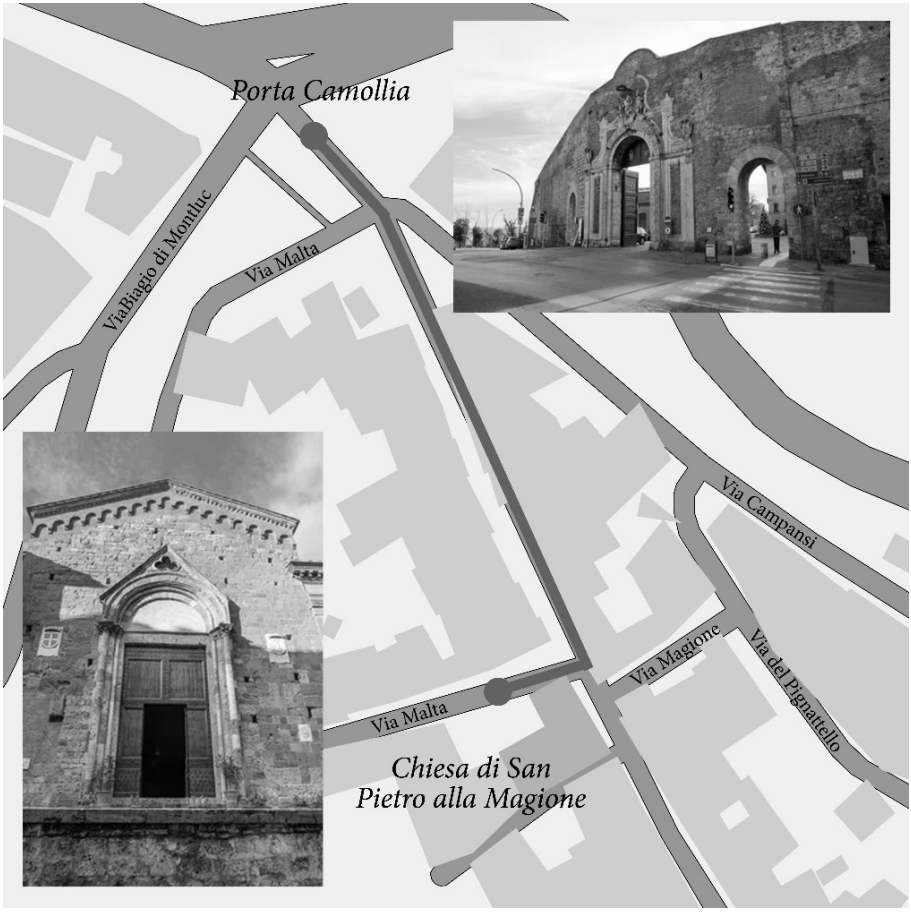
PORTA CAMOLLIA: THE GATE TO THE HEART OF SIENA



Siena may be the most beautiful city in Italy... There is something mystical about it, yet at the same time, impulsive and sensual, like a wild rose at sunset," wrote David Herbert Lawrence in his collection of essays, "Twilight in Italy." It is a beautiful comparison, but in my opinion, it is somewhat verbose. Siena presents itself far more succinctly and clearly when you approach its northern gates, which now align with Viale Vittorio Emanuele II. These gates are known as Porta Camollia, alluding to the well-known myth of the city's founding by the twin sons of Remus. According to the legend, an angry Romulus sent an army, led by the commander Camulio, to capture his nephews. At this site, as the myth goes, he set up camp with the intention of seizing the brothers and bringing them to Rome. However, at the last moment, Camulio changed his mind and joined the founders of Siena, remaining here. These gates were not built in ancient times but, rather, in the 12th century, after which they were rebuilt several times. Following the fall of the Republic of Siena, the Florentine

Duke Cosimo I de’ Medici crowned the gates with his emblems, which we still see today. Yet, the most important part of these gates has remained untouched: the Latin inscription crowning the portal through which we must pass. "Cor magis tibi Sena pandit" translates to "Siena opens to you a heart greater... [than the gates through which you will pass]." I do not believe any further commentary is necessary here.

CHURCH SAN PIETRO ALLA MAGIONE



Following the gates along Via Camollia (a section of the ancient Via Francigena that pilgrims from Northern Europe took on their way to Rome), we will soon pass the church of San Pietro alla Magione. You will not be able to miss it, as it stands out from the other medieval buildings with its deliberately ancient façade made of large stones to which a brick chapel is attached. This church was built in the 10th century: It was first documented in 998. In 1148, the municipality of Siena handed it over to the Knights Templar, who established a shelter for pilgrims travelling from Europe to the Holy

Land via Italy. From this shelter ("la Magione"), the name of the church derives. After the French king dismantled the Templar order in the early 14th century and burned its last Grand Master, Jacques de Molay, at the stake, accusing him and all his knights of heresy, the Church of Saint Peter in Siena, along with the shelter, was transferred to the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem. The latter is now better known as the Knights of Malta due to their last stronghold on the Mediterranean island of Malta. Since then, for over 700 years, this church has remained the main temple for the Hospitallers in Siena and a venue for official order ceremonies and celebrations. In particular, in 1980, a ceremonial reception was held here for Fra' Angelo de Mojana di Cologna, the Grand Master of the order.

If you go inside, be sure to note the right side of the ancient façade, dated to the 12th century: One of the bricks bears a mark in the shape of a Templar cross. The brick chapel, built in the mid-16th century, serves as a donation "to divert the plague from the city" – as you may recall, the "Black Death" brought an end to the "Golden Age" of the Republic of Siena.

Chiesa di Santa Maria in Portico a Fontegiusta



In 1478, the so-called "Pazzi Conspiracy" collapsed with a resounding crash in Florence. It was an attempt by a powerful and wealthy family to overthrow the usurping Medici dynasty in the Florentine Republic by taking advantage of the latter's conflict with Pope Sixtus IV. Securing the support of the pontiff, several members of the Pazzi family and their supporters organised an assassination attempt on the head of the Medici dynasty – Lorenzo "the Magnificent" – and his brother, Giuliano. (If you have already travelled

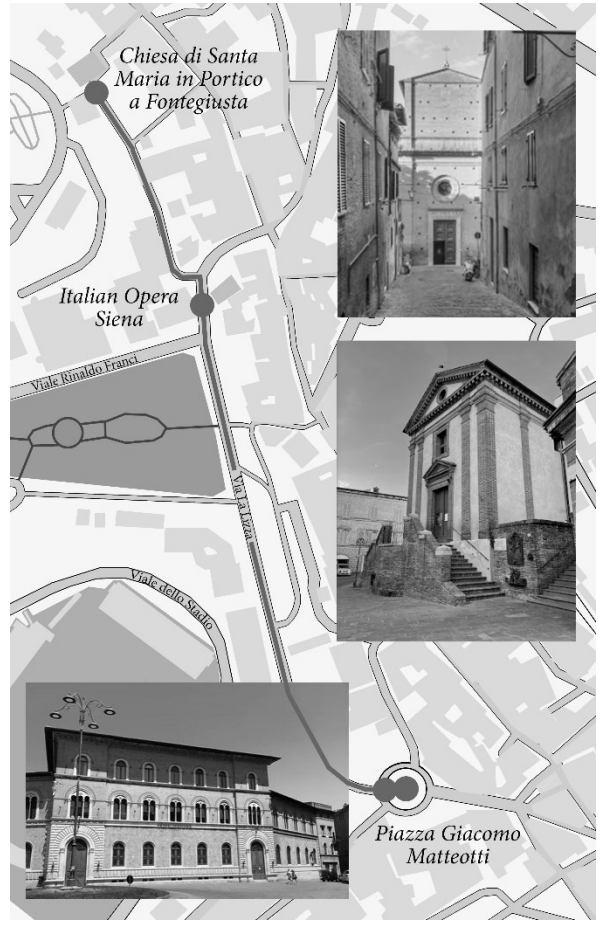
through Florence with my guide, you are well aware of the circumstances surrounding this conspiracy and the consequences of the assassination of Giuliano de' Medici during Mass.) Unfortunately for the Pazzi family, Lorenzo "the Magnificent" survived the attack, and his wrath was all-consuming, though somewhat righteous: Even Cardinal Raffaele Riario, the pope's nephew, who was leading the Mass during the Pazzi assault on the Medici, ended up in prison. In response, Pope Sixtus IV excommunicated Lorenzo de' Medici and arrested representatives of the Medici Bank in the Vatican. War between the Papacy and Florence became inevitable. Soon, Sixtus IV secured the support of King Ferrante I of Naples and Florence's neighbouring rivals, Siena, Lucca, and Urbino. The war that ensued was called the "Pazzi War" even though the Pazzi family itself played no further part in it. The Medici had stripped them of all their property, and those who were not executed or exiled from the city were forced to change their names and renounce any ties to the disgraced clan.

The decisive battle in this war was the fight at Poggio Imperiale, near Siena, where a coalition of the Sienese Republic, Pope Sixtus IV, the Duke of Urbino, and the King of Naples faced the Florentine-French army. It was the sudden attack by the troops of the latter two monarchs on the Florentine camp that determined the battle's outcome: The Sienese army was left only to drive the demoralised Florentines northward. "No more disgraceful defeat ever occurred," wrote the historian Scipione Ammirato about this battle. Indeed, for Siena, this military victory was one of the most brilliant moments in its long-standing struggle against Florence's attempts to conquer all of Tuscany. To commemorate this glorious day in the city's memory, the municipality of Siena built a church here, near the ancient Via Camollia, which we can easily find if we walk to the beautiful 16th-century brick arch crowned with a Latin inscription: *"Mater inexhausto pietatis Fonte redundant / Iusta illi soboles hic nominem locat" – "The Mother is overflowing with an inexhaustible source of piety. It is here that she gives names to her children."* At the end of the alley that starts from this portal, you will see the modest façade of the small church with a long name: Santa Maria in Portico a Fontegiusta. The construction took five years, and the site was chosen deliberately: A sacred spring known as

Fontegiusta was located here, and just behind it, until 1369, stood the city gates. That meant the new church was closely attached to the walls of Siena. The arch through which we are passing was built with funds from the "Compagnia Minore della Vergine" brotherhood (an organisation that maintained an orphanage at the church of Santa Maria in Portico) with the simple goal of ensuring that no one could block access to the church from the main street.
This site is particularly notable for its small museum of personal items belonging to Christopher Columbus, who, according to popular belief, studied at the University of Siena. The exhibition is displayed in the sacristy.



PIAZZA GIACOMO MATTEOTTI

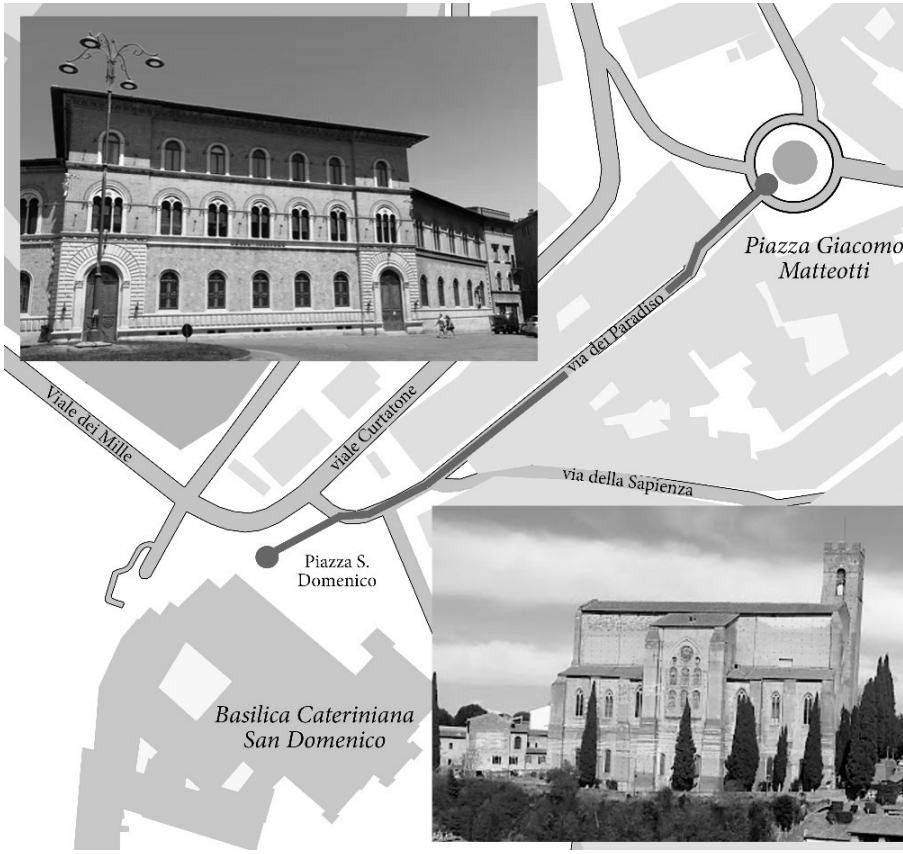


Turning from the church and walking through the alley, we will reach Vicolo Malizia, which veers to the left just before the Fontegiusta gates. Continuing along Vicolo Malizia without turning. Passing through the elongated arch that the Sienese use for parking cars and motorcycles, we will soon emerge onto the wide Via dei Gazzani. Directly in front of us stands a slightly angled building with brick pilasters and a double staircase leading to its main entrance. I recommend that you visit this place if possible, as under this sloping roof in the style of an ancient temple lies the Auditorio Santo Stefano alla Lizza – a former 12th-century church and now an excellent chamber concert venue with superb acoustics. The Auditorio sponsors evenings of "Italian Opera in Siena" – an experience you should definitely have if you want to truly engage with Italian culture in one of the most beautiful cities in Tuscany. If we continue along Via La Lizza from this concert hall without turning until we reach the point where the street splits into two by a marble fence and keep to the left side, which rises slightly, we will soon find ourselves

in the spacious Piazza Giacomo Matteotti, named in honour of the leader of the Italian Socialist Party and one of the most prominent opponents of the Mussolini regime. He was abducted and killed by the Blackshirts (the paramilitary wing of the fascist party) in 1924. The most notable building in this square is the Palazzo delle Poste (Post Office Palace). It appears ancient, but the first stone of its foundation was laid only in 1910, undoubtedly in keeping with the general Renaissance spirit of Sienese architecture. At that time, the square was named after King Umberto I, who was assassinated by an anarchist in the town of Monza, near Milan, in 1900. Opened in 1912 as the main office of the Royal Post of Italy in Siena, this palazzo remains the home of the Italian State Postal Service to this day.

On the building's right-side façade, you can see a memorial plaque listing the names of the Royal Post employees who died on the frontlines during World War I. It was installed here the same year, 1924, in which the Blackshirts killed socialist Matteotti. The square in front of the post office was named after Matteotti only in the late 1940s, after the war and the overthrow of the last King of Italy, Umberto II, whose dynasty's name, in the minds and memories of Italians, had become too firmly associated with the regime of Benito Mussolini.

BASILICA CATERINIANA SAN DOMENICO



The poetic and quite fitting name "Via del Paradiso" leads us from Piazza Giacomo Matteotti to one of Siena's main churches: the impressive Basilica Cateriniana San Domenico, which is particularly striking in size (especially when viewed from Via di Fontebranda, located on the hill opposite the basilica). Siena was one of the first cities in present-day Italy to welcome members of the monastic order founded in the 13th century by the Spanish preacher and priest Domenico di Guzmán. This order was later named after its founder, becoming the Dominican Order. Guzmán's followers arrived in Siena in 1220; by 1225, the Sienese patrician Fortebraccio Malavolti had granted, to the monks, land on the hills near the city walls. Shortly

thereafter, with the help of patrons from the Sienese nobility and merchants, the construction of this basilica began. It was consecrated in 1265. Naturally, it underwent several renovations and expansions over the years, ultimately taking on its current Gothic form in the 14th century. The Dominican order is considered one of the "mendicant brotherhoods" that embrace asceticism as the foundation of virtue, so their main church in Siena is naturally devoid of gaudy decorations, both outside and inside.

Among the interior elements, the most striking feature for me is the large panel "Adoration of the Child" by Francesco di Giorgio Martini, dated 1490 and located on the right wall of the nave (239 by 209 cm or 7.10 by 6.10 feet). The ruins of an antique arch, carefully detailed (with dolphins visible as elements of the capitals of its columns and pilasters), made of pristine white marble, and seemingly split in two by a thunderbolt, have been transformed by the master into… a biblical stable. The missing part of the arch is covered for rain protection with a primitive shelter made of branches and hay. Underneath, in an improvised enclosure surrounded by the fallen fragments of the arch (which are by no means abstract; their original position within the arch could easily be identified by matching the chips), stand a cow and a donkey. The infant Jesus lies before this reused antique arch, on another fragment of it, as if on a pillow, with His Mother, Joseph, and four contrasting figures surrounding the newborn Saviour. To the left are two beautiful, fair-haired pale-faced, brightly dressed angels with multi-coloured wings, while to the right are two dark, hunched figures of shepherds, unnaturally bent compared to the upright angels. One of them seems to be trying to catch a glimpse of the newborn Christ from behind the shoulder of the Virgin Mary, while the other appears to be holding him back, placing a hand on his back and stepping away, preparing to leave. (I think I can even see tears in the eyes of the shepherd who is stepping back.) The striking symbolism of the birth of a new Christian civilization from the ruins of the depicted grand yet fallen civilization of pagan antiquity is breathtaking.

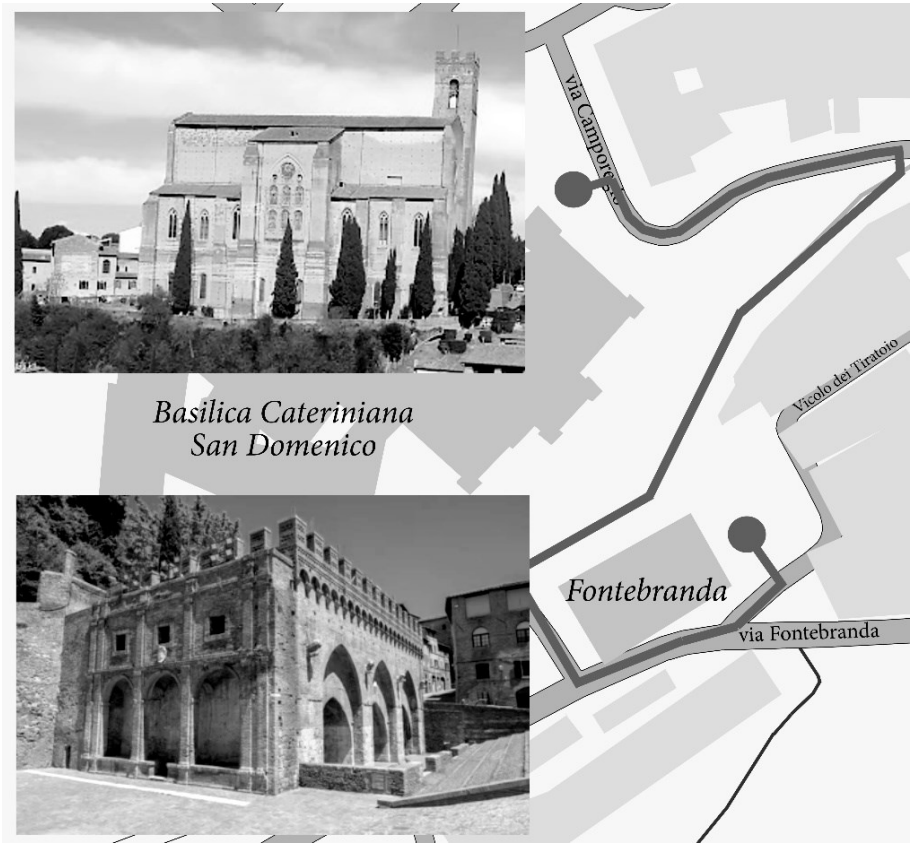
In front of this panel is a work by another notable master – Sodoma (yes, his adopted pseudonym likely points us to that very Old Testament story) – the frame for the Francesco di Vannuccio's "Madonna". This frame

consists of a canvas depicting Saint Sebastian the Martyr, Saint Catherine of Siena, Saint Sigismund, Saint Vincent Ferrer, and God the Father.

The most ornate part of the basilica is the chapel of Saint Catherine of Siena – the saint with whom we are already familiar, known for her piety and the stigmata that appeared on her hands during prayer. (It is in her honour that this basilica is named Cateriniana.) As you might guess, her relics are kept in this chapel. Sodoma and Francesco Vanni created the magnificent 16th-century frescoes depicting key events from Catherine's life.

Another thing to which I would like to draw your attention in this basilica is located in the central chapel, opposite the main entrance to the church. It is the painting "Maestà di San Domenico," created by one of the masters of the proto-Renaissance, Guido da Siena, in 1270. This painting is almost entirely rendered according to Byzantine canons that Sienese masters adopted from Greek icon painters. "Her Majesty" (which is how the title of the painting translates, referring to the Catholic tradition of representing the Virgin Mary as Queen of Heaven) was likely influenced by an earlier work, dated 1262, by the artist Diotisalvi di Speme. This latter work is the "Madonna San Bernardino," which you can see in the National Pinacoteca of Siena. Diotisalvi himself drew inspiration from the works of proto-Renaissance masters such as Coppo di Marcovaldo and Cimabue. Notably, the artist left a rhymed inscription at the bottom of the painting, and it is still legible today: "ME GUIDO DE SENIS / DIEBUS DEPINXIT AMENIS / QUEM CHRISTUS LENIS / NULLIS VELIT ANGERE PENIS - A.D. MCCXXI" or "I, Guido of Siena, painted this in my happy days, whom Christ the Merciful did not wish to torment with any pain – 1221 years after the birth of Christ."

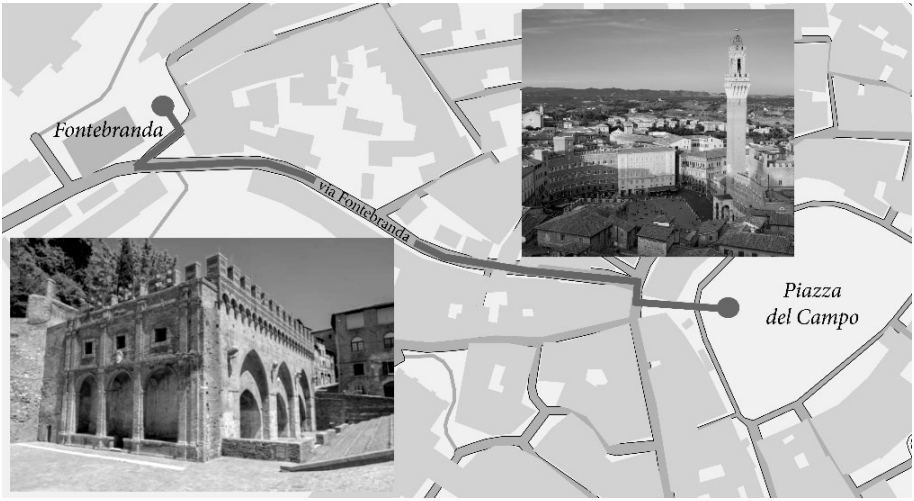
FONTEANDA: THE ANCIENT FOUNTAIN IN THE "GOOSE DISTRICT"



Descending from the basilica along Via Camporegio, which offers a charming view of medieval Siena and, in particular, the tower of Palazzo Pubblico, you will soon find yourself next to a wide, brick-paved staircase. At number 35 on this descending stairway street is the Sanctuary of Saint Catherine, which developed in the 15th century around the house where she was born in 1347. After her canonisation by Pope Pius II (also a native of the Republic of Siena) in 1461, Catherine's familial home and the adjacent buildings of the former workshop of Brunello di Brunaccio were purchased by the Caterinati Society and transformed into the Sanctuary

that exists here today, although only partially: The premises of the former workshop now houses the hotel "Alma Domus."
As soon as we descend this staircase, we will find, on our left, something resembling a covered Gothic loggia made of red brick just behind a small, cobbled square. Be sure to turn back as you leave the staircase, for you will find yourself on Via di Fontebranda, from which one of the best views of the Basilica of San Domenico can be seen.
What is this brick Gothic building, and what is the Goose municipality? There are no mysteries here. In front of you is Fontebranda – a unique source of fresh drinking water, known since 1081 and adorned with its current elegant framing in 1246. According to one version, Dante Alighieri mentions this drinking fountain in the 30th canto of the "Inferno" in his "Divine Comedy," in lines 76 to 78, as he "bends over the stream." This fact made Fontebranda one of the most popular attractions in Siena long before tourism became both a blessing and a curse for Italy.
The prefecture (or, more precisely, the district) of Goose is simply the part of the city in which we find ourselves. As has been previously mentioned, Siena is divided into three main districts (Terzo, literally, "Third"): Terzo di Camollìa, Terzo di Città, and Terzo di San Martino. Each Terzo is further divided into quarters, the names of which derive from their symbols. For example, Terzo di Camollìa includes the quarters Bruco (Caterpillar), Drago (Dragon), Giraffa (Giraffe), Istrice (Porcupine), Lupa (She-Wolf), and Oca (Goose). Because the drinking fountain is in the Gusia district, which funds its maintenance, this monument is commonly referred to as the Fontanina Contrada dell'Oca.
Inside this fountain, behind the storage reservoir for the drinking water, is a system of 25 kilometres (15.5 miles) of special conduits known as bottini. These are vaulted galleries about 1 metre (3.3 feet) high, stretching from the sources in the Sienese mountains with a gradient of 1 metre for every kilometre (3.3 feet for every 1093 yards). And, yes, these pipes still supply water to the city's fountains – continuing for almost 800 years.

PIAZZA DEL CAMPO



Via Fontabranda leads us from this beautiful fountain to perhaps what can be considered the main square of the city: Piazza del Campo. Unlike most streets and squares in the old town of Siena, this square does not belong to any of the districts that comprise the city's Terzi. The reason for this ancient and esteemed decree lies in the famous Sienese games, the Palio di Siena. This is arguably one of the most significant events in Tuscany, alongside the Crickets Festival in Florence and the "Games on the Bridge" in Pisa. It is a tradition that dates back to the 12th century when regular horse races were first held in Siena. During the 12th and 13th centuries, when Siena was divided into Terzi, and these were further divided into quarters, the existing system emerged: Each district is represented by its own team, with recognisable banners adorned with unique symbols during these competitions. Today, Siena has 17 districts, whereas before the "Black Death," there were about eighty. By the early 1350s, due to catastrophic population decline, many deserted districts were absorbed into neighbouring ones. Forty-two teams participated in the first games following the plague epidemic.

It is worth noting that wars or Florence’s conquest of Siena did not interrupt the games. Moreover, the Florentine Medici were interested in

preserving and developing this tradition. Thus, the Palio di Siena began to be held twice a year (in June [as was traditionally done] and August), and Violante Beatrice of Bavaria, wife of Ferdinand I de' Medici, the Grand Duke of Tuscany, herself participated in establishing new boundaries for the districts of Siena.

These games continued even during the turbulent 19th century for the entire Apennine peninsula. The only changes that occurred in the rules of the Sienese races involved prohibiting fights, which often broke out before the races began. Additionally, after the Risorgimento, there were some awkward situations involving the banners of the "Eagle" and "Tortoise" districts. The former, as you might guess, bears the image of a black double-headed eagle on a yellow field, which had been depicted for centuries on the imperial banner of the Habsburgs. This coincidence was not accidental, as the banner was bestowed upon the "Eagle" team by Emperor Charles V during his visit to Siena when he witnessed the Palio being held in the city. However, from 1845 onward, relations between Italians and Austrians soured significantly (due to the Austrians' possession of part of Northern Italy, which most Italians regarded as an occupation), and angry shouts and boos met the ceremonial procession of the "Eagle" team at the start of the races. This was because the "Eagle" banner reminded Sienese citizens of the hated Austrian Habsburgs. A similar story can be told about the banner of the "Tortoise" district, which featured alternating black and yellow stripes (exactly like the flag of the Austrian Empire). However, the "Tortoise" decided to change its banner, replacing the black stripes with blue.

Today, the Palio di Siena features 10 teams from the 17 districts of the city, selected by draw. The games themselves are a reconstruction of a medieval ceremonial parade with a beautiful opening ceremony followed by the races. Thus, Piazza del Campo transforms into a racetrack twice a year: on July 2 (in honour of the Madonna of Provenzano) and August 16 (in honour of the Madonna of Assumption). The square itself was formed at the intersection of three ancient roads: to Rome (southeast), to Florence (north), and to the Tyrrhenian Sea (southwest). It is believed that the square was established in 1193 when it was separated by a wall and an aqueduct was built to collect rainwater from the area now known as Piazza del Mercato. Shortly thereafter, with

Siena recognised as a city-state, a customs house and the first mint in Siena were built alongside the wall. The square’s dominant feature is the large Palazzo Pubblico, constructed between 1298 and 1310 as the residence of the already familiar Government of Nine, during the peak of the Sienese Republic's prosperity. We shall dwell on it in more detail.

PALAZZO PUBBLICO



Take the she-wolf figures, protruding like gargoyles from the corners of the central part of the façade, at approximately the same level as the disc containing the Christogram (I.H.S. – Iesus Hominum Salvator – Jesus Saviour of Men). This is the famous Roman she-wolf, nursing the twins Romulus and Remus – yet another allusion to the myth of the city's founding by Remus's sons, who are said to have taken the statue of the Capitoline Wolf into exile when they left the still-unbuilt Rome and brought it with them to what would become Siena.

The Medici coat of arms, located slightly lower on the façade, was, of course, added later (in the 1560s) as a sign of Siena's conquest by Florence. It should be noted that this is not the only mark of the "dark" pages of the city's history found on this building. The palace's tower, which we have already seen from afar, i.e., the 88-metre (288.8 feet) Torre del Mangia, is one of the tallest medieval towers in Italy. It was

designed and constructed between 1325 and 1348 by Lippo Memmi, the Sienese master with whom we are already familiar. Its grand opening was supposed to take place in 1347, but this was postponed for a year due to the plague that swept through the city and killed more than half of Siena's population.

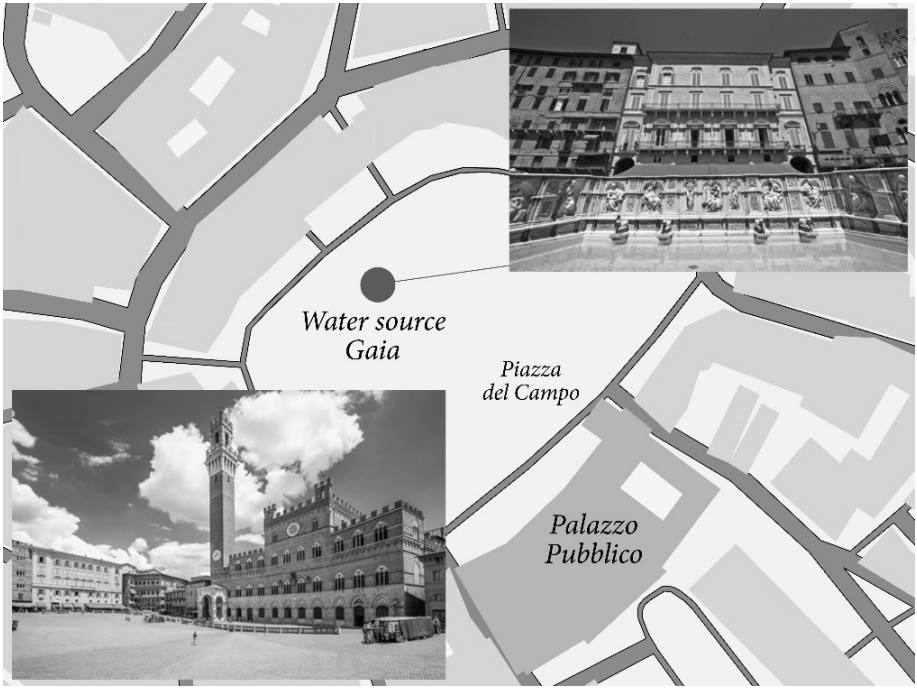
An amusing story is associated with the name of this tower, which can be literally translated as "Tower of 'Eat!'" Giovanni Baldicci, hired in 1360 as the first bellringer to mark time with the bell in this tower, was known in Siena for his vices, particularly his extravagant spending and gluttony. His nickname was Giovanni “Mangia.” Although he was soon replaced by the first clock mechanism installed on the tower, the former bellringer's nickname remained forever attached to the clock tower.

Another "imprint" of the plague epidemic in the palace’s architectural appearance is the marble chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary, added to the left side of the façade. Its foundation date is 1352, and its construction was a sign of gratitude from the people of Siena to the Virgin Mary for delivering the city from the "Black Death."

Since 1930, the Civil Museum of Siena has been located inside the palace. There, in addition to the stunning interiors of the Palazzo Pubblico, you can enjoy masterpieces by such artists as Sodoma, Martino di Bartolomeo, Domenico di Niccolò, Ambrogio Lorenzetti, and Neroccio di Bartolomeo de' Landi.

P.S. Note the typical battlements of Guelph fortifications crowning the palace; Siena was predominantly a Guelph city.

GAIA FOUNTAIN

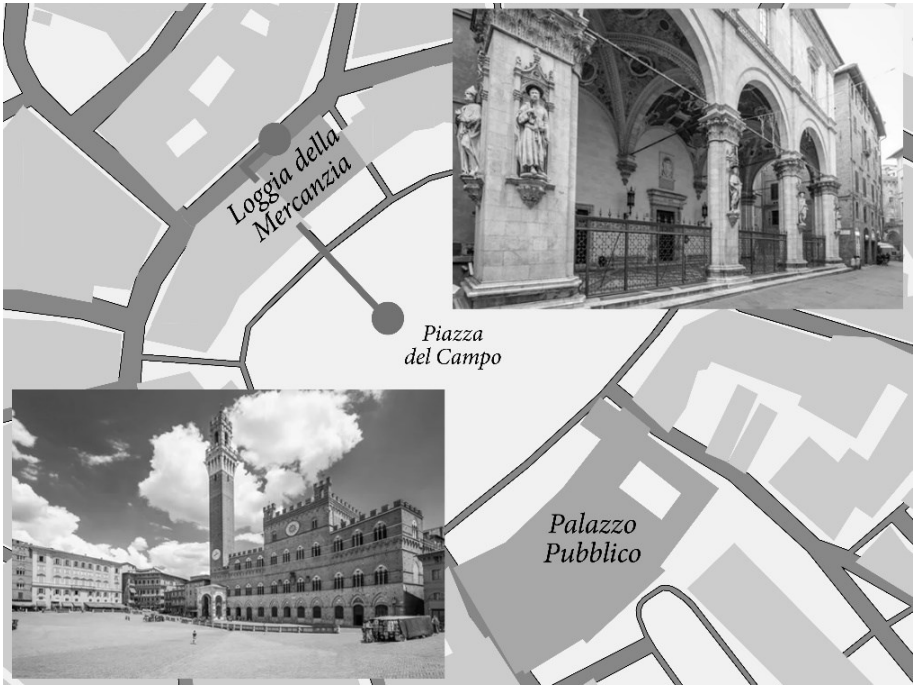


Located in front of the Palazzo Pubblico, the elegant fountain serving as a source of fresh water certainly catches the eye. This fountain, framed by a masterful marble composition by Jacopo della Quercia, was completed in 1346, just one year before the onset of the plague epidemic. The original sculptures and reliefs have been preserved since the 19th century and are displayed in the Santa Maria della Scala museum, with exact copies now adorning the fountain. These, again, refer us to the myth of the founding of Siena by Romulus's nephews. On this fountain, you can see sculptural representations of the biological and adoptive mothers of Romulus and Remus: Rhea Silvia and Acca Larentia.

The origin of the fountain's name is not connected to the name of the ancient Greek goddess of the earth, as one might assume. Instead, it is believed to derive from the exclamations of joy from the townspeople

who witnessed the emergence of a spring with drinking water from the ground in the main square.
Immediately behind this fountain is the Palazzo Sansedoni, which draws attention with its brick Gothic façade, seemingly attempting to "balance" the Palazzo Pubblico. It now houses the Monte dei Paschi di Siena banking foundation. However, this luxurious residence once belonged to the wealthy Sansedoni family, which became extinct in the early 19th century. The building's interiors were created in the early 14th century by architect Agostino di Giovanni, whereas the brick façade is relatively new – only about 300 years old.

LOGGIA DELLA MERCANZIA



This loggia commissioned by the guild of Sienese merchants as an extension of their headquarters. It is located between Via Banchi di Sopra and Via Banchi di Sotto. You can access it by passing through a small archway on the right side of the palace's façade, where the restaurant Ristorante Al Mangia is situated on the ground floor (though I would not recommend entering there). The passage to the loggia features a charming, almost secret staircase. When you walk through the house, you will find a masterpiece of Renaissance Gothic architecture to your left.

The Sienese master Sano di Matteo designed and led its construction between 1417 and 1428. After Sano's death, his work was completed by Pietro del Minella. Alongside the main sculptures depicting Saints Peter and Paul (the patrons of the Sienese merchant guild), the loggia houses sculptures of the city's patron saints: San Savino, Sant'Ansano, and San Vittore. In 1764, when the loggia, along with the building of the former

merchant guild, became home to the Circolo degli Uniti (the Union Circle, the oldest men's club in Siena, founded in 1657 and still active today), the loggia was restored, and a monochrome painting by Luigi Ademollo was placed on its second floor. However, you cannot see it unless you are a member of the Circolo degli Uniti.

PALAZZO PICCOLOMINI



Now, let's walk from the loggia along the street Banchi di Sotto to its intersection with Via Rinaldini. The majestic three-storey palace made of large hewn stone, standing on the corner of the latter, will immediately catch your eye. If you stop and begin to examine all the intricate details with which this palace is richly adorned, you will notice the recurring elements in the form of crescents: They make up the decorative door knockers set into the walls of the palace in two tiers. They also crown the arch above each window on the second and third floors, and they can be seen in the coffered ceiling of the cornice (in small square sections created in the style of ancient Roman and Greek architecture, where such ceilings were necessary to conceal the beams supporting the roof). Of course, you cannot miss the large coat of arms in a diamond-shaped shield, located on the corner of the palace, beneath the face of an open-mouthed old man. As you might guess, the coat of arms also features crescents, and there are five of them. Naturally, these symbols might mean little to us, but in the 16th century, any Sienese citizen and many Romans would have instantly recognised that this palace belonged to the Piccolomini family – an ancient and

highly esteemed name in Italy. The first mention of its members in official documents dates back to 1055, a time when Siena had not yet even begun to think about becoming an independent city-state. It was then that the Holy Roman Emperor Henry III appointed a certain Salomone Piccolomini as his governor in Siena and all the surrounding lands. From that time onward, for many centuries, members of this family participated in the governance of the city, holding important positions in various capacities. Even during the Government of Nine, when aristocrats were prohibited from holding office, the Piccolomini maintained their influence over political affairs. Engaging in trade, they opened accounting offices not only in Siena and its surrounding towns but also in Genoa, Venice, Trieste, and even cities in France, England, and Germany.

The Piccolomini reached the height of their wealth and influence in the 15th and 16th centuries when two members of their family were elected popes. In 1458, Enea Silvio Piccolomini took on the name Pius II as the head of the Catholic Church, while in 1503, his nephew (the son of his sister), Francesco Todeschini-Piccolomini, became Pope Pius III. While the first served as Pope for only five years, and the second died just 26 days after his election, few families can boast of having relatives ascend the Papal Throne.

This palace was commissioned by two other nephews of Pope Pius II: Giacomo and Andrea Piccolomini. In 1469, they presented, to the municipality of Siena, their project for a new luxurious residence with a well-chosen location: Seven years earlier, at the end of this street, the so-called "Pope's Loggia" had been built. It was a luxurious covered arcade that Pius II had gifted to his native city, primarily for his relatives, the Piccolomini. (We will look at this loggia a bit later.)

Of course, the municipality granted permission (could it have been otherwise with the applicants being the pope's nephews?), and construction began in the same year. Naturally, it would be impossible to complete such an imposing building within a year: By 1480, it was only half the current height, reaching just to the mezzanine of the first floor. The new family residence was not finished until 1509 – 40 years after its inception. Since then and until the mid-17th century, the palace served as the main residence of the Piccolomini family in Siena. (More

accurately, its owners belonged to the Todeschini-Piccolomini branch descending from the sister of Pope Pius II. According to the family constitution that remained in effect until 1821, any man from another family who married a woman from the Piccolomini line had to adopt her surname and combine his coat of arms with hers, thus ensuring that their descendants bore both names. After all, who could be more noble and esteemed than the Piccolomini?) The palace interiors have been altered numerous times since then and only partially preserved from the time of the first owners. The same cannot be said of the exterior; if you approach the door knockers embedded in the walls, you will notice that the Piccolomini crescents "hang" from the figures of sheep, which, in turn, were taken from the coat of arms of the Todeschini family – a reference to the family tradition I mentioned earlier.

Allow me to draw your attention to two more curious details on the façade – details that a regular tour guide might not mention. The first is a small ceramic shield, easily overlooked if one is not aware of it, located on the corner of the palace near a no-parking sign. (This side of the palace faces Banchi di Sotto and is directed toward the neighbouring palace at number 55.) This shield depicts an elephant carrying a red fortress tower on its back, indicating that the Palazzo Piccolomini belongs to the "Tower" or "Torre" district of the Terzo di San Martino. The team from this district competes under a banner displaying the same image during the Palio di Siena.

The second and final important element of the façade is the coats of arms of the Piccolomini family with papal tiaras, located on the second floor, directly above the main entrance to the palace. Beneath these coats of arms are corresponding inscriptions reminding passersby that two popes – Pius II and Pius III – came from the Piccolomini family.

Today, this palace houses a branch of the state museum of Siena, which features a unique collection of painted wooden tablets that served as "covers" for the treasury documents of the city's main financial oversight institution: the Biccherna. Its name derives from the main residence of the Byzantine emperors: the Palace of the Blachernae in Constantinople (Istanbul), where the Imperial treasury was also kept. (Yes, another unexpected trace of Byzantium in Italy.) This institution operated in

Siena from the 12th century until 1786, and the museum collection currently includes 124 tablets covering the period from 1258 to 1682.

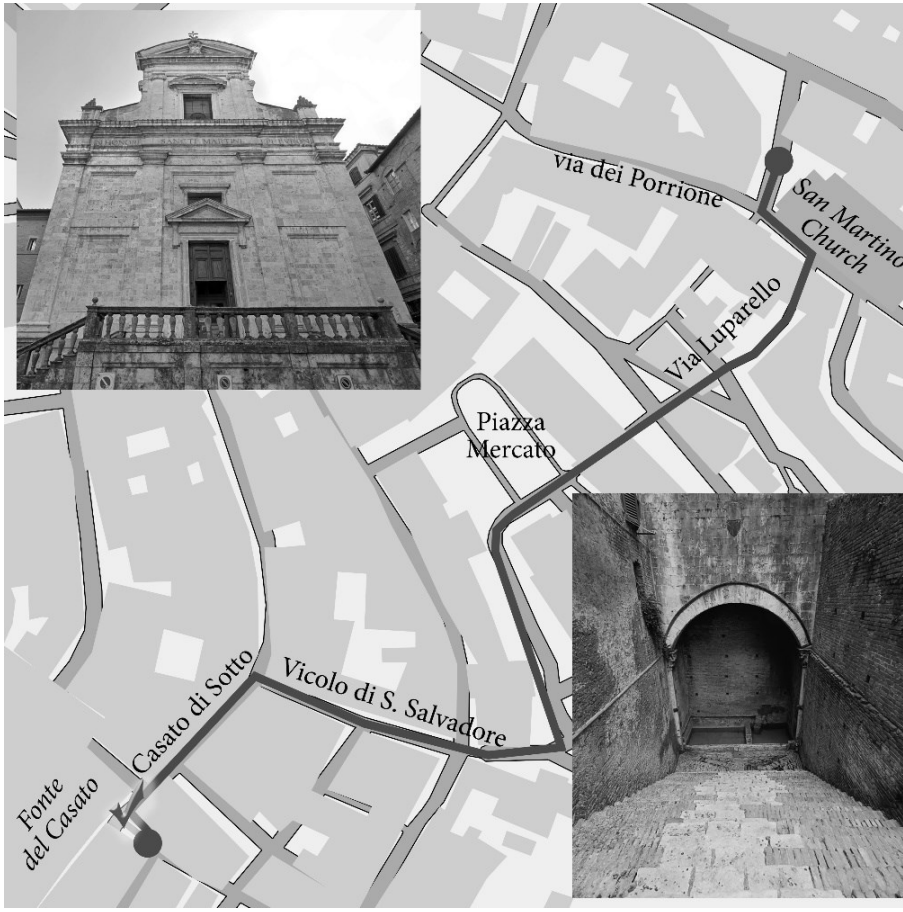
Loggia del Papa and the Church of San Martino



After visiting the Palazzo Piccolomini, let's walk a little farther along Banchi di Sotto. We will find ourselves in front of the aforementioned Loggia of Pope Pius II. Indeed, the large Latin letters on its architrave make it clear: "PIUS II PONT MAX GENTILIBUS SVIS PICCOLOMINEIS" or "Pius II, the Supreme Pontiff – to his relatives, the Piccolomini." A little farther down the street, to the right of the loggia, an elegant church draws attention with its strikingly Roman façade. This style is hard to confuse with anything else. And, yes, this façade was created for the 12th-century church

dedicated to Saint Martin of Tours in the 17th century, immediately following a substantial internal reconstruction.
When you enter the church, take note of the counter-facade (the inner part of the façade). It features a fresco depicting the Madonna protecting Siena during the infamous Battle of Camollia, which took place in 1526 at the already familiar Sienese gates (through which we entered the city). This was yet another attempt by Florence, supported by Pope Clement VII (born Giulio de' Medici), to capture Siena. That day, against 1,100 mounted knights and 9,000 infantry of the papal-Florentine army, only "400 infantry, a quarter of whom were bandits and exiles from our territories and 50 light cavalrymen" defended the city, as Clement VII's advisor later recorded. The outcome of the battle was a crushing defeat for the Florentine and papal army, shocking even the seasoned conquerors of the Medici house. The victory resulted from a successful and unexpected flank attack that the Sienese forces launched during the night, when the Florentines, confident in their imminent victory, rested peacefully near Porta Camollia. This is precisely what Clement VII's advisor, Francesco Vettori, wrote in his letter to Niccolò Machiavelli, admitting that before this event he "did not believe in biblical miracles."

FONTE DEL CASATO (FONTE SERENA)



Now, we will take a walk through streets familiar only to Sienese residents, particularly those born and raised in the labyrinths of medieval alleys and stairways. Upon exiting the Church of Saint Martin, turn onto Via del Porrione, which runs to the right of the church's façade. Look for the houses on the even-numbered side (to your right). When you reach about the midpoint of the side of the church, you will find yourself at house number 60. There, you will immediately notice a small archway tunnel. This arch marks the beginning of the ancient Via Luparello. We will proceed down this street

without turning, descending farther down the stairs and through intersections with other streets until we arrive at a lovely, spacious square that offers a picturesque view of the city. Nine centuries ago, a wall separated this square – Piazza Mercato or Market Square – from the present-day Piazza del Campo. Today, residential buildings separate the two.

From this square, we will depart via Vicolo di San Salvadore. This charming alley begins just after the parking area. Gradually, the alley will narrow and eventually lead us to Casato di Sotto. At the intersection, we must turn left and continue until we reach the junction with Vicolo della Fonte at house number 70. Incidentally, these streets are already part of the "Eagle" district; if you are lucky, the houses here will be adorned with the very banners that the "Eagle" team received during the Palio di Siena from Emperor Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire – the banners that the public repeatedly booed in the 1840s and 1850s during the struggle for Italian unification.

Now, let’s turn down the little staircase leading from Casato di Sotto to Vicolo della Fonte. Then, at the foot of the stairs, we will turn around. Deep within a small "niche," another Sienese drinking fountain awaits us. It was built between 1352 and 1360 after the plague epidemic. This fountain has a complex history and two interchangeable names: Fonte del Casato and Fonte Serena. The first name indicates the geographical location of this drinking spring, which became one of the first public sources of fresh water in this part of Siena. (Aristocrats and wealthy merchants typically first dug wells, while such fountains were created for the middle and lower classes.) The second name reminds us of the unfortunate reputation that the fountain quickly acquired after its opening: Its inconvenient location, recessed several steps below the street, complicated the fetching of water by townspeople as well as its use for watering horses. However, its convenient height in relation to the street Casato di Sotto and the overall seclusion of this nook quickly made this source a popular spot for suicides.

Unable to find a better solution, residents of Siena would throw themselves headfirst from the street above into the fountain's basin or, more commonly, would simply drown in it. Consequently, the fountain soon earned the nickname "Fountain of Sirens" (as it is known that the

sirens living in the waters lure people with their singing, then grab and drown them). The fountain was consecrated several times, including in the presence of the Sienese bishop, leading it to be regarded as miraculous. Soon, in addition to suicides, severely ill Sienese citizens flocked to it, hoping for healing from the holy water. Nevertheless, the reputation of Fonte del Casato remained unsavoury. In fact, it is associated with one of the classic urban legends about werewolves typical of medieval cities.

As the story goes among the Sienese, a wealthy and noble man lived on Casato di Sotto. Cursed by the devil, he transformed into a wolf every night. Taking on his beastly form, the werewolf would leave his house and roam the neighbourhood, howling at the moon and frightening residents until he encountered another werewolf on the stairs by this fountain. Both wished to drink from the cursed fountain of suicides but could not agree on the space. Thus, they tore each other apart. The laundresses from neighbouring houses who came to the fountain in the morning discovered only bits of wolf fur and pools of blood on the stairs. In the end, the fountain was sealed up and remained closed until it was reopened in 1970. Drinking from it is probably not advisable, as turning into a wolf each night is very harmful to the heart and blood vessels.

PALAZZO CHIGI-SARACINI



Returning to Casato di Sotto let's take a few steps to the right and turn onto the uphill alley of Vicolo di Tone. When we reach its fork, we must turn right and pass through another long archway tunnel to emerge onto Via di Città. There, we will find that this arch is part of the luxurious, large Palazzo Chigi-Saracini, which is slightly curved and features beautiful Gothic windows. This magnificent residence was built at the request of the Marescotti family in the 12th century, but, as one might easily guess, it changed hands numerous times and underwent even more renovations and reconstructions. In its time, this palace was owned by the already

familiar Piccolomini family. During this time, it gained a courtyard, a loggia, and new Renaissance interiors. However, the longest ownership of the palace belonged to the Saracini family, which conducted yet another – final and longest – restoration, lasting from 1770 to 1824. One of the few elements of the palace that has retained its original appearance (i.e., has remained untouched since the 13th century) is the Gothic façade, made partly of brick, a material highly characteristic of Siena.

In 1877, after the death of the last representative of the Saracini family (Signor Galgano), the palace was inherited by Fabio Chigi Saracini, the son of Galgano's sister. Accordingly, the palace underwent a name change. As one of the richest residents of Siena, Fabio Chigi led a rather restrained – even ascetic – life, severely limiting any "extravagant" expenditures. He was a consistent critic of the socialists, who were gaining popularity in Siena at the time; in all the controversies concerning the King of Italy and his government, Chigi firmly sided with the monarch (which was probably to be expected of someone of his lineage and status). His only weaknesses were passions for collecting Renaissance art and hunting for rabbits. The latter pastime ultimately proved fatal for Signor Chigi: On October 18, 1908, during a hunting expedition with his friends and relatives (Pietro Brigata Busatti, Emilio Piccolomini, Guglielmo Ponticelli, and his son, Guido Chigi), a fellow hunter accidentally shot the owner of this luxurious palace while all five were trying to shoot a rabbit that had bolted from its burrow. Wounded in the side, Fabio Chigi Saracini died on the spot. The new owner of the palace became his son, Guido Chigi degli Useppi Saracini Lucherini. (Yes, a plot worthy of an Agatha Christie novel.)

This Count Guido Chigi proved to be a worthy successor to his father's traditions (in terms of spending restraint and patronage rather than hunting). He devoted a large part of his fortune to establishing the Music Academy – "Accademia Chigiana" – in this palace (Chigi himself was a composer). The academy is still situated here today. Furthermore, in 1939, he founded the music festival "Settimane musicali," which continues to this day.

Interestingly, from 1933 onward, the secretary of the Academy was Olga Rudge – a violinist and companion of the American poet Ezra Pound, with whom we became acquainted during our journey in Pisa. Rudge

was deeply involved in studying the legacy of Antonio Vivaldi, particularly extracting unpublished and unknown autographs of the genius composer from the archives of the National Library of Turin. Meanwhile, Pound organised concerts dedicated to Vivaldi in Venice. These events did not achieve considerable success in the city of Saint Mark, which is why, starting in 1936, the "Centre for Vivaldian Studies" was established at the Academy in Palazzo Chigi-Saracini.

Today, in addition to the Music Academy, the palace houses an excellent art museum, filled primarily with items from the Chigi-Saracini family collection, as well as a cosy café in the inner courtyard.

PALAZZO DELLE PAPESSE



Another of the illustrious Piccolomini dynasty, the Palazzo Piccolomini-delle Papesse is located just across from the Palazzo Chigi-Saracini. It is easily recognisable by the rough stone that clads the lower part of its façade. Its unusual name (the Palace of the Popess) is linked to the fact that it was commissioned by Caterina Piccolomini, the biological sister of Pope Pius II. (Yes, he had several very wealthy sisters.) After marrying Signor Bartolomeo Pieri, she became the matriarch of the Pieri-Piccolomini family, which lasted until the mid-18th century. In the late 16th and early 17th centuries, descendants of Caterina and Bartolomeo, who owned this palace, held high ecclesiastical and administrative positions. Signor Ascanio II Pieri-Piccolomini even became the Archbishop of Siena in 1628.

He is associated with the most interesting story in the life of Palazzo delle Papesse. In 1633, Archbishop Ascanio II, who had a long-standing acquaintance with the respected astronomer and scholar Galileo Galilei at the Florentine court of the Medici, invited him to stay at his Siena residence. There, the legendary scientist lived from July 9 to the end of December 1633. Among other things, he observed the stars and the Moon from the terrace of the archbishop's palace, which still offers almost the same view as it did 400 years ago. It is also worth noting that under the influence of Galileo (a man 20 years older than Ascanio Piccolomini), the future head of the Siena metropolitan area displayed a lively, unusual-for-a-church-representative interest in the natural sciences.

Today, this palace houses a museum of so-called modern art, which is not worth your attention or time. The only reason to visit the palace is, of course, to see the very terrace where Galileo Galilei spent many of his nights in Siena.

SIENA CATHEDRAL



Via Castoro, which begins just around the corner from Palazzo delle Papesse, leads us through several arches to what is arguably the second main square of Siena and our last stop on this journey through the city. Bathed in the colours of endless Tuscan sunsets, this square greets us with an unexpected sight: the unfinished walls of the colossal nave of the never-expanded Cathedral of Siena. Indeed, an ambitious project existed in the Sienese Republic: to create a temple that would surpass all other known Christian cathedrals in the world. This idea arose among the Sienese municipality in 1339 when the existing cathedral, which had been there since the 13th century, seemed too small for the significantly expanded influence and considerable wealth of the Sienese Republic. The creation of a new cathedral that would "properly underscore" the significance and splendour of Siena in the Christian world was entrusted to architect Lando di Pietro, known as a master of bell towers and bridges. In 1340, based on his design, work commenced on erecting new walls for the

cathedral. The intention was for the existing main nave of the old church to become the transept of the new one.
As you might guess, the 1347 outbreak of the plague – which devastated the city and ended the most stable period of the Sienese Republic – hindered the realisation of this project. When the plague left the city, there was no one who could continue the work or who had the means of doing so. However, the decision was made for the erected walls to be left standing. To be honest, they look impressive even in their unfinished state.
As we move a little farther, we find ourselves directly in front of the cathedral, where a statue of the Capitoline Wolf stands at the corner of the main staircase. This references the legend of the founding of Siena by the sons of Remus and the nephews of Romulus.
A starting point for the history of this temple can be considered the year 1227, in which the biccherna (the financial oversight body with which we are already familiar) registered payments for the white and black marble constituting the cathedral and its adjoining bell tower. However, the cathedral, officially titled "Metropolitan Cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta," was consecrated on November 18, 1179, by Pope Alexander III. In memory of this fact, every year on November 18, the Papal banner is hung in the cathedral's choir. Clearly, that year saw the completion of works on the premises of the church, while the cladding, the creation of the façade, and the construction of the dome took nearly another century. In 1263, master coppersmith Rosso Padellaio was paid for the copper "apple" placed on top of the dome; the receipt for this payment is preserved in the archive of the Sienese biccherna. (Yes, if you collect receipts, keep in mind that there is a small chance that your distant descendants will discover them 800 years from now.) Incidentally, one of the tablets displayed in the Palazzo Piccolomini, dated to the 15th century, depicts members of the Sienese municipality symbolically presenting the keys of the city to the Virgin Mary within the interiors of the cathedral.
The temple is 48 metres (157.5 feet) high – a stature achieved only after a series of additions and renovations in the mid-17th century. The height of the bell tower, constructed between 1264 and 1313, is 77 metres (252.7 feet), which is 11 metres (36.1 feet) less than Torre del Mangia.

I personally rank the façade of the cathedral, which is divided into two parts (the lower part, including the portals and the compositions directly above them, and the upper part, featuring a large oculus and the surrounding sculptural compositions), second only to the façade of the Florence Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore. This is simply because I love Florence with all my heart and would not exchange it for any other city, may Lady Siena forgive me. The lower part of this façade was crafted by the master and sculptor Giovanni Pisano, who worked on it from 1284 to 1297 along with his students. After completing the triangular lunettes above the portals, he ceased his work and abruptly left Siena. (It is believed that Pisano did this due to criticism from the Sienese municipality, which accused him of slowness, wastefulness, and disorganisation.) Nevertheless, Pisano set the tone for the entire façade of the cathedral by ensuring its astonishing decoration with Gothic sculptures, including figures of "the heralds of the coming of Christ": the ancient philosopher Plato, the prophet Habakkuk, the Sibyl, Kings David and Solomon, the prophet Moses, and Jesus Sirach. As with Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence, the sculptures we see today are exact replicas of Pisano's works, the originals of which are displayed in the museum Opera del Duomo (which occupies a brick building "integrated" into the unfinished nave of the unbuilt "New Cathedral" located to our right as we entered the square).



The upper part of the façade was completed between 1299 and 1317 by Camaino di Crescentino, the father of the much more famous master Tino di Camaino. The latter is believed to have worked on the relief in the central portal of the temple. I regret to disappoint you regarding the splendid mosaics – arguably the most striking parts of the cathedral, shimmering with dazzling golden light in the sunset. They were placed here only in 1878. Of course, this fact does not detract from their impressive nature.

Upon entering the cathedral, let us follow our established habit and pay attention to the counter-facade: Here, the master who worked on the stained glass of the oculus has prepared a surprise for us. "The Last Supper," created in the 16th century by Pastorino dei Pastorini, can be seen only from the inside; it is completely hidden from view on the outside.

Now, let’s glance at the upper part of the central nave. The entire space above its columns is nothing more than a gallery of sculptural portraits of the 171 Popes. It is arranged chronologically in a clockwise direction, starting with Christ, from whom the Pontiffs claim apostolic succession, and ending with Pope Lucius III, whose Papacy ended in 1185 when the

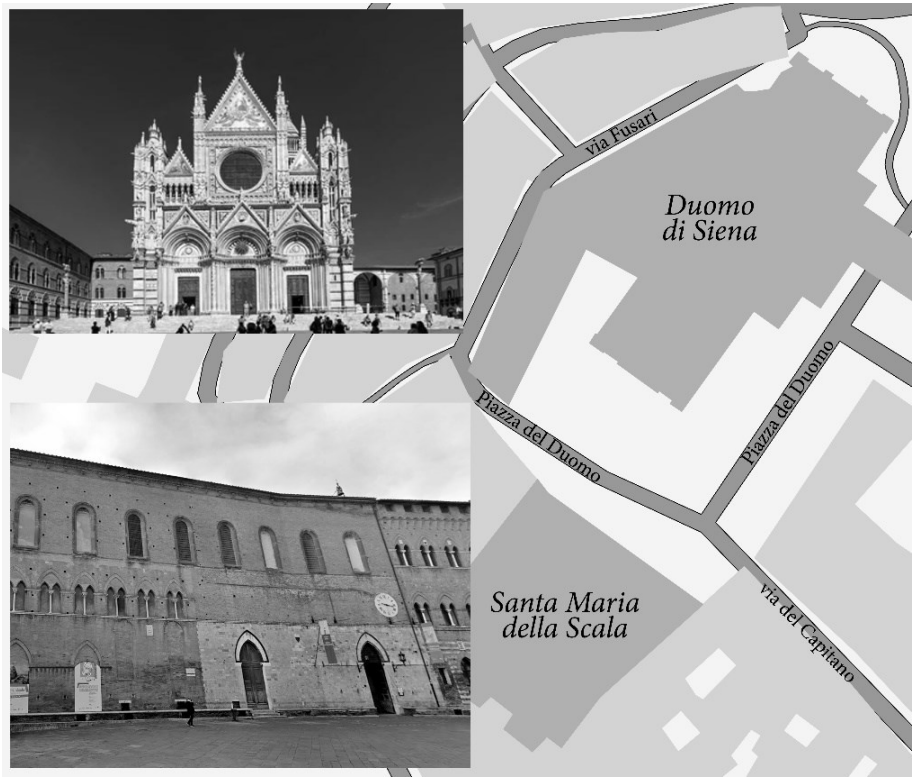
cathedral was, according to official records, already consecrated but still under construction. While these busts may be regarded as mediocre artistically, the series of them cannot help but impress with its length and completeness.

Beneath the popes, in tondo frames in the niches at the bases of the arches, you can see depictions of 36 men, presumably representing Roman emperors. However, without inscriptions beneath their busts, interpreting the portraits proves impossible. The appearance of these portraits in the early 16th century was likely a tribute to the Sienese Ghibellines (supporters of the emperors in their conflict with the popes).

Furthermore, the choir of the cathedral and the design of its dome are impressive, featuring images of architectural forms we have already encountered: coffers, likely inspired by the dome of the Roman Pantheon.

Also, pay attention to the two holy water fonts (exceptional masterpieces of sculptural artistry) made of Carrara marble by Antonio Federighi, as well as the stunning pulpit crafted by Nicola Pisano (the father of Giovanni, who worked on the cathedral's façade).

SANTA MARIA DELLA SCALA



Our last stop in Siena is the former hospital of Santa Maria della Scala, located opposite the cathedral. It was once the largest and one of the oldest hospitals in Europe. Its name, "della Scala," can be easily explained by its location. "Scala" translates from Italian as "stairs," in this case referring to the staircase of the cathedral in front of which the hospital stands.

The first document unambiguously relating to it dates back to March 29, 1090. Since then, and for the following 900 years, this building has sheltered the sick, the destitute, orphans, helpless old people, and pilgrims journeying to the Holy Land. (The latter activity was long considered the hospital's primary function, as several pilgrimage routes – to Rome and Jerusalem – passed through Siena.) Transferred under the direct management of the Sienese municipality in the 15th century, the

hospital continued its operations until 1995. Only in the late 20th century, after 905 years of service, was it completely transformed into a museum.

To recount all the stories and artifacts associated with this hospital would take more than two such guides, so I will simply mention that it was here that Saint Catherine of Siena carried out her charitable work. In addition to numerous invaluable paintings, furniture, and sculptures displayed in the hospital's halls, you can see superb frescoes by the brothers della Quercia and Domenico di Bartolo. Furthermore, the hospital houses a permanent exhibition from the National Archaeological Museum of Siena, and a few years ago, after careful restoration, the Chiasso di Sant'Ansano was opened to the public. This was once part of a city street that gradually became built up as the hospital complex expanded. By the 16th century, it was completely closed off and transformed into an internal gallery used for communication within the hospital.

Such is Siena: a city that, like many of its neighbours in the hills and valleys of the Tuscan vineyards, has forgotten what the word "time" means and is simply waiting for people who can share with it the moments of this eternity.

WHERE TO STAY IN SIENA

BUDGET HOTELS

Hotel Italia

- Address: Viale Cavour 67, 53100, Siena
- Tel: +39 0577 44248
- Free Wi-Fi, free breakfast, dog/pet friendly, paid private parking on-site

A cosy family hotel located in the city centre, not far from the train station. Housed in a historic building that was converted from a family home into a hotel in the mid-20th century. The decor of the rooms and common areas harmoniously blends modern and classic styles. The rooms are spacious, clean, and comfortable, and your morning will begin with one of the best breakfasts in Siena. The staff is welcoming and friendly. The only point to note is that if you have many devices that will need charging simultaneously, the number of sockets might seem insufficient.

Casa Vacanze Il Campo

- Address: Via Salicotto, 73, 53100, Siena
- Tel: +39 0577 226849
- Free Wi-Fi, paid private parking nearby, dog/pet-friendly, air conditioning, kitchenette

A complex of nine apartments in the city centre. The apartments range from 34 square metres for one or two people to two-room units for families or groups. All apartments come with a mini or full kitchen. The rooms have been recently renovated and are clean and comfortable. The owner, Signor Giovanni, is warm and hospitable.

MID-RANGE HOTELS

Residenza d'Epoca Palazzo Borghesi

- Address: Via S. Pietro 3, Piazza Postierla, 53100, Siena
- Tel: +39 339 666 2939
- Email: residenzaborghesi@gmail.com
- Free Wi-Fi, valet parking, free breakfast, air conditioning, bicycle tours, hiking, rooftop terrace

An old palace of Pope Paul V. For more information about its history, visit the following link: https://www.palazzoborghesesiena.it/en/palazzo-borghesi.

HIGH-RANGE HOTELS

Grand Hotel Continental Siena – Starhotels Collezione

- Address: Banchi di Sopra 85, 53100, Siena
- Tel: +39 0577 56011
- Free Wi-Fi, valet parking, in-room breakfast, air conditioning, babysitting, non-smoking rooms

Grand Hotel Continental in Siena is located in a magnificent 17th-century palazzo that exudes elegance and charm. With its stunning architecture, historic grandeur, and impeccable service, every stay is a unique experience. As one of the city's most prestigious hotels, it is the only five-star boutique hotel in the historic centre. Palazzo Gori Pannilini, the noble residence that now houses the hotel, is a prime example of Italian elegance. Pope Alexander VII gifted the palazzo to his niece, Olimpia, upon her marriage to a Sienese aristocrat. Designed as a celebration of love, it has hosted historical figures who contributed to Siena's greatness for centuries. The hotel has an enviable location just steps from the cathedral and Piazza del Campo, renowned for hosting

the annual Palio race. Its sophisticated and elegant rooms and suites feature frescoed ceilings, original Tuscan cotto tiled floors, and finishes in porcelain, marble, and travertine. They are finely decorated with antique furniture, precious objects, valuable artworks, and luxurious silks. The Sapordivino restaurant offers a culinary experience at the height of Italian gastronomy, with a refined menu showcasing the authentic flavours of Sienese cuisine. At the Lounge Bar by Sapordivino, guests can enjoy an aperitif or after-dinner cocktail in a refined and tranquil atmosphere. The hotel also houses four of Siena's most impressive halls, featuring high ceilings, beautiful 17th-century frescoes, and exquisite Murano glass chandeliers, making them ideal for private events, weddings, seminars, and conferences for up to 100 guests. From the concierge to 24-hour room service and valet parking, every service is carefully chosen to ensure an unforgettable stay.

WHERE TO EAT IN SIENA

Il Bocconcino

- Address: Via Rinaldini 8, 53100, Siena
- Tel: +39 0577 152 4668

Classic Italian street food. The menu features over 30 types of sandwiches that are prepared right in front of you. All products are fresh and sourced from local farmers. There is a wide selection of Tuscan wines. Tasty and affordable. Please note that there might be queues during peak hours.

La Piccola Ciaccineria

- Address: Via Di San Pietro, 52, 53100, Siena, Italy
- Tel: +39 0577 151 3263

Takeaway pizza. The owner prepares it right before you. Fresh ingredients from local farmers. Very delicious. Prices start from €2.00.

Fischi per Fiaschi

- Address: Via San Marco 43, 53100, Siena, Italy
- Tel: +39 0577 280971

A warm environment and welcoming atmosphere with a private hall. It features self-produced white and red wines, labels from various regions of Tuscany, local products, and traditional Sienese dishes. Enjoy delicious anchovies under pesto, panzanella, a flavourful tomato soup, and a selection of typical Tuscan cold cuts and cheeses.

MUSEUMS OF SIENNA

Italian Opera in Siena

Address: Via La Lizza, 1, 53100 Siena
Tel: +39 3459 305865
Price: Full ticket: €25.00; Under 25: €15.00; Under 12: free; Meet the artists: €10.00 per person

Museo dell'acqua Siena

Address: Str. Fonti di Pescaia, 1, 53100 Siena
Price: Full ticket: €10.00; Discount: €5.00 (children aged 11 to 19, those over 65, university students), Free: children under 11, disabled people and their accompanying persons

Palazzo Pubblico

Address: Il Campo, 1, 53100 Siena

Museo Civico Tickets
Single rate (with or without reservation from January 13, 2022): €6.00
Family: €22.00 (2 adults + children over 11 years old)
Free: children under 11, disabled people and their companions, journalists

Torre del Mangia Tickets
Single rate: €10.00
Family €25.00 (2 adults + children over 11 years old)
Free: children under 11

IMPORTANT

Ascents are scheduled every 45 minutes for a limited number of 25 people.
Tickets are subject to availability.

Cumulative tickets

Museo Civico + Santa Maria della Scala: €14.00 (valid for two days)
Museo Civico + Torre del Mangia: €15.00 (valid for one day)
Civic Museum + Santa Maria della Scala + Torre del Mangia: €20.00
Family Municipal Museums and Tower (2 adults + children over 11 years old): €40.00

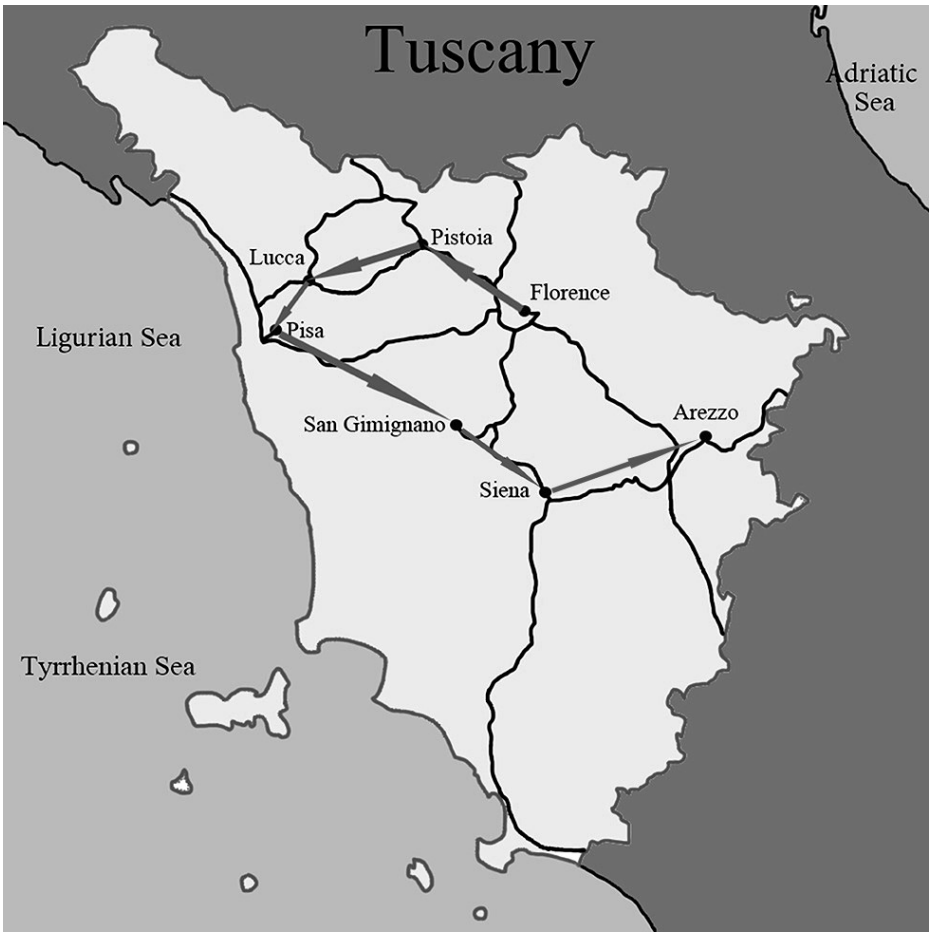
Integrated tickets

Civic Museum + Santa Maria della Scala + National Art Gallery of Siena: €18.00
Civic Museum + Santa Maria della Scala + Torre del Mangia + National Art Gallery of Siena: €23.00
Entrance to the Civic Museum also includes admittance to the temporary exhibitions currently taking place at the Magazzini del sale.

The sale of cumulative tickets and integrated tickets that include Santa Maria della Scala is suspended every first weekend of the month.

Siena Cathedral Monumental Complex (Cathedral, Opa SI Pass)

Address: Piazza del Duomo, 8, 53100 Siena
Tel: +390577283048
Combined tickets (Opa SI Pass) are valid for three consecutive days.
Cathedral and Piccolomini Library: €7.00
Opa SI Pass (Cathedral and Piccolomini Library, Opera Museum and Panorama from the New Cathedral Facade, Crypt, Baptistery): €16.00



AREZZO: THE CITY THAT GAVE US PETRARCH

Arezzo is considered one of the oldest cities in Tuscany; even the Etruscans, who inhabited this land long before the Romans, did not know exactly who founded it and when. As a result, they devised a myth about the city's foundation by the Etruscan goddess Artume, who was responsible for night, the moon, forests, death, and fertility in the Etruscan pantheon. The ancient, fortified

settlement was named Artume in her honour. (Yes, you are not mistaken: This goddess was likely borrowed from the ancient Greeks, to whom she was known as Artemis.) Archaeological evidence suggests that the city standing on the site of present-day Arezzo has existed since at least the 9th century BC. (Florence, for reference, was founded almost nine centuries later, in 59 BC.) Furthermore, there is every reason to believe that Artume was one of the main cities of the Etruscans, along with Orvieto, Cortona, and Chiusi.



When the Romans arrived in Etruscan lands, Artume became Arretium. From this toponym, through "vulgarisation" (in other words, simplification or adaptation to vernacular forms of popular Latin), the city's modern name evolved.

During that time, the greatest threat to the city came from the Celts known as the Senones or the Gallic Senones. Residing on the northeast coast of the Italian peninsula, they increasingly invaded the territories of the Roman Republic from the late 5th century BC. It was then that a permanent garrison of Roman soldiers was established in Arezzo, which ultimately proved unable to withstand the Celtic onslaught; the Gauls defeated and destroyed the entire garrison not far from Arezzo, in a field

now known as Campoluci or "Lucius's Field," named after the consul Lucius Metellus, who commanded the garrison. Shortly after that, in 390 or 387 BC, the Senone Gauls – led by their chieftain, Brennus – effortlessly occupied Rome and forced the city's rulers and citizens to pay a substantial ransom to the invaders. (This event is associated with such famous phrases as "woe to the vanquished" and "the right to the point of my sword," both attributed to Brennus.)

It should be noted that until the time of Gaius Julius Caesar (the 1st century BC), Arezzo maintained a strong influence from its ancient Etruscan past. Its inhabitants were well aware of their distinctiveness from the Romans to the extent that any civil war within the Roman Republic (which occurred quite frequently) provoked Arezzo to remind Rome of its right to autonomy. (The city was entitled to this, as it was the largest military-industrial centre, almost entirely supplying the Roman army during the wars against Carthage.) Thus, during the conflict between Caesar and Gnaeus Pompey the Great, Arezzo resolutely sided with the latter. This proved to be a fatal mistake for the city: After Pompey's defeat, Caesar transformed the "disloyal" city into a colony for Roman veterans (similar to what Florence had been since its foundation). It was then that the city finally bid farewell to the remnants of its ancient culture and fully Latinised itself.

However, this did not mean a decline in culture or economy; quite the opposite. It was here, in 68 BC, that Gaius Cilnius Maecenas was born, and it was here that he spent most of his life. His name is the source of the well-known term "patron," synonymous with "benefactor." Gaius Cilnius Maecenas, hailing from a very wealthy Roman family and having close ties with the future emperor Octavian Augustus, spent colossal sums on supporting young poets, including the "intermediary friend" of Dante Alighieri, Virgil, who became the guide of the father of modern Italian literature through Hell.

After the split of the Roman Empire into two (Eastern [also known as Byzantine] and Western), followed by the subsequent fragmentation of the Western Roman Empire into numerous Germanic kingdoms, Arezzo found itself in a border zone between the Exarchate of Ravenna, controlled by Byzantium, and the lands of the Goths. Before long, the city, which had an important strategic position (as the Via Cassia, the

road connecting Rome with Etruria, ran through it), was occupied by the German Lombards, who exerted an unexpected influence on Arezzo. During the Lombard period, the first early Christian churches and new major fortifications and castles appeared in the city. When the Kingdom of the Lombards was incorporated into the Empire of Charlemagne (8th to 9th centuries), the first bishop was appointed in Arezzo. Today, this city can boast of knowing all of its bishops by name since the establishment of the episcopate in Arezzo.

In 1000, the bishop of Arezzo was granted the title of count (a move that combined his spiritual authority over the city with secular power), and Arezzo itself became an independent district – in other words, a municipality. However, the city truly became autonomous only at the end of the 11th century when a consular system of governance (which would later appear in Siena) was established within it.

In the early 13th century, due to the ongoing conflict between the popes and the emperors of the Holy Roman Empire for power and supremacy over one another, the bishops of Arezzo – a city that had resolutely supported the emperors – lost their secular power over the city and were reduced to the status of ordinary pastors. At the same time, monks from dissolved monasteries in the area were forcibly relocated to the city. (The confiscation of monastic lands was part of the Ghibelline [pro-Imperial] policy to diminish the popes' influence in Imperial lands.) Additionally, the city experienced a significant cultural rise: In 1252, the University of Arezzo was established, and by the end of the century, the names of its graduates – poets Guittone d'Arezzo and Cenne da la Chitarra – shone brightly in Tuscany. Meanwhile, another native of the city, Restoro d'Arezzo, published his cosmological work "Composition of the World," which is considered the first scientific treatise written in the "vulgar tongue" rather than the official but rarely used Latin. Margaritone d'Arezzo became the founder of the "Aretine" school of art, which would, at some point, include Cimabue – one of the Florentine masters who anticipated the Italian Renaissance.

Of course, this period of peaceful prosperity could not last indefinitely. Nearby, Florence had emerged as a significant economic and political centre dominated mainly by supporters of the Guelph party – bitter enemies of the Ghibellines. A direct confrontation was inevitable, and it

occurred in 1289 at the Battle of Campaldino, where the young Florentine Dante Alighieri was present. The Florentine Guelphs claimed the victory. For Arezzo, it marked the beginning of a decline in both its political and cultural stature. During this period, following the defeat by the Florentine army, a son was born in Arezzo to the family of the lawyer Pietro di ser Parenzo Petracco, who had been exiled from Florence along with Dante Alighieri for his loyalty to the Ghibellines. This son would later move with his parents to Avignon and become known as one of the greatest Italian poets of the Renaissance: Francesco Petrarch.

In Arezzo, thanks to the strict policies of Bishop Guido Tarlati, who, from 1321, combined his office with the title of "lifetime lord of Arezzo," the city's civil and social life was brought under control. The bishop firmly suppressed attempts by local Guelphs or Ghibellines to take up arms to assert their positions. As a result, the city's economy was restored to the extent that Arezzo began minting currency. On the other hand, one day, the future saint Francis of Assisi arrived at the walls of Arezzo to preach, but according to the accounts of those accompanying him, he refused to enter the city. He stated that it was "inhabited by devils" – such was the disapproval that the founder of the Franciscan order felt toward the rigidity of Bishop Tarlati.

To the relief of many who might relish the idea of unleashing bloody mayhem on the streets of the city, Bishop Guido Tarlati passed away just six years into his "dictatorship." His cousin and successor, Piero Saccone Tarlati, was such a democratic ruler that, in his early years, he destroyed the entire economy of the municipality. In 1337, he "handed it over to Florence" for 10 years in exchange for financial compensation. Credit must be given to the Florentines, as, after this period, Arezzo's independence was fully restored, but prosperity and peace were not to be spoken of.

By the end of the 14th century, Bishop Giovanni Albergotti of Arezzo decided to bring the city into the pope's sphere of influence. This provoked another war during which Arezzo was raided multiple times by mercenary soldiers who were periodically "bought off" by the different sides of the conflict. Following one such sack, Arezzo was occupied by a French mercenary army under the command of the knight Angerran de Coucy, who agreed to "sell" the conquered city to Florence

for 40,000 florins. During this time, the city's most revered relic – the head of Saint Donatus, the patron saint of Arezzo – was removed from the nearly destroyed and depopulated city. For a long time, this relic was kept in Forlì, whose ruler purchased it from Angerran de Coucy. Not until the death of the lord of Forlì did Saint Donatus' remains return to Arezzo.

Since then, starting in 1384, Arezzo was permanently under the control of the Florentine Republic, which later became a duchy, then the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, and, subsequently, part of the unified Kingdom of Italy. Undoubtedly, this long period of Florentine rule significantly influenced the city's architecture, painting, and sculpture. Unfortunately, the invaluable heritage suffered immense damage during World War II, when Allied bombings resulted in Arezzo losing 60 percent of its buildings, including important historical and cultural monuments. Nevertheless, in the 1950s, the city was quickly restored and today serves as an important administrative centre in Tuscany, connected by railway to Rome and Florence.

PIAZZA GRANDE



We begin our journey through Arezzo right here, at the oldest square in the city, formed in the Middle Ages on the site of the former Roman forum – the most important and central part of any city in ancient Rome, where all the major administrative and trading buildings were located. Naturally, even after the end of the Roman era, the city's centre of cultural life remained unchanged. The square gradually transformed from a rectangle (the typical shape of Roman forums) into a square, and by the 14th century, it had taken on its present trapezoidal shape. The city experienced both flourishing and crises, wars and upheavals. Rulers and banners over its fortress walls changed, but Piazza Grande remained the place where passionate declarations were read, livestock was sold, poets and small

traders gathered, and the ringing of the bells of the Santa Maria Assunta called citizens to prayer.

One of the main buildings in this square is the Palazzo della Fraternita dei Laici, or the Palace of the Laity Brotherhood. This secular charitable organisation was founded in 1262 as a society to assist the poor and the needy, and it continues to operate to this day. Over the centuries of its active work, this Brotherhood, which relied entirely on the voluntary donations of its many members, has been the patron and sponsor of numerous remarkable architectural landmarks that have shaped Arezzo's modern identity. Greatness is born from small beginnings – a thought you inevitably encounter while travelling through Tuscany. The Brotherhood acquired its own palace in the 14th century, and it has been located in this square from the very beginning. The oldest, right portion of the palace was completed in the 1370s and adorned with a lunette by Spinello Aretino – one of many masters from Arezzo who enjoyed the Brotherhood's patronage.



In 1434, the central part of this old façade featured the beautifully preserved sculptural group "Madonna with Child and Saints Lorentino and Pergentino," created by Bernardo Rossellino. Later, it was augmented with statues of Saints Gregory and Donatus. The final stage

of the construction of this building was the erection of the bell tower; it was completed in 1550 and embellished in 1552 with astronomical clocks. The author and director of this "addition" to the palace was another famous native of Arezzo: Giorgio Vasari, whose name is associated primarily with a monumental and invaluable work on the history of the arts, "Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects." In it, he collected, systematised, and presented the biographies of most masters of the Italian Renaissance. Thanks to this work, Vasari is considered the founder of the discipline known as art history, and it is due to his efforts that we have an understanding (albeit not always accurate and sometimes apocryphal) of the lives of great creators such as Filippo Brunelleschi, Giotto di Bondone, Cimabue, and Michelangelo beyond their workshops.

Of course, for those of you who have already travelled through Florence with my guide, Giorgio Vasari is well-known as the creator of the famous gallery that connects the Palazzo Pitti with the Palazzo Vecchio above the city streets and even the bridge.

CHIESA DI SANTA MARIA DELLA PIEVE



One of the most unusual churches in Tuscany, in my opinion, is located to the left of the Palazzo della Fraternita. Known as Santa Maria Assunta or Santa Maria della Pieve, this ancient church was built on the site of the former Roman forum as early as the 5th century AD and is one of the most revered sacred places among Catholics in Arezzo. It is believed that, in 362, Bishop Donatus of Arezzo performed his last miracle at this church: During the Eucharist, pagans burst into the church where he was officiating and broke the chalice used for Communion. Leaning over the broken pieces, Bishop Donatus began to pray and join the fragments until he had reassembled the chalice. Despite one piece being missing, not a single drop spilled during the sacred ceremony. As the legend goes, this made such an impression on the pagan residents of Arezzo that on that very day, 79 of them were baptised. A month later, the bishop was arrested on the orders of the prefect of Arezzo, Quadracian, and was subsequently beheaded on August 7, 362. Since then, Christians in Arezzo have venerated the rescued head of Saint Donatus as one of the city's most important relics.



In the 11th and 12th centuries, a new phase of construction began, and the early Christian church was significantly rebuilt and expanded. In the process, it acquired a mixture of architectural features typical of the period when Romanesque architecture gradually transformed into the Gothic style with which we are familiar today. Based on surviving documents, it can be inferred that in ancient times, there stood a temple of Mercury at the site of the present church, which was later used as a Christian church. (This is mentioned in the decree for the construction of the current church from the year 1009.)

What we see from the square is a semicircular projection adorned with a colonnade, known as the apse, which, as you might guess, is the rear part of the temple. If we walk around it, we will see a very unusual Gothic façade, completed in the 13th century and consisting of three tiers of columns and a fourth, lower tier made up of an arcade with the main portal. You will immediately notice that the upper tiers of the façade have few identical columns: Among them are spiral columns, standard columns, columns with longitudinal grooves, and even one "caryatid" – a column in the shape of a human figure wrapped in a chiton. It might seem that the façade was created "with whatever was at hand," but that would be a significant misunderstanding. One does not have to be the greatest detective in the world to see that all the columns correspond to

their neighbours in the same register – clearly indicating that they were deliberately made diverse.

Other aspects of the façade are the lunettes (the spaces above the doors in the portals) and the archivolt (which you will find inside the central portal, consisting of 12 sculptures arranged around the arch). The term "archivolt" originates from the Latin phrase "arcus volutus," meaning "surrounding arch." These elements of the façade differ from the majority of what you can see in the decoration of Italian churches: Their style clearly indicates that the master who worked on them belonged to the northern European (Germanic-Scandinavian) architectural tradition. These sculptures appeared here no later than the 1240s and are characterised by, among other things, their remarkable polychromy, which has been restored after careful renovation.

If you examine the inscriptions accompanying 11 of the 12 sculptures, you can understand, without the need for an art historian or their extensive guides, what the unknown artist intended to depict: the 12 months of the year. The composition should be read from the lower right tier, where the two-faced god Janus (the god of all beginnings, to whom offerings were traditionally made on January 1, his month) is located. From Janus moving to the wall, we see the personifications of February and March. Next, we should shift our gaze to the opposite side of the arch, where the figure representing April is located. It is followed by the only unlabelled figure, for May. The third figure represents the first month of summer: June. Directly above this figure, on the outer side of the arch, is the figure for July, followed by those for August and September. Continuing in this manner, starting from the wall, on the second tier of the right side of the arch, we see the figures for October, November, and December.

This method of "recording" was evidently borrowed from the ancient Greeks and is called "Boustrophedon" – from the ancient Greek words βοῦς (bous) meaning "ox" and στρέφω (strepho) meaning "to turn." This system of writing follows the path of an ox ploughing the field, with the first line written left to right, the second from right to left, the third again from left to right, and so on, until the end of the text. This style was used in most writings in ancient Greek and, at times, was also applied in visual

arts, as painting and sculpture are also texts, albeit using symbolism instead of letters.

Just as an ancient book with a beautiful, tightly bound leather cover will certainly not disappoint you when you open it, this ancient church surprises not only with its façade but also with its layout and interior design. However, of course, as with an ancient book, one must know how to read the language that the authors use.

As we turn to the counter-facade immediately upon entering the church, we see the marble relief "Adoration of the Magi," also of unknown authorship but dated to the 11th to 12th centuries. In the right nave, you can also see a baptistery from the mid-14th century; its carved panels depict scenes from the life of John the Baptist. The author of this work, the sculptor Giovanni di Agostino, is considered one of the most sought-after masters of his time. He is also known for his collaboration with his father, Agostino di Giovanni.

From the right nave, as well as from the left, a small staircase leads us to the presbytery, which is slightly elevated compared to the rest of the church. It is arguably the oldest part of the church, remaining unchanged since the 12th century. Here lies one of the masterpieces of ecclesiastical art in Arezzo: a polyptych depicting the Madonna and Child, Saint John the Evangelist, and Saints Donatus, John the Baptist, and Matthew. It was created in 1320 by the Sienese artist Pietro Lorenzetti at the commission of the bishop of Arezzo at that time, Guido Tarlati, who once served as this church's archpriest.

Interestingly, John the Baptist, traditionally depicted in polyptychs pointing at the figure of Christ to indicate his prophecy of the Saviour's coming, instead points at the infant with his thumb – a technique that Lorenzetti first applied in this altar and repeated in several other works.

The walls of the apse (the semicircular projection) were once adorned with frescoes by Lorenzetti, but his works were lost – or, rather, partly destroyed – in the 17th century during the church's "conformity" to the Baroque style that was in vogue at the time. Additional losses occurred three centuries later in the quest to restore the interiors to their original Romanesque spirit. The only survivor among these "metamorphoses" is the fresco on the column to the left, which one of Arezzo's most famous natives, Giorgio Vasari, attributed to the genius Giotto – the designer of

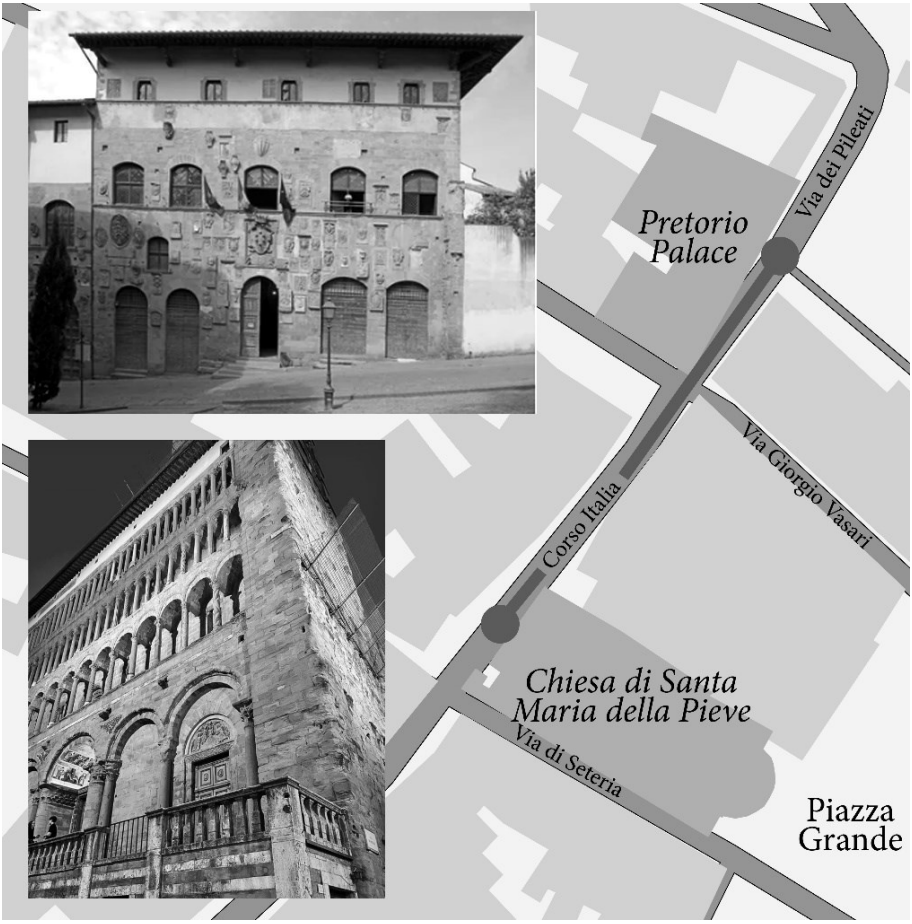
the famous bell tower of the Florence Cathedral. However, it was later discovered that this fresco was executed over 150 years after Giotto's death by an artist evidently imitating the Florentine's style.

Perhaps the most intriguing part of this church is the 12th-century crypt located directly beneath the presbytery. It houses the revered head (skull) of Saint Donatus, severed by the order of the Roman prefect Quadracian. Arezzo's main relic is stored in a golden bust of Saint Donatus, which Vasari attributed to the goldsmiths Pietro Vanni and Paolo Gizelli – students of the already familiar Agostino di Giovanni – and dated to 1346.

It is interesting to note that this church was considered the "family temple" of Vasari: For several generations, his ancestors maintained their own modest chapel here, in memory of which the master created a grand painted wooden altar for Santa Maria della Pieve. This altar was located next to Lorenzetti's ancient altar until 1865, when, after restoration, Vasari's "Opus Magnum" was moved to the Abbey of Saints Flora and Lucilla. It is also no coincidence that the remains of the "father of art history," Giorgio Vasari, and of his wife, Nicolosa de Bacci, were buried in this crypt.

Another feature worthy of highlighting is the bell tower of this church, known as "delle cento buche" ("of a hundred holes," the reason for which should be obvious). It was built between 1216 and 1330 (as noted by an inscription inside the church, written in "vulgar" (popular) language in Gothic script). This 50-metre (164.04 feet) tower has 80 windows distributed across five tiers. The common name among the residents of Arezzo likely relates to the rounding of that number.

PRETORIO PALACE



If, upon exiting the church, you turn right and walk a short way along Corso Italia, passing the intersection of this street with Via degli Albergotti, you will find, on your left, the façade of the Praetorian Palace or Palazzo Pretorio, leading to a hilly city park, adorned with numerous stone tablets and reliefs. Since 1290, this building served as the residence of the podestà (the ruler or governor) and the captain of justice (the chair of the supreme court) of Arezzo. Before it housed high-ranking officials of the municipal government, the palace comprised three sections belonging to the three

most influential and ancient families of the city: the Albergotti (after whom the adjoining street is named), Lodomeri, and Sassoli (from whom the authorities purchased it for use).

The numerous reliefs that adorn the façade are nothing more than the coats of arms of the leaders of the municipality of Arezzo – the podestà – and their successors after the Florentine Republic's conquest of the city. The tradition of "displaying" one's coat of arms on the façade of the building on the day of assumption of the highest municipal office was established by the city council of Arezzo in 1434 and was strictly observed until the day of the abolition of municipal autonomy. Thus, these coats of arms encompass the period of Arezzo's political history from the 15th to the 18th centuries, with the family emblem of the Medici occupying an outstanding position among them: a large shield in a cartouche containing six spheres and topped with a ducal crown featuring the Florentine lily.

In the 17th century, this palace was partially converted into a municipal prison. It fully "absorbed" the remaining administrative parts of the palace in the following century and functioned quite successfully until 1925 when the prefecture of Arezzo decided to restore the palazzo and house a medieval museum and art gallery within its premises. Despite the long period of the palace's existence as a penitentiary, the original interiors of the vestibule and the reception area of the city commissioner from the time of the Florentine governors, as well as the former chapel, have been well preserved. Since 1959, the building has housed the Arezzo City Library, which includes a priceless collection of books, including the library of the Fraternita de Laici, founded in 1609 and enriched over the centuries through individual donations and the acquisition of book collections from noble families and monasteries.

THE SECRET WINDOW AND PETRARCH'S HOUSE



Let's walk a little farther to the corner of Via dei Pileati, where we will find a small structure: a sort of enclosed rotunda with an iron grille at the edge of the street, offering a picturesque view of Arezzo. This rotunda is a popular meeting place among the residents of Arezzo and a "convenient spot for decent photographs" for tourists passing through the city. However, not every Arezzan and even not every professional tour guide can explain the true significance of this monument. The rotunda is called Tempietto alla Vittoria – "Little Temple of Victory" – and was built in 1935 to

commemorate the 20th anniversary of the entry of the Kingdom of Italy into World War I. From this war, the country emerged victorious, expanding its territories at the expense of the disintegrated Austro-Hungarian monarchy.

The small round stained-glass window at the top of the single wall of this "temple" depicts the allegorical figure of Italy, crowned with towers and fortress walls (symbolism understood only by those who have visited Tuscany), with the goddess of victory – Nike – extending a laurel wreath to Italy. For now, this monument serves as just a landmark for us. Directly opposite the "Little Temple of Victory," Via dell'Orto begins. This street stretches all the way to Arezzo's clock tower. We will now walk down it, but let's not rush, as shortly to our left, at number 28, we will come across a house that entered the annals of world culture and literature due to a single, almost incidental fact: On its premises, on July 20, 1304, Francesco Petrarch was born. However, shortly thereafter (within eight months to a year), the future poet's family was forced to leave Arezzo, where Petrarch's father, Pietro di Parenzo di Garzo, who had been exiled from Florence along with Dante Alighieri, settled. Pietro was a lawyer known by the nickname "Petracco." Petrarch would spend a large part of his life in present-day France and, on Easter Day 1341, was crowned with a laurel wreath in the church of Santa Maria in Aracoeli in Rome. He moved from Vaucluse to Italy only in 1353, settling in Milan at the court of the Visconti. Petrarch, one of the fathers of the literary Renaissance, never returned to Arezzo, but that did not prevent the city council from expropriating this building from the Arezzo police department in 1926 and turning it into the "House Museum of Francesco Petrarch." Yes, in this museum, you will not find his cradle, his writing desk, his favourite chair, or the plate from which he ate or the cup from which he drank; however, to visit Arezzo and not see this museum would be an act completely uncharacteristic of true travellers.

After Petrarch's family left Arezzo, this house changed hands multiple times and underwent several reconstructions until it ended up under the municipality's control. The municipality then handed it over to the police. However, as you already know, when the fascists came to power in Italy in 1922, they initiated a sort of "new Renaissance," raising the banner of purposefully elevating the most brilliant pages of Italian

history. (To be fair, they deserve some credit for that.) This is how this museum came into being. It now belongs to the Academy of Literature, Sciences, and Fine Arts of Arezzo in the name of Francesco Petrarch. Most of the museum's exhibition consists of items that are only indirectly related to the great poet: antique editions of his works, engravings, portraits of him, his heroes, and figures from his circle, etc. This museum will certainly not disappoint if you already know what to expect from it (your humble servant is always at your service), and the entrance fee is almost symbolic, so make sure to visit.

TORRE DELL'OROLOGIO



Now, let's walk to the end of Via dell'Orto to reach the city's main clock tower. The dial of the astronomical clock, commissioned by the aforementioned Lay Brotherhood of Arezzo in 1552 and functioning perfectly to this day, faces the cathedral. The creator of this piece of horological art was Felice di Salvatore Vannucci da Fossato, and its mechanism – powered by simple weights and ropes, although in need of periodic restorations – has counted nearly five centuries of history that have passed in these cobbled squares and narrow streets.

The tower housing the clock was built in the 1470s as an addition to the Arezzo municipality building, which commenced construction as early as 1337. Today, this tower can be accessed from the nearby Palazzo dei Priori, which is now a public museum.

PALAZZO DEI PRIORI



Crowned with the Ghibelline spires of bifurcated battlements and erected in 1333 in the square in front of the cathedral, now known as the Piazza della Libertà, this palace remained the main administrative building in Arezzo for many years, serving as home to the city magistracy and its successors. Of course, not everything in this palace is as ancient as it might seem at first glance, considering the date of its construction. For example, the building's old façade collapsed in 1650 and was only partially restored, omitting the previously existing

loggia and slightly “sinking” into the building itself, thus “receding” backward. The Ghibelline battlements are even younger; they were added to the former residence of the city magistracy during the last restoration from 1930 to 1933 in preparation for the opening of the museum that operates here to this day and is divided into two sections.
The first part of the museum, located on the ground floor, features a permanent exhibition of items related to the history and traditions of Arezzo's main festival: the "Giostra del Saracino," an impressive medieval festival during which a knightly tournament is held in the Piazza della Libertà in front of the Cathedral of Arezzo. The main objective for the knight participating in the competition is to strike a target secured in the left hand of a rotating automaton known as "Buratto," which impersonates the "King of India" (a somewhat abstract Eastern ruler; the name of the festival refers to the historical conflict between Tuscan knights and the Islamic Saracen invaders). Additionally, in its other hand, the "Buratto" holds a flail, which the target mannequin uses to strike the knight, spinning away from the lance's blow to the opposite side. The knight’s strike will be counted only if the knight manages to avoid the "counterattack" from the "Buratto."
The earliest record of such a tournament held in Arezzo dates back to 1260. At that time, through this unusual event (as viewed from a contemporary perspective), the city honoured its native son named Ildebrandino Giratasca, who had recently been knighted in the Order of the Golden Spur (also known as the Order of the Golden Militia). This honour was conferred upon nobles of the Catholic faith by personal decree of the pope for particularly outstanding good deeds and contributions to the spread of the Christian faith. (The order still exists today, but no living knights are left; the last was Grand Duke Jean I of Luxembourg, who passed away in 2019.) Dante directly references the holding of knightly tournaments in Arezzo at the beginning of the 22nd canto of the "Inferno":

It hath been heretofore my chance to see

Horsemen with martial order shifting camp,

To onset sallying, or in muster rang'd,

Or in retreat sometimes outstretch'd for flight;

Light-armed squadrons and fleet foragers

Scouring thy plains, Arezzo! have I seen,

And clashing tournaments, and tilting jousts,

Now with the sound of trumpets, now of bells,

Tabors, or signals made from castled heights,

And with inventions multiform, our own,

Or introduc'd from foreign land; but ne'er

To such a strange recorder I beheld,

In evolution moving, horse nor foot,

Nor ship, that tack'd by sign from land or star.

In the 14th century, knightly tournaments in Arezzo were mentioned in the correspondence of the noble Tarlati family (from which our previously mentioned "dictator" of Arezzo came) with the Roman popes. Not until 1535 was this event first linked to a church holiday: August 6, the feast day of Saint Donatus, the bishop of Arezzo. To this day, this tournament takes place twice a year to coincide with important church festivals for the city: the first time on the penultimate Saturday of June, when the memory of Saint Donatus is celebrated, and the first Sunday of October, dedicated to the Madonna del Conforto – the image of the Virgin Mary, venerated as miraculous and protective of Arezzo.

In 1677, new rules were drafted for the tournament: the so-called "Chapters," which continue to serve as the unchanging canon for the Arezzo tournament today. (The previous "statute" had been in effect since 1327.)

Over time, the Giostra del Saracino lost some of its significance for the city, and from the late 17th century, it was more frequently held in rural areas in a "poor" form – that is to say, without horses, which the peasantry could not afford. Larger and more ceremonial tournaments took place in 1810 and 1811 in honour of the French Emperor Napoleon

I, who had also become King of Italy. (Not within modern borders, of course: his kingdom encompassed only the northern part of the Apennines, while Tuscany was given to his sister, Elisa.) Furthermore, with particular grandeur, the 600th anniversary of Francesco Petrarch's birth was celebrated in Prato on July 22, 1902, when the cavalry regiment of His Majesty the King of Italy participated in the Giostra del Saracino.

This tournament has been held continuously since August 7, 1931, when, at the initiative of the podestà of Arezzo (this post was revived in Mussolini's Italy), the rules of the tournament were updated. In ancient times, teams of knights representing various districts of the old city participated in the competition; they were named after the sections of the city walls to which these districts were adjacent. As the city expanded over the centuries, some older districts were rebuilt or incorporated into neighbouring ones. Today, the solemn procession preceding the tournament features four teams: Porta Crucifera, Porta Sant'Andrea, Porta del Foro, and Porta Santo Spirito. Each district has its own coat of arms, flag, motto, church, headquarters, and periodic publication. (If you visited at the right time of year, you might have seen the heraldic banners of the four districts of Arezzo displayed in the Church of Santa Maria della Pieve.)

Additionally, according to medieval tradition, all knights are divided into noble houses that reside or have resided in the districts that the knights represent. (Among these houses are, for example, the local branch of the famous Florentine dynasty Pazzi and the ancient family Tolomei, who trace their lineage back to the Ptolemies of Hellenistic Egypt.) All knights participating in the festivities and the tournament, along with their squires, are clad in the heraldic colours of their respective houses. Two knights represent each district in the tournament; these are not random individuals but, rather, professionals who treat the Giostra del Saracino as a sport, training year-round. A special jury determines the winner. As noted earlier, to win the "Golden Lance" for their district, a knight must hit the centre of the shield held by a mannequin representing a Middle Eastern "king," all while avoiding a counterattack from a flail.

After the results are announced and the winner declared, the victorious knights are celebrated in their districts, where a grand festival with a meat feast is held. This is an excellent tradition that will certainly leave lasting impressions if you have the chance to visit Arezzo during the Giostra del Saracino.

Returning to the Palazzo dei Priori, it is worth mentioning that on the upper floors, you will find a collection of portraits (mostly of artists from Arezzo) and an interesting assembly of ancient coats of arms belonging to the city's patricians. Additionally, the museum's exhibition features a stone statue of the "Madonna and Child," which once stood above the now non-existent gates of Santo Spirito.

AREZZO CATHEDRAL



As you approach the main cathedral of Arezzo, you cannot miss the elegant Florentine-style monument to Grand Duke of Tuscany Ferdinando I de' Medici, son of Cosimo I, the founder of the Grand Duchy, who ruled from 1587 to 1609. The monument was created by the well-known (if you've already travelled through Florence with me) Pietro Francavilla – one of the court artists of the late Medici era. Interestingly, the Grand Duke is depicted looking down upon the Palazzo dei Priori – a symbol of the independence of the municipality of Arezzo, which was suppressed by Florence as early as 1384.

The cathedral itself is believed to stand on the site of an ancient Etruscan acropolis (Upper City) – the spiritual centre and, to put it simply, the residence of the government of one of the largest Etruscan cities, which existed here before the arrival of the Romans. However, the first cathedral of Arezzo was not located here but, rather, to the southwest, in the area now known as Colle Pionta, which for a long time lay beyond the city walls. In 1203, Pope Innocent III (noted for initiating the Fourth Crusade, which ended in the Crusaders' conquest of the Byzantine Empire) ordered the relocation of the main city church to the city centre – specifically, to the site where the old Benedictine church, mentioned as far back as 876, once stood. For the next century, this church became the main temple of the episcopate of Arezzo.



The further fate of the cathedral was decided by chance. In December 1275, Pope Gregory X, suffering from an inguinal hernia, was returning to Rome from the Ecumenical Council held in Lyon (now France), where discussions were taking place regarding the union of the Western and Eastern churches into one universal church. Not far from Arezzo, at the Ubaldini castle, the pope began to develop a fever, and with each passing day, it became clearer to him that he might not make it to Rome. During

his stop in Arezzo, he blessed the local municipality to build a new cathedral as a spiritual testament and left 30,000 golden florins from his personal funds for this holy purpose. He passed away on January 10, 1276, in the residence of the bishop of Arezzo.

The execution of the pope's wishes was not delayed, especially since it was decided to bury the pope in Arezzo as well. By early 1278, under Bishop Guglielmino Ubertini, construction began, and in 1289, the unfinished cathedral was consecrated in honour of Saint Donatus. A significant contribution to advancing the work was made by the "tyrant bishop" Guido Tarlati, whose monumental cenotaph by Giovanni di Agostino is in the fifth bay of the cathedral nave, near the sepulchral monument of Pope Gregory X – essentially the main benefactor of the cathedral.

The crisis that arose after the death of Bishop Tarlati forced the municipality of Arezzo to "freeze" the construction of the temple again, and after the city was conquered by Florence in 1384, the question of completing the main city church was pushed further down the agenda. It was not until 1471 that this issue was revisited, and it took another 40 years to complete the entire ensemble of the cathedral. In 1511, the completion of the construction was announced; however, the façade remained "naked," that is, without any decorations, for half a millennium: between 1901 and 1914, its adornments were created by Arezzo native Dante Viviani.

There is a separate story connected to the cathedral’s bell towers: yes, indeed, bell towers, as the current one is the fourth constructed for the main church of Arezzo. The first was erected in the 16th century but was soon demolished because the ringing of the bells disturbed meetings in the Palazzo dei Priori. Subsequently, a second bell tower was built to the left of the cathedral, near the apse of the chapel, but because it damaged the church’s wall, it was decided to demolish this bell tower as well. To avoid previous mistakes, the construction of the third was planned for the other side of the church and separately from the building itself; however, work there was hindered by a water-bearing horizon that caused the still-unfinished campanile to collapse.

Thus, only in the 1840s did work begin on the construction of the current bell tower in the Neo-Gothic style, which resonates with the later façade

of the church. However, even here, there were challenges: In 1860, the bishop who financed the construction passed away, and for the next 70 years, the bell tower stood "decapitated," with its upper portion incomplete. Not until 1931 through 1937 were the third tier of the campanile and the 21-metre (68.89 feet) spire completed.

The ceiling of the central nave is particularly impressive: six bays with ribbed vaults, painted with large-scale frescoes on biblical themes by the French master Guillaume de Marcillat (1470-1529), who also created the rose window on the façade of the church, depicting the Pentecost in stained glass. The tall windows of the polygonal apse from the 13th century, which concludes the central nave, were replaced after the Second World War; in 1944, the ancient polychrome glass was shattered by the shockwave from a nearby bomb detonated during air raids. The main altar, located in this apse, is a true masterpiece of sculptural art. It was created in 1289 for the cathedral's consecration in honour of Saint Donatus, and it was designed to house the relics of Arezzo's heavenly patron, including a special casket that still preserves the remains of the saint.



The most significant crime committed by the bishopric and the municipality of Arezzo in the last 500 years was the decision made in 2012 to dismantle the masterfully carved wooden choir by Giorgio Vasari, which once stood in the apse, to allow a certain Giuliano Vangi to "supply" the main city temple with postmodern pseudo-artistic abuse of marble in the form of a new so-called presbytery, which you can see before the altar. (Yes, this coffee table is worthy of a taxi waiting room in a not-so-great hotel.)

Returning to the art, I invite you to walk into the left nave, from where you can access the baptistery attached to the church. The hexagonal font installed there, decorated with reliefs from the workshop of Donatello, is notable for one of the reliefs: "The Baptism of Christ," attributed to the chisel of the creator of the first of two genius "David" sculptures. Upon returning to the nave, pay attention to the so-called "choir loft" – a balcony made of carved grey sandstone, which houses the 16th-century cathedral organ. This balcony is the first known work of Giorgio Vasari and was created when he was just 24 years old. (Remarkably, it has not yet been demolished and replaced with some glass and concrete sculpture.)

Opposite the second bay of the left nave is the entrance to the chapel of Madonna del Conforto, built between 1796 and 1817 to the design of Giuseppe del Rosso, the court architect of Grand Duke Leopold I of Tuscany, a member of the Habsburg dynasty. This chapel is dedicated to the revered image of the Virgin Mary located in the altar area. This image is associated with a miracle that took place in Arezzo in 1796.

The event occurred on February 10 of that year, when the city was shaken by an extraordinarily powerful earthquake that continued for some time, subsiding and then returning. The beloved image of the Madonna was in the basement of the Hospizio della Grange – the monastery of the Camaldolese order in the Porta San Clemente area, in the northern part of the old city. In that basement, the Camaldolese monks were retailing wine, and on that very day, four people were present: a monk selling wine and three of his customers, shoemakers. The image of the Virgin Mary was situated by the stove that heated the room and was covered in a layer of soot from the continually lit lamp nearby.

After another tremor occurred at three o'clock in the afternoon (so strong that the church bells rang on their own), everyone present in the basement discussed the earthquake. Suddenly, one of them – a man named Antonio Tanti – decided to light a candle in gratitude to the Madonna for saving them from the earthquake. When he did this, the image began to shine on its own and was cleansed of the soot that had covered it. A few hours later, the basement was filled with acquaintances, relatives, and friends of the three shoemakers, all eager to see the miraculous image of the Madonna for themselves. The event was so swiftly interpreted by the church as a miracle (a term that holds legal significance in the Catholic Church) that Bishop Niccolò Marcacchi of Arezzo ordered the image to be moved to the cathedral. In 1814, his successor, Agostino Albergotti, achieved its coronation (a procedure reserved for the most revered images of the Virgin Mary). The crown was bestowed upon the image directly by Pope Pius VII, who, nine years earlier, had stopped in Arezzo to celebrate Mass before the image while returning from Paris after the coronation of Emperor Napoleon I. This image is also dedicated to the September knightly tournament, Giostra del Saracino, which begins with a solemn prayer in this very chapel, adorned with the banners of the district whose knights emerge victorious from the competition.

In addition to the image housed in the altar, attention is drawn to the majestic, coffered dome with an oculus, which replicates the dome of the Roman Pantheon.

Returning to the left nave of the cathedral, take note of the cenotaph of Bishop Guido Tarlati, made by Agostino di Giovanni. It is believed to have been executed according to the designs of the legendary Giotto – the creator of the bell tower of the Florence Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore.

In the right nave, as previously mentioned, is the tomb of Pope Gregory X. It is based on an ancient Roman sarcophagus that houses the remains of the pontiff, under whose direction the construction of this cathedral began.

MUSEO DIOCESANO DI ARTE SACRA



Opposite the cathedral, the Episcopal Palace became the residence of the head of the diocese of Arezzo under the already familiar Bishop Guglielmino degli Ubertini in 1256. It was here that Pope Gregory X concluded his earthly journey. Of course, since then, the palace has undergone several renovations and restorations, so its current appearance dates back to the late 16th century. In 1478, a covered loggia was designed to connect the palace and the cathedral; it was transformed into a palace wing in 1710. Although the Bishop of Arezzo still resides in this luxurious palace, part of its premises has, since 2011, housed a permanent exhibition of the Episcopal Museum of Sacred Art – a must-visit for anyone coming to Arezzo.

In addition to the opulent interiors of the palace, adorned with stucco and frescoes in the late Renaissance style, you will find an extensive collection of paintings, sculptures, church furnishings, and artifacts from various eras that are directly related to the history of the episcopate of Arezzo.

SAN DOMENICO CHURCH



Let's leave the Piazza della Libertà via Via Ricasoli and, at the first turn, veer right onto the narrow Via di Sasso Verde, which begins at Piazza Landucci. This street will lead us directly to the Piazza di San Domenico, named after the ancient church located there – our penultimate stop in Tuscany. The construction of this temple, with its rough façade of yellow sandstone, began with two major donations made by the Tarlati and Ubertini families in 1275. In 1276, just after the death of Pope Gregory X in the Episcopal Palace of Arezzo, the first conclave in the history of the Catholic Church took place right

here, in this still unfinished church, according to the Apostolic Constitution "Ubi Periculum."

Per the rules of this Constitution, all the doors of the church were sealed, as were all the windows except for one, through which, at certain hours of the day, a servant delivered food and drink to the cardinal electors. Starting from the third day of the conclave sessions, the cardinals received only one meal a day, and by the fifth day, only wine, bread, and water. Furthermore, during the conclave, no cardinal-bishops received any income from their property; all of it went directly and fully to the Church's treasury. These measures aimed to reduce the vacancy period of the Papal Seat (Sede Vacante) as much as possible, particularly given that the Papal Throne had long been contested to the death among the aristocratic families close to Rome. Some conclaves could disperse and be reconvened over weeks, months, or even years. For instance, Pope Gregory X was elected 1,006 days after the death of his predecessor. It should be noted that the new rules were effective; just 11 days after Gregory X's death, on January 21, 1276, Cardinal-Bishop Pierre de Tarentaise was elected as the new Pope. He took the name Innocent V.

The church of San Domenico was completed in the 14th century, and, as you might guess, was entrusted to the Dominican Order. For this church, the young Florentine artist Cenni Bencivieni di Pepo, later known by the nickname Cimabue (meaning "bull-headed," referring to his stubbornness and unruly nature), created his first large and earliest remaining work: a large crucifix (336 by 267 cm or 11.02 by 8.75 feet), painted with tempera and gold on wood. It largely imitated the crucifix in the main Dominican church in Bologna, created by the leading Italian master of the mid-13th century, Giunta Pisano.

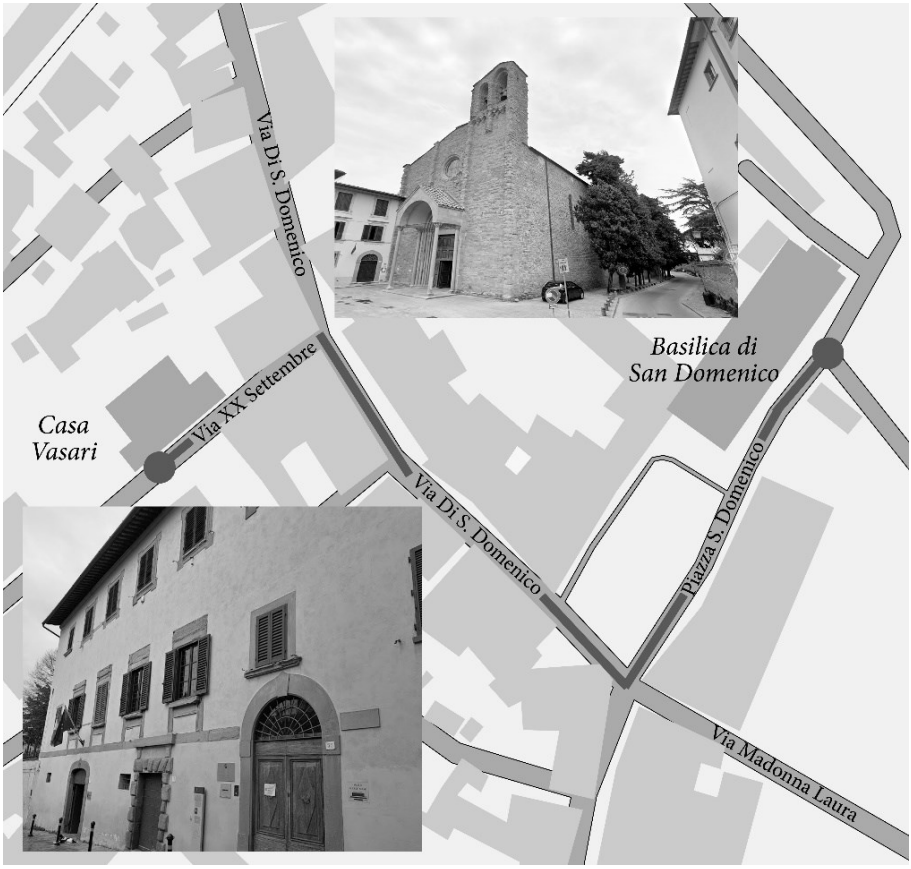
Despite the obvious imitation, Cimabue's work is regarded as one of the key masterpieces of Italian proto-Renaissance. It clearly marks a departure from the Byzantine canons of iconography toward greater expressionism; that is, it focuses on the emotional, earthly, and human aspects of the narrative. This is manifested in the distinct sorrow reflected on the faces of the Madonna and Saint John the Evangelist – an element that began to appear in Byzantine ecclesiastical art only after 1261 (almost concurrently with Cimabue’s artistic journey, which likely

overlapped with Byzantine icon painters during his apprenticeship in Rome).

The crucifix occupies its rightful central place in the apse of the church, in front of three enormous windows, the light from which enhances the effect of the masterpiece on display.

In 1782, when Grand Duke of Tuscany Pietro Leopoldo I decided to reform legislation regarding monastic orders in his state, the Dominicans lost much of their property. Their main church in Arezzo was closed – left vacant and dilapidated for many years. Not until the early 20th century did the city government decide to undertake a large-scale restoration of the church and to repair the partially collapsed frescoes from the 13th and 14th centuries (which, to be fair, were not "completed"; merely the natural processes of plaster deterioration were halted). However, this appearance in no way detracts from the overall effect; on the contrary, it serves as a kind of accompaniment to the timeless masterpiece by Cimabue that has hung in the apse of the church all this time, surviving the end of Arezzo's municipal independence, the reigns of all the Tuscan dukes, the Napoleonic wars, and the wars for Italian unification. It has witnessed the rise and fall of the House of Savoy (the Royal House of Italy from 1859 to 1946), as well as the openings and closings of churches, temples, and monasteries along with all that has transpired in Tuscany over these 800 years.

CASA VASARI



As we conclude our journey through Arezzo and, more broadly, through the enchanting land of Tuscany, I invite you to visit a very unusual and symbolic place. Let's head to Via Di San Domenico and walk to the second turn, where Via XX Settembre begins. On this street, at number 55, is the house where Giorgio Vasari lived (and, unlike Petrarch, not for the first eight months but for the last 30 years of his life, albeit with long interruptions due to work trips). Vasari is a man to whom I owe much for the material to write my guide. He was not just a talented painter, architect, draftsman, and sculptor but also a writer and historian – and, as we know, the father of the discipline of art

history in its modern understanding, associated with the historical study, historiography, and bibliography of artists.

“[...] I began by buying a house in Arezzo in the suburb of San Vito, where you can breathe the best air in this city [...],” Vasari wrote in 1541, just a few days after purchasing this house. Here, as in every work of his (be it his collection of biographies of great masters, a portrait of the Grand Duke, or a church altar), Vasari infused a piece of his soul. He personally designed the interiors, painted the walls, and planned the arrangement of the furniture. Although most of the museum's exhibits were donated to it by the Florentine galleries in the 1950s, all are, without exception, directly connected to the life and work of the second most renowned native of Arezzo after Petrarch. However, in contrast to his poet compatriot, Vasari tied his whole life to this city and always returned here from each of his extended trips, to these cobbled, winding streets that resemble the branches of a chestnut tree, illuminated by the reflections from the sandstone façades of the ancient churches.

WHERE TO STAY IN AREZZO

BUDGET HOTELS

Antiche Mura

- Address: Piaggia di Murello, 33, 52100 Arezzo
- Tel: +39 3473149146
- Wi-Fi, parking, non-smoking rooms, family rooms, breakfast included

The Antiche Mura guesthouse is in a 13th-century mansion in the historical centre of Arezzo. It offers six rooms equipped with en-suite bathrooms, coffee machines, and televisions. Additionally, the hotel has a luggage storage room and an ATM.

Vogue Hotel Arezzo

- Address: Via Guido Monaco, 54, 52100 Arezzo
- Tel: +39 057524361
- Wi-Fi, breakfast included, non-smoking rooms, family rooms, garage

This hotel with 26 rooms is situated in the historical centre of Arezzo, within walking distance of the main attractions of the old town. The decor of the rooms is not overly extravagant, yet it is certainly tasteful, setting the right tone for your journey through the native city of Petrarch and Vasari from the first moments of your stay. Thanks to the hotel's garage for guests, this is also the perfect choice if you are travelling with your own car or a rented one.

Minerva Hotel

- Address: Via Fiorentina 4, 52100 Arezzo

- Tel: +39 0575370390
- Wi-Fi, restaurant, bar, fitness centre, sauna, free spacious parking for guests, breakfast included

A classic large hotel with spacious, bright rooms, a restaurant, and a fitness centre, this is ideal if you plan to stay in Arezzo for more than two to three days. It is located within walking distance of the historical centre and not far from the exit of the A1 motorway, which connects Arezzo with Florence.

MIDDLE- AND HIGH-RANGE HOTELS

I Portici Boutique Hotel

- Address: Via Roma, 18, 52100 Arezzo
- Tel: +39 0575299901
- Wi-Fi, breakfast included, non-smoking rooms, family rooms, pets allowed

I Portici is a small and charming hotel located on the fourth floor of a historical building in the centre of Arezzo, situated above the arcade of Via Roma. It is just a few steps from the main highlights of the town and the train station.

Hotel Continentale

- Address: Piazza Guido Monaco, 7, 52100 Arezzo
- Tel: +39 057520251
- Wi-Fi, non-smoking rooms, family rooms, pets allowed, parking 10 minutes from the hotel, rooftop restaurant

Opened in 1945, this hotel features a gym and a conference room, as well as a rooftop restaurant that offers excellent views of the old town.

La Corte del Re Suite & Charme House

- Address: Via Borgunto, 5, 52100 Arezzo
- Tel: +39 0575401603
- Wi-Fi, non-smoking rooms, family rooms, pets allowed, shuttle service, kitchen in all rooms

A small and cosy guest house in the heart of the old town, offering its guests a homey atmosphere and a wide range of additional services.

WHERE TO EAT IN AREZZO

Teorema del Gusto

- Address: Via Dè Cenci, 17, 52100 Arezzo
- Reservation Tel: +39 0575454249

One of the locals' favourite restaurants, located in the heart of the old town – just a five-minute walk from Piazza Guido Monaco, on the narrow pedestrian street Via Dè Cenci. Fresh ingredients, from vegetables and meats to homemade pasta dough, along with an excellent selection of the best local table wines, have brought Teorema del Gusto wide acclaim and top ratings from critics. Furthermore, the average bill for a visitor to this restaurant rarely exceeds €30.00, which includes a main course, dessert, and wine.

Il Covo dei Briganti

- Address: Via Guido Monaco, 9, 52100 Arezzo
- Reservation Tel: +39 3808692985

"The Hideout of the Bandit": an establishment whose interior fully reflects its name. It is hard to find even two identical chairs within it. This, along with the splendour of architectural masterpieces and the

glamour of the city's aristocracy, is very much in the Tuscan style, as this country has known a great many bandits (though not all were fortunate enough to be crowned by the Roman popes). However, it is not just the interiors that will endear this place to you; the abundance of Tuscan cuisine and high-quality products, combined with reasonable prices, will also leave you pleased.

Antica Osteria l'Agania

- Address: Via Giuseppe Mazzini, 10, 52100 Arezzo
- Reservation Tel: +39 0575295381

This place is a must-visit for those looking to immerse themselves in the spirit of Italy in the 1950s: The interiors of this tavern are entirely conducive to that. Diners are treated to an excellent selection of seasonal dishes: truffles, game, asparagus, local veal and pork, homemade wines, and desserts.

Osteria I Bottega

- Address: Via Fiorentina, 137, 52100 Arezzo
- Reservation Tel: +39 3346319709

This small and exceptionally cosy establishment, whose menu focuses largely on traditional dishes from Arezzo, has become a favourite meeting place for locals. Where better to get acquainted with all the nuances and aromas of the cuisine of one of the oldest cities in Tuscany?

MUSEUMS OF AREZZO

Mudas Museum and Palazzo Vescovile

- Address: Piazza Del Duomo, 52100 Arezzo

- Price: Regular: €6.00; Reduced: €4.00 (Reduced price admission for children aged between 6 and 18 and groups of more than 15 people. Free admission for children up to 6 years of age, residents of the municipality of Arezzo, disabled people and their companions, teachers accompanying schools or groups, authorised tourist guides, and journalists.)

The museum of the Episcopal Palace of Arezzo and the museum of ecclesiastical art located in the main square of the city.

Vasari House Museum

- Address: Via XX Settembre, 55, 52100 Arezzo
- Price: Regular: €7.00 (€4.00 + €3.00 commission fee); Reduced: €5.00 (€2.00 + €3.00 commission fee)

The house-museum of one of the most famous natives of Arezzo: the renowned architect, sculptor, painter, and founding father of modern art history, Giorgio Vasari.

Petrarca's House

- Address: Piazza dell'Orto, 28, Arezzo
- Price: Regular: €4.00; Reduced: €3.00

The house where one of Italy's greatest poets, Francesco Petrarch, was born on July 20, 1304. The museum exhibits items primarily of later origin that are somehow related to Petrarch: editions of his works from various periods, books about him, and so on.

POSTSCRIPT

No text, no matter how artistically crafted, and no photographs or videos, no matter how detailed, can enrich a person in the way that a personal encounter with reality can: with its undeniable truth, all its beauty and terror, all the good and evil that fill this world and make it so astonishing, multifaceted, and profound. No guidebook will ever provide you with what your own perspective and personal connection to the place you are visiting will offer.

As the author, I sincerely hope that this book helps your heart open wide and embrace these cities, these ancient streets, these silenced voices, and the long-cool traces that together create the unique symphony of one of the most beautiful manmade corners of the world: Tuscany. It is a great monument to humanity as a being capable of great deeds, whether by displaying incredible generosity or perpetrating great evil in the name of love, homeland, God, or oneself.

I wish you long and unforgettable journeys. Instead of saying goodbye, I say: Until we meet again!

Yours sincerely,

George Esperidis

P.S.:

Dear Traveler, thank you so much for purchasing my guidebook! I'm confident you'll enjoy it.



If you have any questions, feel free to join **my Facebook group**—a gathering place for passionate travelers, explorers of hidden mysteries, and history enthusiasts!



I'd also be delighted if you could write a few kind words in a review for the book on Amazon. Just follow this link!