

JACOPO MAURO AND ROBERTO DI FERDINANDO

SECRET TUSCANY



JONGLEZ PUBLISHING

CONTENTS

Outside Florence, Prato and Pistoia

THE CUPOLA OF THE SEMIFONTE CHAPEL	16
THE SACRO MONTE OF SAN VIVALDO	18
TEMPLE OF MINERVA MEDICA	20
CONSTELLATIONS OF THE CATHEDRAL OF SANTA MARIA ASSUNTA E SAN GENESIO	24
STATUE OF THE VIRGIN IN THE CLOISTER OF THE COLLEGIATE CHURCH OF SANT'ANDREA	26
WOODEN WINGS OF A FLYING ASS	27
PASSION CROSS IN THE MONASTERY OF SANTA MARIA A RIPA	28
HEADS ON BUILDINGS IN PISTOIA	30
THE ANATOMICAL THEATRE OF THE CEPPPO HOSPITAL	32
THE PISTOIA HISTORIC ROLLING STOCK DEPOT	34
THE MADONNINA ICE HOUSE	36
MUSEUM OF DEPORTATION	38
THE TABERNACLE OF SANT'ANNA	39
THE SANPAO BUDDHIST TEMPLE	40
THE HISTORIC PHARMACY OF THE MONASTERY AND CONSERVATORY OF SAN NICCOLÒ DI PRATO	42
THE HANDPRINT IN PRATO CATHEDRAL	44
THE ALIGNMENT OF THE BASILICA OF SANTA MARIA DELLE CARCERI	46
ITALY'S LARGEST METEOR	47
PALAZZO DATINI FRESCOES	48
LA LISCA	50
PARCO MEDICEO DE PRATOLINO	52
THE ARBITRARY FOUNTAIN	56
FORMER HOSPICE OF BIGALLO	58
THE FOUNTAIN OF FATA MORGANA	60
STATUE OF FIDO	62
CRUCIFIX IN THE ORATORY OF THE SANCTISSIMO CROCIFISSO DI MIRACOLI	63
GROTTA DEL ROMITO	64

Siena

STRANGE 'LAMPPOST' IN VIA DEL REFE NERO	68
A PLAQUE COMMEMORATING THE REFORM OF THE CALENDAR	69
THE SECRETS OF THE PIAZZA DEL CAMPO	70
MUSEUM OF THE BICCHERNE	72

PALAZZO CHIGI ZONDADARI	74
THE WATERS OF FOLLONICA	76
LIBRARY AND CONCERT HALL OF THE CHIGIANA	
MUSICAL ACADEMY	78
THE CONTRADA DEL LEOCORNO MUSEUM	80
A CHRIST WITH MOVEABLE ARMS	82
THE HERALDIC ARMS OF THE TOLOMEI FAMILY	83
MAGIC SQUARE IN THE CATHEDRAL	84
THE MARBLE INLAY OF HERMES TRISMEGISTUS	86
THE MARBLE INLAYS OF THE SIBYLS	88
ALLEGORY OF THE MOUNT OF WISDOM	92
SHAFTS FROM THE MONTAPERTI 'VICTORY CHARIOT'	94
MARKS OF GUNFIRE ON THE NEW CATHEDRAL	96
THE MADONNA OF THE CROW	97
THE NATIONAL ANTARCTIC MUSEUM	98
THE MARBLE HEAD OF THE PAINTER GIACOMO DEL SODOMA	100
THE EARTH SCIENCE MUSEUM	101
THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM OF THE ACCADEMIA DEGLI FISIOCRITICI	102
PALAZZO SAN GALGANO	104
THE RUSTY PLAQUES OF THE OLD PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL	105
MARCOVALDO'S VIRGIN AND CHILD	105
MUSEUM OF THE CONFRATERNITÀ DI SANTA MARIA IN PORTICO	106
COLUMN COMMEMORATING THE MEETING OF FREDERICK III AND ELEANOR OF PORTUGAL	107

Outside Siena

THE HIDDEN SYMBOLS OF THE CHAPEL OF MONTESIEPI	110
MUMMIFIED HANDS OF A THIEF	114
THE CLOISTER OF TORRI	116
THE ESOTERIC SYMBOLS IN THE PARK OF VILLA CETINALE	118
GRAFFITI IN THE FORMER PSYCHIATRIC BUILDING OF SAN GIROLAMO	122
MEDIEVAL STANDARD MEASURES	123
A CANNONBALL EMBEDDED IN A FAÇADE	123
ANTHROPOMORPHIC EX-VOTOS AT THE SANCTUARY OF ROMITUZZO	124
CHIANTI SCULPTURE PARK	126
PARCO ARTISTICO BUM BUM GÀ	128

CONTENTS

THE CORONATION OF THE VIRGIN	129
VILLA GEGGIANO	130
THE GOLDEN TREE IN THE MUNICIPAL MUSEUM OF LUCIGNANO	134
THE TRIUMPH OF DEATH	135
ROMAN MOSAIC IN THE DE MUNARI CHEMIST'S SHOP	136
THE GIANT SUNDIAL OF PIENZA	140
THE HISTORIC WINE CELLARS OF THE PALAZZO CONTUCCI	146
ARCHAEOLOGICAL PARK OF RADICOFANI FORT	148
THE SECRETS OF THE ROMANTIC WOODS OF RADICOFANI	150

Pisa

THE JEWISH CEMETERY OF PISA	154
THE PISA SYNAGOGUE	155
A CATHEDRAL AS A SUNDIAL	156
THE VERTICAL LINE FROM THE CATHEDRAL	157
THE AMPHORA FROM THE CATHEDRAL	158
THE CATHEDRAL'S RHINO	160
THE LIZARD OF PISA CATHEDRAL	162
WIND ROSE IN PIAZZA DEI MIRACOLI	163
OLD FOUNDLINGS HOSPITAL	164
THE MUSSOLINI PORTRAIT	168
THE LAST PILLORY RING IN PIAZZA CAIROLI	170
TABLE OF CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN OLD WEIGHTS AND MEASURES AND THE METRIC SYSTEM	171
PALAZZO ALLA GIORNATA	172
THE FIBONACCI SEQUENCE ON THE CHURCH OF SAN NICOLA	174
PUBLIC TOILETS OF THE ALBERGO COBIANCHI	176
THE WELL OF SAINT UBALDESCA	178
STATUE OF KINZICA DE SISMONDI	180

Lucca

THE AXE IN THE CATHEDRAL OF SAN MARTINO	184
THE LABYRINTH IN LUCCA CATHEDRAL	186
VISIT TO THE HOUSE OF SAINT GEMMA GALGANI	188
ROMAN WALL IN THE CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA DELLA ROSA	190

THE MERIDIAN IN THE CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA FORIS PORTAM	192
CURIOSITIES OF PALAZZO BERNARDINI	198
SILK MARKS	200
MODERN PORTRAITS ON THE FAÇADE OF THE CHURCH OF SAN MICHELE IN FORO	202
MUSEO PAOLO CRESCI AND THE HISTORY OF ITALIAN EMIGRANTS	204
A YAWNING GULF OF HELL IN THE CHURCH OF SANT'AGOSTINO	206
THE MADONNA DEL SOCCORSO	207
A PHIAL OF CHRIST'S BLOOD	208
VESTIGES OF A ROMAN AMPHITHEATRE	209
MONOLITH IN THE BASILICA OF SAN FREDIANO	210
A STROLL THROUGH ART NOUVEAU LUCCA	212
THE WATER TOWERS OF THE LUCCA AQUEDUCT	214

North West

STANDARD MEASURES FROM THE 16TH CENTURY	218
SYMBOLS IN BARGA CATHEDRAL	219
THE SUSPENSION BRIDGE TO THE FOUNDRY MUSEUM AND SHELTERS OF THE S.M.I. AT CAMPO TIZZORO	222
CHESSBOARD OF VICO PANCELLORUM CHURCH	224
CRYSTALS ASSOCIATED WITH CARRARA MARBLE	228
THE BRANCOLINO ON THE CHURCH OF SAN GIORGIO	229
THE MYSTERIOUS SIGNS OF LUCCHIO VILLAGE	230
A DA VINCI ANGEL	232
THE SYMBOLIC MEANING OF THE GARZONI GARDEN	234
A PERFECT COPY OF THE MADONNA DEL BALDACCHINO	238
MERIDIAN IN THE CATHEDRAL OF PESCIA	239
BAS-RELIEF OF A MAN JOINING HANDS WITH TWO WOMEN	240
THE ESOTERIC SYMBOLS OF CASTELVECCHIO CHURCH	242
PINOCCHIO'S OAK TREE	244
THE PLAQUE AND THE MAGNOLIA OF THE SWISS GUARDS	245
THE EMBLEM OF THE ORDER OF THE CROSS OF SAINT ANTHONY	248
PASSION CROSS IN THE CHURCH OF SAN PIETRO IN GRADO	250
THE ORNITHOLOGICAL MUSEUM AT TORRE DEL LAGO	252
VILLA ORLANDO	253
MONUMENT TO THE VIAREGGIO DEEP-SEA DIVERS	254

CONTENTS

ARCICONFRATERNITÀ DELLA MISERICORDIA	256
HENRAUX OR DELLE TAGLIATE QUARRY	258
AN ASCENT ALONG THE PIASTRETA MONORAIL	262
THE TERZO QUARRIES	264
THE MARBLE ROOM AT THE CARRARA ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS	266
CASTLE OF LA VERRUCOLA	268
THE OLD CLEMENTI PHARMACY AND FACTORY: A LITTLE SECRET FROM THE TOWN OF FIVIZZANO	269
THE CASTLE OF CASTIGLIONE DEL TERZIERE	270

Livorno and surroundings

THE CHURCH OF SAN LEOPOLDO	274
CASA DINOSAURO	276
THE MYSTERIES OF CAMPIGLIA	278
THE TRIPLE ENCLOSURE OF SAN SILVESTRO CATHEDRAL	280
PETRA AZIENDA AGRICOLA	282
THE MADONNA OF FRASSINE	284
EX-VOTOS AT THE SANCTUARY OF THE MADONNA OF MONTENERO	286
THE VIRGO INTERFEROMETER	290

Grosseto and surroundings

THE HIDDEN SYMBOLS OF THE TOMBA ILDEBRANDA	294
THE MADONNA OF THE CAT FLAP	296
GUILLOTINE IN THE ILDEBRANDO IMBERCIADORI LOCAL HISTORY MUSEUM	297
THE TOWER OF DAVID	298
THE CROSSES OF BALDASSARE AUDIBERT	302
THE SPRING OF ABUNDANCE AND THE TREE OF FECUNDITY	304

Arezzo and surroundings

LA FONDAZIONE ARCHIVIO DIARISTICO NAZIONALE ONLUS	308
THE CAMPARI FOUNTAIN	309
ETRUSCAN OFFERINGS IN THE CASENTINO ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM	310
THE GIANT STILL OF THE CAMALDOLESE NUNS	312
THE WORLD FORGING CHAMPIONSHIP EXHIBITION	314

CASENTINO FABRIC	316
CLOCK TOWER	318
MUSEUM OF GUNPOWDER AND SMUGGLING	320
BALDACCIO'S GHOST STILL HAUNTS THE CASTELLO DI SORCI	321
KNOTTED COLUMNS IN THE CHURCH OF GROFINA	322
PONTE BURIANO	326
IVAN BRUSCHI'S HOME MUSEUM	327
TROMPE-L'OEIL CUPOLA IN THE CHURCH OF LA BADIA	328
A CROOKED COLUMN	329
THE ASTRONOMICAL CLOCK OF THE LAY FRATERNITY	330
THE PORTA CRUCIFERA SARACEN JOUST MUSEUM	332
THE WILD WEST COLLECTION	334
MUSEUM OF THE GORI & ZUCCHI COMPANY (UNO A ERRE)	336
THE DOOR OF THE DEAD OF THE PALAZZO MANCINI	338
SAINT GILBERT'S WELL	339
THE ROCCOLO OF TREQUANDA	340
THE RUINS OF CASTELLO DI MONTELIFRÉ	341
THE COLUMN WITH A SERPENT	342
MILK TAP AT THE OLD HOSPITAL OF THE FRATERNITÀ DI SANTA MARIA	344
TWO RIVAL TOWERS WITH ASTONISHING NAMES	345
ALPHABETICAL INDEX	346
ALPHABETICAL INDEX BY CITY	350

PARCO MEDICEO DI PRATOLINO ②1

The alchemist and the giant

Via Fiorentina, 276 – 50036 Pratolino (FI)

parcomediceodipratolino@cittametropolitana.fi.it

March to October: free admission

October to March: Monday to Friday, 9am–2pm, by reservation by email

Closed Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays



Grand Duke Francesco I de' Medici – the alchemist prince (see "Secret Florence" from the same publisher) – commissioned the Parco Mediceo di Pratolino in the second half of the 16th century. Filled with symbolic statues, grottoes, water features and mechanical figures, the park created a physical journey through wisdom and spiritual initiation. Today, visitors can still discover meaningful remnants of this esoteric journey.

A transverse axis divided the 20-hectare park in two. The main route ran straight from north to south, opening with a statue of Jupiter Pluvius (now replaced by a copy).

The sculpture shows Jupiter with his left hand resting on a sphere balanced on his knee. As father of the gods and giver of life, he grasps a golden thunderbolt in his right hand – water once cascaded from it into the basin below. An eagle sits at his feet.

A vast hedge maze led from Jupiter down through the park to Giambologna's extraordinary creation: an enormous statue of brick and stone that still captivates visitors today.

The colossus stands roughly 14 metres tall, its form merging giant and mountain into one – hence its name "Appennino" (in reference to the Apennine Mountains). The figure leans forward over a pool of water, one massive hand crushing a monster's head beneath it.

This sacred mountain symbolised the alchemical athanor, the furnace where base matter transforms into gold. Three levels of grottoes lay hidden inside, each representing a stage of alchemical transformation. The lowest grotto, buried completely underground, evoked the mines and metals concealed in earth's depths.

The middle chamber housed a spring dedicated to Tethys, symbolising water's purifying power. At the summit, the third and final chamber was carved into the giant's head and received sunlight streaming directly through its eyes. Behind the figure stands a 17th-century dragon sculpture with outstretched wings – a terrifying guardian meant to breathe flames and smoke as visitors passed.

A great villa once stood at the park's centre, dividing the landscape into two distinct realms. Above it lay the Park of the Ancients – a place of initiatory trials. Below stretched the Park of the Moderns, where the wisdom journey reached its culmination.

Seven grottoes in the building's basement housed water-powered statues and animated figures. Mechanical fountains provided gentle musical accompaniment to these moving scenes.

Initiation rites probably took place here – Grand Duke Francesco and his second wife Bianca Cappello, to whom the park was dedicated, were not only alchemists but members of a secret initiatory society passed down through the Medici family.



Three water channels led from the villa. The central one stretched 290 metres and was known as the *viale degli zampilli* or Avenue of Jets. Water jets rising on either side created a watery pergola, its spray catching the light in rainbow colours.

These three channels converged at the park's lowest point, where Mount Parnassus, an artificial hill, rose from a dense grove of laurel trees. At its summit, a winged marble Pegasus stood surrounded by stone figures of Apollo and the nine Muses.

Apollo, the sun god, brought the journey to its close, complementing Jupiter who had marked its beginning.

A hydraulic organ was concealed within the statue, producing wondrous musical harmonies – the celestial music of the spheres – marking the journey's end and the achievement of divine wisdom.



MUSEUM OF THE BICCHERNE

④

'Can an account book be truly beautiful?'

Banchi di Sotto, 52 – 53100 Siena (SI)

+39 05 7724 7145 – as-si@beniculturali.it

Monday–Saturday with entry at 9:30am, 10:30am, 11:30am

Free admission



Writing in the Middle Ages was neither common nor easy: the act of writing itself was largely a calligraphic exercise beyond most people's abilities, and the material on which ink was applied was either parchment or rather thick paper. This gave books considerable bulk, and when they were important they needed to be sturdily bound and well protected: nothing better than a wooden cover. The *Biccherna*, Siena's financial magistracy that operated from the 12th century, began commissioning paintings for the wooden boards used to bind its registers, which it considered records of the utmost importance. These distinctive works of art took their name from their principal patron (other magistracies later followed the idea), and gradually became more elaborate, evolving from simple portraits of the *camerlengo* (the Biccherne's most senior official) counting money to genuine works of art depicting scenes of everyday life, prayers, sieges, mystical events and allegories.

The museum is unique in the world, housing 105 of these painted covers – others are scattered across various collections. Almost all are painted on wood, with just one on leather and two on canvas. The canvas examples are considerably larger than usual, and can be considered paintings in their own right. The tradition began in 1258 and continued until the 18th century, showing a remarkable evolution in both artistic style and subject matter. Yet the structure remained unchanged throughout: an image at the top, with the date, officials' names and their coats of arms below.

The museum sits within the State Archives, housed in the splendid Palazzo Piccolomini. The palazzo alone is worth visiting: its top floor boasts a magnificent balcony overlooking Piazza del Campo, whilst its rooms preserve 15 kilometres' worth of documents: books, volumes, bundles and parchments bearing witness to the history of this extraordinary city.

The world's first written constitution

A notable treasure of the Siena Archives is the *Constituto Senese*, drafted between 1309 and 1310 following a decision taken in just two days. It was decided to compile and record all the laws governing the city at the time: the work was to be written in the vernacular rather than Latin, to make it freely accessible to citizens. The document is in fact the world's first written constitution, and perhaps inadvertently also the most substantial text in the Italian language to survive from that period.

LIBRARY AND CONCERT HALL OF ⑦ THE CHIGIANA MUSICAL ACADEMY

A musical treasure from the days of patronage

Palazzo Chigi Saracini, Via di Città, 89

53100 Siena (SI)

chigiana.it

Library: Monday–Friday 8:30am–1:30pm and Thursday and Friday

3:30pm–7pm

July and August: opening hours are longer and the library also opens on Saturday

The concert hall can be visited during guided tours of the palazzo:

Monday–Saturday from 11:30am and on Thursday and Friday at 4pm

In July and August, opening hours vary in accordance with teaching requirements

Visits are not available in September



The Palazzo Chigi Saracini stands right in the centre of town, but there are lots of hidden surprises to discover within, starting with its music library, which is open every day to the public.

The library holds roughly 75,000 volumes, some of which are the fruit of the collection handed down by the Chigi Saracini family. Other acquisitions relate to the advanced musical study activities. The collection was created by Count Guido Chigi Saracini in 1932 and remains a reference library for professional classical musicians. Included in the library are some very rare works, such as illuminated manuscripts, first editions and of particular note, original musical scores dedicated to the Count, a true patron of music. The most famous of these is without doubt the Suite della Tabacchiera by Ottorino Respighi, who composed it having been inspired by the musical design decorating a tobacco box belonging to the Count. Even before the creation of the advanced music school, the Count's passion for music inspired him to make radical changes to the medieval layout of certain rooms of his *palazzo* and create a Viennese-style concert hall. The hall can hold more than two hundred people, but the Count himself preferred to listen to the performances from a salon through a door to the left of the stage. The Count enjoyed playing the organ, which prompted him to have a magnificent organ built for himself. This formed the basis for the creation of the advanced music classes.

Although it is partly concealed behind the walls, which extend over two floors of the *palazzo*, the stately organ, with its set of about 4,200 pipes, can be seen from the concert hall. This fine instrument has attracted many musicians, among them Fernando Germani, the founder of the first advanced music classes for the organ.

Students practice in the enormous rooms of the *palazzo*, which contain some amazing items from the Count's collection. It is good to be reminded of him by a visit to the *palazzo*, or in summer when you can hear the music from the streets outside it.



THE MARBLE INLAY OF HERMES TRISMEGISTUS

12

Hermeticism and alchemy in Siena Cathedral

*Cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta
Piazza del Duomo, 8 - 53100 Siena (SI)
Daily 10am-7pm*

Siena Cathedral – inspired by the legendary temple built for King Solomon by the architect Hiram – was created according to the precepts of sacred knowledge passed down through time. It's a condensed repository of knowledge concealed within the 56 marble inlays that compose the extraordinary floor.

At the centre of the cathedral's central nave stands the representation of Hermes Trismegistus – the only depiction of this mythical figure in a Christian temple. Considered a contemporary of Moses and sometimes identified with the Egyptian god Thoth, Hermes was regarded as a great sage, priest of Osiris and initiate of the temples of Ancient Egypt.



Hermes Trismegistus was rediscovered in the 15th century within Florence's Platonic Academy. An emissary of Cosimo de' Medici discovered texts attributed to him in the Peloponnese – the so-called 'Corpus Hermeticum'. These wisdom writings were brought to Florence and translated by Marsilio Ficino, forming the foundation of Hermetic philosophy.

The marble inlay's design was the work of Alberto Aringhieri, who lived and worked in Siena during the second half of the 15th century as a cathedral administrator. Aringhieri was a high-ranking figure, a knight of the Order of Rhodes, devoted to alchemical research. The representation of Hermes stands as the cornerstone of the overall Hermetic and alchemical project for the cathedral. The inlay's marble colours are tellingly green, white, red and yellow – the four colours that distinguish the stages of the alchemical work, where green, symbol of rebirth, sometimes replaces black, symbol of the putrefaction that precedes it.

Aringhieri introduced the 'Corpus Hermeticum' to Siena through his continuous contacts with the Florentine circle.

In the inlay, Hermes appears dressed in Oriental fashion with a forked beard and an Isiac knot at his belt. His left hand rests on a stone supported by two winged sphinxes that bear an inscription. The sphinxes, guardians of initiatory knowledge, cross their tails to form the infinity symbol, signifying the eternal cycle of human life. The inscription carved on the stone is partly taken from the 'Asclepius,' one of the 'Corpus Hermeticum' texts translated by the Roman Lactantius, who introduced Hermes among the Christian prophets.

Hermes Trismegistus is depicted transmitting the laws and letters of Egypt to two mysterious figures. The open book he presents to them bears the inscription: '*SUSCIPITE O LICTERAS ET LEGES EGYPTI*' ('Receive the letters and laws, O Egyptians'). According to tradition, the Egyptian god Thoth transmitted the principles of laws and letters to the Egyptians – here, '*licteras*' and '*leges*' refer to the wisdom teachings of ancient Egypt.

The two figures represent the Eastern tradition, embodied by the man with a goatee and turban, and the Western tradition, represented by a younger, clean-shaven man with his head covered by a veil.

THE HIDDEN SYMBOLS OF THE CHAPEL OF MONTESIEPI

①

Initiation temple

53012 Chiusdino (SI)

Free admission, open from 9.30am until sunset



© Vignaccia76

The hill of Montesiepi rises above the ruins of the great Cistercian abbey of San Galgano.

At its summit stands a mysterious hermitage. In 1180, a young knight from Chiusdino, Galgano Guidotti, withdrew to live as a hermit after experiencing prophetic dreams in which St. Michael appeared, instructing him to build a chapel at Montesiepi.

Galgano decided to leave earthly knighthood for celestial service. As proof of his resolve to abandon worldly life forever, he thrust his sword into the rock, transforming the weapon from an instrument of death into a cross of redemption.

A round hut was first built around the sword, later replaced by a circular structure crowned with an ellipsoidal dome. Over the centuries, two additions – a sacristy and a chapel – were made to the original building.

The building's symbolism, like the knight's experience, suggests this place served as temple for spiritual initiation linked to the Order of the Temple. The Templars had an important commandery just a few kilometres away near Frosini.

A stone slab set into the floor to the left of the entrance supports this theory. It bears a mysterious Latin inscription: '*Quisquis ades qui morte / Cades me respice petram / Quam cum morieris / Capiti substratam habebis*', interpreted as: 'Whoever you are, when you fall in death / look to me, the stone / when you die / you will find me laid beneath your head'. A Templar cross pattée accompanies the inscription, its lower arm ending in a sword-like point. The stone may have served as a headrest for initiates. Another theory suggests it was placed near San Galgano's tomb. Today, only the saint's head survives: a skull with blond hair, preserved in a reliquary at the Civic and Diocesan Museum of Sacred Art in Chiusdino.

The head itself holds esoteric significance: it houses the spirit, and decapitation symbolises the spirit's liberation from bodily subjugation. The sword thrust into rock and the temple's circular plan recall King Arthur's knights and the mysterious chalice of the Last Supper – the Holy Grail, which the Templars guarded and which, according to some theories, might be hidden in this very hermitage.

The chapel's exterior features ten chromatic bands alternating white and red, recalling Templar colours. Ten is the number of completeness and refers to the Divine, emphasising the place's sanctity.

The rotunda has three entrances. The south-western one lies on the Via Micaelica – the line that starts from Mont-Saint-Michel, crosses Europe connecting sites dedicated to the archangel, and ends at Monte Sant'Angelo on the Gargano, home to the oldest and most important sanctuary dedicated to St. Michael.

Inside, the exterior's two-colour bands transform into concentric circles in the dome, growing progressively smaller as they converge towards the apex, positioned about 12.5 metres above the floor.

At the dome's centre is a large red circle composed of 16 smaller circles, each formed by a row of bricks. Sixteen is the product of eight times two: eight is the number of salvation and marks the passage from the material to the spiritual world. Baptisteries are all octagonal in plan to manifest this function of rebirth, supporting the theory of the temple as a place for initiations.

The temple also has cosmogonic characteristics and was designed as a solar clock. During solstices and equinoxes, a sunbeam penetrates the interior, illuminating the sword placed at the rotunda's centre – though offset by 50 centimetres from the apex. The dome contains four

small circular funnel-shaped openings positioned at the same height but irregularly spaced. Sunlight streams through them, casting projections into the interior at the solstices and equinoxes.

This celestial connection, visible during solstices and equinoxes, is embedded in the building's symbolism and design. Through its geometry, the chapel acts as a concentrator of telluric and magnetic forces. It's not merely a book in stone but a place for extrasensory experiences.

Viewing the dome from below produces optical illusions when stared at directly: the space seems to expand infinitely. Through meditation, this disorientation allows the observer to transcend their surroundings and reach a higher dimension of consciousness – an experience akin to an initiatory rite.



VILLA GEGGIANO

12

Frozen in time since the 1700s

Geggiano, 1 – 53019 Castelnuovo Berardenga (SI)

villadigeggiano.it

Visits by request (admission charge), contact via website



Villa Geggiano exists in an exceptional state of preservation. Both the villa (with all its rooms) and the garden have maintained their original 18th-century furnishings and decorations almost entirely intact. This is due not only to various family circumstances in the past, but also to the intervention of the celebrated archaeologist and art historian Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli (1900–1975), who made it his main residence and preserved it with philological precision, passing on his love for this exceptional place – declared a National Monument – to his descendants, who still live and work in the villa today.

It is a historic and landscape complex unique of its kind thanks to the organic preservation of furnishings and decorations that transport visitors into the atmosphere of an elegant 18th-century holiday villa.

The garden is adorned with groups of centuries-old cypresses, a parterre of box hedges and ancient potted lemon trees. Here stands the characteristic Teatro di Verzura (Green Theatre), which features two late Baroque brick proscenium arches decorated with statues by the Maltese sculptor Bosio. Vittorio Alfieri, a close friend of Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli, composed and staged some of his tragedies in the villa's Teatro di Verzura.

Pass through one of the monumental gates punctuating the main garden's boundary wall and you'll reach the *pomario*. This ornamental kitchen garden is decorated with topiary and has a terraced fish pond where you can enjoy magnificent views over Siena.

Besides the Teatro di Verzura, the villa contains a *ciarlatorio* (a 'chattering room' for conversation) and an evocative entrance gallery painted around 1790 by the Tyrolean artist Ignazio Moder, with compositions depicting the twelve months of the year.

Other rooms display the original 18th-century furnishings intact, along with original wallpapers and *toiles de Jouy* that cover the walls.

The present Villa di Geggiano originated as a rural building dating from the 1300s. It came into the possession of the Bianchi Bandinelli family in 1527 and was enlarged at that time with the addition of several rooms for summer holidays. Its current appearance resulted from radical rebuilding and expansion carried out in 1768.

The ciarlatorio

The name '*ciarlatorio*' appears in Geggiano's historic inventory. It is a long and distinctive room at the villa's entrance that served as an initial reception area for guests, as each corner cabinet was equipped with its own tray for offering refreshments or cordials. The room's most characteristic feature, however, is the extremely long sofa where visiting ladies would sit during the day. You can imagine thirty or more ladies seated side by side, chattering away whilst protecting their aristocratic pale skin from the sun. The room's name, perhaps given with a touch of humour, perfectly captures this lively atmosphere. The room's decoration, loosely inspired by Pompeian style, remains remarkably fresh despite never having been restored.



THE MUSSOLINI PORTRAIT

⑩

Mussolini in stained glass in a 14th century church

Church of San Francesco
Piazza San Francesco – 56127 Pisa (PI)



In the 1930s Francesco Mossmeyer was commissioned to carry out restoration work on the church of San Francesco. He produced new stained glass windows for the left side of the nave. Naturally these depict episodes from the lives of the saints ... but there is also a figure who bears a striking resemblance to Benito Mussolini. The windows were produced when Il Duce ruled supreme in Italy, so some have argued that this similarity is far from being an accident ...

Another souvenir from the Mussolini era

From the top of the famous Leaning Tower, looking towards the Baptistery, one can see a rather curiously-shaped building directly outside the city walls. This Istituto Tecnico Industriale was built during the period of Fascism and its M-shaped design was clearly intended as a homage to Mussolini

Why Saint-Tropez owes its name to a Pisan knight...

In the year 68 AD, the Roman emperor Nero was present at a ceremony in the Temple of Diana at Pisa and claimed 'Diana is mistress of the world.' Torpè, a convert to Christianity, dared to contradict him: 'You are mistaken, Nero. There is only one master; and that master is God!'

Upon leaving Pisa, Nero asked a certain Satellicus to make sure, by whatever means necessary, that Torpè abjured his faith. Tied to a column, Torpè was flogged; but at the very first strokes, the column collapsed on the torturers and upon the said Satellicus. Then the Christian was stretched out on the wheel, but that, too, broke. Then he was thrown to savage beasts, but they apparently had no appetite for him. Eventually he was beheaded and his body – together with a cockerel and a dog – was put in a skiff and pushed out into the Arno.

As you might have gathered, this boat finally ran aground at Saint-Tropez, which took Torpè as its patron saint.

Cogolin, a nearby village, takes its name from the coq on the boat, and Grimaud, another nearby village, from its canine companion (grimaud in Old French meant 'dog').

The church of San Torpè

20, Via Carlo Fedeli.

Weekdays 9am-noon and 3:45pm-5:30pm, Sunday and holidays
3:45pm-5:30pm

MODERN PORTRAITS ON THE FAÇADE OF THE CHURCH OF SAN MICHELE IN FORO

⑧

*How Cavour and Garibaldi come to find themselves
on the façade of a 13th century church...*

Piazza San Michele – 55100 Lucca (LU)



The famous church of San Michele in Foro is celebrated by townsfolk and tourists alike; however there are some rather tasty little details about the place which they may not know.

The restoration of the building began in 1866, at the height of enthusiasm for the unification of Italy. Working on the small columns in the upper part of the façade, the craftsmen of the day replaced the badly damaged heads with portraits of contemporary figures – that is, with heroes of the Risorgimento. Thus the sharp-eyed – or those equipped with a good pair of binoculars – can make out Garibaldi (third figure from the right, in the second row from the bottom); Cavour (alongside), King Vittorio Emanuele II (seventh figure from the right), and Mazzini (fourth figure from the left) – not forgetting the great mediaeval poet Dante (sixth from the left).

At little higher up, at the very top of the façade, the large statue of St. Michael holds in its left hand a ring with a red stone which, it is said, reflects the light of the sun into the eyes of anyone who happens to be standing in front of the Banca Commerciale in Piazza San Michele around noon. Legend has it that all those who see this light and make a wish will see it come true ...

What is definitely true is that the angel's wings are made up of 'mobile' feathers, so that the wind can pass through them and not blow against them as into a sail.

Finally, on the right side of the cathedral, recent restoration work has been careful not to remove the graffiti which over the course of the years was scratched by the market traders who brought their produce here to sell.

Windows for children

Finistrelle are small windows which enabled children to see outside without any risk of falling. A good number of such *finistrelle* can be seen in Piazza del Salvatore (number 9), Corte Portici and Via Calderia (numbers 19 and 21).



THE SUSPENSION BRIDGE TO THE FOUNDRY

③

*One of the longest pedestrian suspension bridges
in the world*

*Between Popiglio and Mammiano Basso (follow the directions to Ponte sospeso
delle ferriere)*

Always open, except at times of high winds

Maximum of 80 people on the bridge at one time



Iron has been produced in Mammiano Basso since 1704, taking full advantage of the River Lima that flows through the hills. But because of the way the valley is configured, the most significant settled areas grew up on the opposite bank at Popiglio. It was as a solution to this problem that Vincenzo Douglas Scotti, an engineer and director of the Mammiano metallurgic establishment, was prompted in 1920 to have a suspension bridge built. The bridge would be built across the valley in order to shorten by several kilometres the workers' daily journey to and from the factory. In spite of it being a very bold project, it was completed in only two years. All the workers employed in the factory lived locally, and they all worked under the qualified supervision of Scotti in person. Douglas Scotti himself was the designer of the bridge.

Made of steel with metal cables anchored into concrete bases at each end, the bridge is only 80 centimetres wide, but its total length of 227 metres makes it one of the world's longest pedestrian suspension bridges. At the time it was built, the bridge was state-of-the-art in technical terms. At its highest point it is 36 metres above the river Lima. Although it is narrow and sways very slightly in response to vibration caused by footfall, users feel that it is solid and safe. Entirely restored in 2004, the bridge has not once in all of its years of use witnessed any accidents. It can, of course, cause vertigo, but walking across it will produce a pleasant sense of achievement of the kind experienced after taking a controlled risk – the kind of feeling that engineer Douglas Scotti himself must have experienced more than once in his day.



PINOCCHIO'S OAK TREE

15

Pinocchio could well have been hanged from the branches of this hundred-year oak

Il Quercione (literally, The Great Oak)

Via Carrara – Wood of San Martino in Colle – 55012 Capannori (LU)



Known as ‘Pinocchio’s oak’ or ‘the Witches’ Oak’, this remarkable tree is over 600 years old and is thought to have inspired Collodi, author of the famous children’s story, for the scene of Pinocchio’s hanging by the Cat and the Fox. The village of Collodi, where the author’s mother was born, is located about ten kilometres away, and it is said that the young man, who often spent his holidays there, liked to sit in the shade of this tree to write.

This specimen of pubescent oak, a species that is very common in Italy, has several distinctive features: 15 metres high and 4 metres wide at the trunk, with a crown more than 40 metres in diameter, it is classified as the second largest tree in Tuscany.

It also has an unusual appearance for this species: its crown extends parallel to the ground, which, according to local legend, is due to a group of witches who held their sabbaths under this tree, hence the other nickname given to this majestic oak. Unfortunately, the tree is now endangered by parasites, and the municipality of Capannori has recently launched a campaign to save it – supported, among others, by Roberto Benigni, director of one of the latest film adaptations of Pinocchio.

For more on Pinocchio, see the following double-page.

NEARBY

The plaque and the magnolia of the Swiss guards 16

Piazza Vittorio Emanuele – 55011 Altopascio (LU)

In September 1505, 150 Swiss halberdiers left Bellinzona in the Swiss canton of Ticino for Rome, called there by Pope Julius II. They would arrive in the city on 22 January 1506, becoming the first body of the Papal Swiss Guard.

In 2006, to commemorate the five-hundredth anniversary of the creation of that Papal Guard, the 720-kilometres march was repeated by 70 former Swiss Guards. At each stopping-point on their route, a plaque was placed by a tree. Under the magnolia in Piazza Vittorio Emanuele, the plaque records that on 20 April 2006 the march reached its 14th stopping place at Altopascio, having already covered some 398 kilometres.

CASA DINOSAURO

②

A bold experiment between three visionary friends

Via Vittorio Giorgini – 57025 Baratti (LI)

casadinosaurobaratti.it

Visits by request to the owners at info@casadinosaurobaratti.it



Designed and built from 1965 onwards by architect Vittorio Giorgini, the remarkable Casa Dinosaururo Baratti – so named because it resembles a dinosaur drinking – was a spontaneous project that evolved during construction. It was initiated by three friends who loved the location and were driven by a desire to dare and experiment.

Giorgini's earlier project, Casa Esagono, occupied the adjacent plot. Also set in woodland but with views to the magical Gulf of Baratti, it was constructed entirely from interlocking timber.

But for the house to be shared with friends from Como, they needed to be even more ambitious. The initial design featured simple circular forms like a nautilus shell. But to keep the sea view, they elevated the central section on legs and added a neck for access.

And so, the dinosaur idea was born. But it still needed building.

They started with scale models for load-bearing tests in Casa Esagono's garden before attempting the full-scale structure, though they weren't entirely sure how it would all hold together. No plans or blueprints for the house exist. The only statement of intent was that they would use wire-mesh concrete technique and that the dwelling would be called Casa Dinosaururo. Their ambition was to 'make Kiesler's Endless House habitable' and to 'incorporate Gaudí's forms'.

Construction took a year and a half, but eventually an otherwise extinct creature rose again – albeit made of double wire mesh covered in raw concrete, sometimes hand-moulded. Its 'skin' is sand from Baratti beach. The owners assure visitors that apart from waterproofing every two years, no maintenance has been needed for the exterior.

The interior, however, was never completed by Giorgini. Once the external structure was finished, he abandoned the project for personal reasons. The house stood empty for several years until the current owners' father purchased it and finished the interior, with Giorgini's blessing.

The interior is remarkably bright, undulating and sinuous yet solid – somewhere between the Flintstones' house and the Smurfs' home (which are imaginary, whilst this one is real!).

THE VIRGO INTERFEROMETER

8

One of the world's most advanced space research instruments

Via Amaldi, 5 - 56021 Cascina (PI)

+39 050752511

ego-gw.it

Visits by booking via ego-gw.it

Free admission



Wandering across the plain of Pisa amongst sea, hills, pine forests, farmhouses and the Apuan Alps as backdrop, you'll notice two large mauve metal tubes three kilometres long, positioned at 90 degrees to each other.

These form part of one of the world's most advanced space research instruments – in fact, one of only three in existence on the planet (the other two are in the United States). The interferometer is a gravitational wave detector. Theorised by Einstein in his theory of relativity, these imperceptible oscillations in space-time were first detected in 2015 and have since been observed hundreds of times through joint observations between the United States and the Virgo interferometer.

Built from 1996 onwards and continuously maintained, updated and technologically developed, the Virgo interferometer brings together almost 1,000 people including physicists, mathematicians, engineers and technicians from 150 institutions in 20 different countries.

The highly sophisticated technology behind its operation creates Europe's largest ultra-high vacuum volume and uses the purest and smoothest mirrors ever created.

Achieving such precise measurements requires counteracting numerous sources of external 'noise'. These include the subsidence of local ground (the nearby Leaning Tower of Pisa is a famous victim of this), the simple movement of personnel – including footsteps – and even waves from the Tyrrhenian Sea constantly 'shaking' the coast. Scientists must develop sophisticated techniques to filter out these disturbances. Only then can they be certain that the infinitesimal variations detected in Virgo's long arms are caused by passing gravitational waves rather than local interference.

THE SPRING OF ABUNDANCE AND THE TREE OF FECUNDITY

⑥

Dozens of male members in a 13th-century fresco

Piazzale Mazzini
58024 Massa Marittima (GR)



The fresco within the porch containing the fountain in Piazza Mazzini will surprise even the most blasé hunters after the curious and bizarre. Painted in 1265 – the same year in which the fountain came into use – it depicts a tree bearing heavy fruit which, upon close inspection, turns out to be penises. The women standing beneath the laden branches are busy plucking the fruit and placing them in their baskets. Clearly allegorical in intention, this fresco is nevertheless very forthright in its realism – and demonstrates that religious subjects were not the only thing which attracted 13th century artists.

The fresco was only recently rediscovered after having lain for years ‘protected’ by the thick layer of lime scale deposited by the water from the fountain – in fact, it had been effectively protected not only from the elements but also from the narrow-mindedness of those who would have been quick to censure such unorthodox work. Paradoxically, the removal of the lime scale damaged the fresco, so now the restoration has had to be reassessed by the Opificio delle Pietre Dure in Florence. Hence the delay in the conclusion of work which, according to original estimates, should have been completed in 2005.

The name ‘Fountain of Abundance’ does not allude to the copious flow of water but to the fact that the space above the arcade was given over to the storage of grain for use during periods of famine.



JACOPO MAURO AND ROBERTO DI FERDINANDO



SECRET TUSCANY

The oak tree from which Pinocchio was hanged, Mussolini on a stained glass window in a 15th-century church, a forgotten statue by Leonardo da Vinci, a luxurious hotel converted into public toilets, a 17th-century milk dispenser, an astronomical phenomenon unique in the world, an authentic vial of Christ's blood, a faith that moves mountains, diamonds in marble, clues to an alchemical journey in Siena Cathedral, one of the vases from the Wedding at Cana, an extraordinary anatomical amphitheatre, the fountain of youth of the fairy Morgane, an unusual walk along the marble monorail, esoteric symbols hidden in the region's most beautiful gardens...

Far from the crowds and the usual clichés, Tuscany still has well-hidden treasures that it reveals only to locals and travellers who know how to get off the beaten track.

An indispensable guide for those who thought they knew Tuscany well or for those who wish to discover another side of the region. The city of Florence is not covered in this book since another guide is specifically dedicated to it: see 'Secret Florence' from the same publisher.

JONGLEZ PUBLISHING
360 PAGES

£15.99

€19.95

US\$21.95

ISBN: 978-2-36195-870-1



9 782361 958701

info@junglezpublishing.com

www.junglezpublishing.com



MIX

Paper | Supporting
responsible forestry

FSC® C115628