



# Expedition: Europe

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01 Feb 03 - 06 Feb 03



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RICHARD G RUSSO

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"'Expedition: Europe | Firenze' -- Reflections of Life" is a journal depicting real-life events. Names, places, and events are real and have not been fabricated.



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## table of contents

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-02/01/03: "The Jewel of the Renaissance".....	04
-02/02/03: "Along the Arno".....	13
-02/02/03: "Piazza del Duomo".....	25
-02/03/03: "Torre pendente di Pisa".....	33
-02/04/03: "Roma, The Eternal City (Part 1)".....	43
-02/04/03: "Roma, The Eternal City (Part 2)".....	58
-02/06/03: "Duomo, David & Giardino di Boboli".....	73



### Firenze, IT

## “The Jewel of the Renaissance”

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 15+

### Parte Uno

*beep-beep-beep-beep-beep-beepbeepbeepbeepbeep!*  
*//clunk// \*ouch!\* that'll leave a mark...*

It is 7:30am, or just a few moments past, and our eyes have just begun to fill with one of the most inviting, glowing lights imaginable. Warm tones of a sun in rising have breached the dew-crusted window of our cubicle and soaked our cabin with its affection from top to bottom. But this pleasantness isn't what roused us from our fitful slumber; only if it were just. What so unceremoniously brought us to consciousness at this ungodly hour was one of the most annoying sounds ever to pierce the resting soul: the high-pitched *beep-beep-beep* of a wrist-watch alarm clock.

We're moving about now – me perhaps a little more slowly than the others since I just reared up and hit my head on the top of the train car – but we're moving. How stupid of me to forget I was sleeping on the top bunk, but it is the perfect wake-up call... almost. There's no room to say I'm not awake now, right? Although last night's departure debacle is now behind us, we're still not sure whether the train will arrive in Firenze at its posted time (7:45am), having made up some travel time on the tracks, or not – hence the early call. We figured getting up a few minutes before our scheduled stop would give us enough time to ooze out of bed, make ourselves presentable and organize our bags for the inevitable arrival should we be “on time”. And if we're not arriving on time – no harm, no foul.

Now that we're good and awake both my travel-mates are still with me: Cedric is on the top bunk opposite me (or was; he's out checking up on our arrival into Firenze SMN) and Maya is still wrapped up in her blankets in a shelf below him. It's rather brisk in our couchette here, but we're rather used to that by now I should think. *Brrr!*

And this is a heated car? Yes, yes it is. But it could have been much, much worse.

Imagine, if you will, three humble travelers shivering on the arrival/departure platform out in a freak Parisian snow-storm with the hopes of rushing aboard their train under the pre-conceived notion of ensconcing themselves someplace warm, only to quickly determine and discover, to their horror, that their assigned couchette had a) no power and thus b) no heat to speak of. *Quel horreur!*

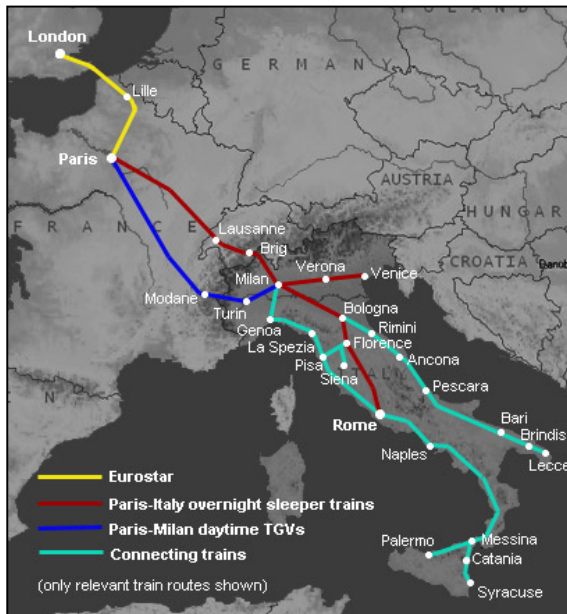


Realizing what would be in store for them if they had chosen to stay the night in such a hostile environment, they quickly flagged down a steward and pleaded, no downright begged, to be re-assigned. Unable to withstand their overpowering tear-filled puppy-dog eyes for long, he swiftly re-assigned them to another couchette in a completely different train car, with lighting, heating, and comfy seating, a move for which they were eternally grateful. (*You have saved our lives. We are eternally grateful!*)

Overly dramatic, isn't it? Perhaps I hit my head harder than I thought...

In either case the room we ended up in – this one – was no larger than the one we were originally assigned. Although we're three, it sits (and sleeps) up to four. Thankfully, though, we remained three; the roommate we were supposed to have in the other room never showed up here – so we had more space to maneuver around in than anticipated, such as it is. Small room equates to small sleeping quarters and that wasn't too much to look at, or overly exciting to talk about, in this class of couchette. Though I will say I'm not quite certain what I was expecting – nothing fancy to be certain – but I didn't quite expect the sleeping compartments to be fold-out, drop-down shelves. Then again, how else would you do it? I slept badly either way.

With Italy's Tuscany region flying by in a whirlwind of greens I'd say we still have some time before our arrival – I hope we get there soon, I can't wait to see Florence!



itinerary – Rome is as well – and I am equally as excited, perhaps more so, to visit the birthplace of the Roman Empire.

Over the years I've become quite fascinated with the Roman Empire, having learnt about the empire through history classes from middle-school up through college. Getting the chance to see Rome, bask in many of its past monuments, and actually breathe the living history that besieges the city is a one-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Can you imagine? To walk along some of the alleys that perhaps Julius Caesar, the charismatic conqueror of Gaul, did more than two thousand years ago? To visit the remains of the Roman Senate where Caesar defeated the last resistance of the Pompeians, paraded through the streets of Rome, and proclaimed himself dictator and consul for life in 45 BC? Or where conspirators, led by Marcus Junius Brutus (*et tu, brute?*), stabbed to death his friend in the Senate a year later on March 15, 44 BC? Or where Marc Anthony, the Roman General smitten with Cleopatra of Egypt, stood with Octavius to assume triumvirate control of the Republic? Or where Octavius launched the western legions to defeat Anthony at the Battle of Actium in 31 BC? (Both Anthony and Cleopatra fled back to Egypt where they committed suicide in disgrace).



And it's all here – the ruins of the once, vast and mighty Roman Empire.

Then, of course, there's Pisa and its Leaning Tower, Venice with its Grand Canals, Turin with its Shroud, and Naples, Mount Vesuvius, and Pompeii. Will I have the time? Alas, it looks like we're scheduled to roll into Firenze at about 11:00am, so we have a couple of hours left on the rails; therefore, I'm going to go put Europe's toilet paper challenge to the test – I'm taking my own just in case there is none. Wish me luck!

*Clickity-clack... clickity-clack... clickity-clack...*

### Parte Due

*Ciao, Benvenuto a Firenze!*

Via Raffaello Sanzio, 16  
50124 Firenze  
Italia

No, not good-bye – hello! Welcome to Italy, or more precisely, welcome to Florence, the *Jewel of the Renaissance*. Interestingly enough, “ciao” is used both as an informal greeting and an informal farewell here in Italy. I thought it was just used to say goodbye, alas, the nice young girl who waited on the three of us at the Via Pisana Supermarket nearby, from where we've come by the way, educated us on that one right from the start – but I'm getting ahead of myself here.

The train pulled into Firenze SMN at approximately 11:00am and we promptly stepped into another world.

Santa Maria Novella (the SMN in Firenze SMN), the train station (or Stazione), with over dozens of tracks, a bustling platform, and a huge cross-station, is a marvel in its own right. But not but twelve hours ago we were in a place where the language of choice was most decidedly French; here everyone spoke differently and it happily filled the air as people milled about rushing to and from their trains. The three of us settled onto the platform, our bags in tow, and just soaked it all in. It wasn't really any warmer here, but it sure was brighter and it almost seemed as if we were a bit more welcome here too.



Having taken a breath or two of the slightly warmer, but fresh, Italian air, we set out to find our way to the bus area, catch #12, and make our way to our hostel: *Youth Residence Firenze 2000* (address above right). This proved to be harder than at first thought because the station had two huge exits with bus plazas at either end, and since none of us spoke a lick of Italian, we weren't sure exactly which one to select. Thus we ended

up criss-crossing the station platform for a few moments as we filed out one door, then the other, back across, and again before coming upon the help of two older Italian ladies. They were gracious enough to point us out the proper exit (the other side, wouldn't you know?) and directed us where we could find tickets so we could ride the ATAF, or Azienda Trasporti Area Fiorentina – the bus.

Unfortunately Florence (Firenze in Italian; I'll probably go back and forth throughout the next few days) doesn't have a metro system, much to my dismay and surprise, so we had no choice but to familiarize ourselves with the bus system. It was pretty easy though – most newsstands, bars and/or tobacconist sell books of tickets (or individual rides) that are valid for 70-minutes a ride, just look for an orange ATAF sticker on the door or window!

These busses (also orange in color) have three doors – the front and back are used to board the bus while the one in the middle is to disembark. Once you do get on you must immediately validate your ticket with the “validation machine” located at the front of the bus (it'll stamp the date and time on it). Failure to do so and getting caught with an un-validated ticket could leave you with a pretty hefty fine! Way more than the €1.50 it costs to actually ride the bus.



About an hour after our arrival in Firenze we were knocking on the door to our hostel, checked in and found ourselves alone in our spacious room.





Youth Residence Firenze 2000 is quite unlike the other two places we've lodged at thus far on our trip, which were (more or less) hotels. The Rosedene in London and Hotel Coulencourt in Paris both had their charms, but Youth Residence Firenze is – from the initial onset – nothing but a hostel. It's almost like being housed in a school dorm (who wants the cot nearest the bathroom?), that's how uninspiring it is. It is, at least, cheap and we have a room all to ourselves with a bathroom (sorry, a WC or Water Closet – that's what they call toilets here in Europe), a shower and sink, so all is not lost. There is also no curfew here so we can come and go as we please – all we need to remember is to take our gate pass. Lack of character aside I think it'll serve quite nicely as our launching point for all that we have planned for Italy – Firenze (of course), but also Pisa and Roma.



After settling in to our new abode, the three of us decided it was time to heed our grumbling and rumbling tummies and thus set off on foot to find a nearby convenience store or supermarket where we could purchase some foodstuffs. Our journey ended quickly enough at a small Italian chain market store on the corner of Via Faffaello Sanzio and Via Pisana (*Via*, in Italian, means “way”, street or avenue as in the infamous “Appian Way”), not but just five to ten minutes walk from our hostel. There we procured pizza by the slice, muffins by the pack, and other interesting goodies to eat and drink to satisfy our munchies. On the way back we ran across an ATM machine to withdrawal some more Euros for our stay (I've been running low), and then brought the bounty back to our room to consume.

But then it came time for the inevitable... to make the call to my dad.

Although I've not mentioned this fact, this leg of our journey has been weighing on me. You see, my biological father is a native Italian who moved from the United States back to Firenze some time ago. Our relationship is estranged; he and I have not spoken for a number of years and, in fact, I recall now the last time I saw him or had any form of contact with him what-so-ever was in late-1988. I was twelve years old at the time and he and a lady-friend of his took me to Walt Disney World's Magic Kingdom in Orlando; it wasn't a pleasant time and I was scared out of my wits most of the time.



There is, of course, a family history here, which I will not necessarily share in this journal, but suffice it to say, my mom and he had been divorced for several years even by that time. I have no recollection of them ever being married, though I do have some good memories of him and being with him.



When the decision was made to come to Italy with my other two friends, it was brought to my attention that he, in fact, lived in Florence. Perhaps now was the time to look my father up? Even though doing so would add an element of difficulty (not to mention uneasiness) to this part of the journey, how could I not with the two of us being in the same city? What would it say about me if I came all the way to Europe and didn't make an attempt?

So, here it is about 2:00pm and I am sitting out in the common area (outside) looking at this green monstrosity of a telephone. I have the number here and instructions on how to dial. All I have to do is pick up the receiver...

*Okay, here we go... wish me luck!*

### Parte Tre

*"Pronto!"*

*"Uh... Dominico?"*

*(Something in Italian I didn't understand)*

*"This is Ricky."*

*"Ricky!!"*

*Buona Sera, I miei amici.* Good Evening, my friends. I'm back at Firenze 2000 at this late hour, sitting quietly on my bunk and waiting patiently for Cedric and Maya to make their return. While I spent the rest of the afternoon and evening catching up with my biological father, they made plans to meet with Maya's cousin Mikael, an exchange student from the United States and one of the reasons Maya wanted to make the journey to Firenze in the first place, and grab dinner. Apparently they're not yet done, but no bother, it allows me to organize my thoughts about tonight's experience.

It was a very interesting day to say the least but I think it went along quite nicely.



To say my father was ecstatic to hear from me would be an understatement; he tripped over his words in both Italian and then English (when he remembered I didn't speak Italian) throughout our conversation. It was an awkward few moments but by the time we hung up, a few minutes later, we agreed that he'd come to the hostel and pick me up. From there he'd take me wherever I wanted to go, grab something nice to eat, and then figure out what to do for the remaining days I had in Firenze. To say I was apprehensive would also be an understatement, but I returned to my two friends, clued them in on what would transpire, and then prepared to take my leave. They had nothing but good words to say, which I thanked them for, but I still wasn't sure whether I should be doing this or not, but what was done was done.

All that was left was to see how the evening would play out.

Almost an hour and a half after concluding our phone conversation, I spotted his car zipping along Vie Raffaello Sanzio, the roadway along which our hostel was situated. Swallowing my apprehension, I jettied out my arm, waving him down, and then watched the windshield intently as the driver made his way over to me. The moment the car came to a stop I popped open the passenger door (on the right) and hopped in. There really wasn't much to the vehicle really – a boxy looking thing, reddish and small (something akin to a pregnant roller skate, or so my mom would say) – but then again, there's not much to any of the European cars I've seen thus far on my trip. The streets just can't handle anything more than a compact car (and some not even). Although, in contrast, streets that can, do handle a multitude of cars – many times more than probably designed. For example, the highway that Dominico and I traversed contained about four stripped lanes – but with cars weaving in and out from behind one another, there was at least six lanes of traffic moving at all times.

And that doesn't even count the various "motorini" in the mix. Florence is filled to the brim with these gasoline-powered scooters.

Eventually my eyes wandered from the road over to my dad and I'm startled to see exactly how much we look alike... the hairline, the eyes, the face, the nose and the mouth. Although he's gained quite a bit of weight since I last saw him, and he walks now with a limp, there's no mistaking the lineage. It's also quite apparent I'm not the only one who's nervous... and then the chatter began.

At first we talked about nothing in particular: where I've visited thus far, who I'm traveling with, what I'm studying at school, whether or not I had a girlfriend, and generally how my life has been thus far. He professed having some sense of pride in me knowing now how well I've been doing, and starts to calm down. I too began to feel less worried and apprehensive about the decision to meet and thus we started to relate to one another. He brought me up to date with how his life had been, why he's limping – and accident at work crushed his foot – and how he's been. He makes no never mind of what happened between my mom and he all those years ago, nor makes excuses. He simply apologizes for being such a bad father and vowed to keep contact from this point forward.



I couldn't help but forgive him a little... he is my dad after all. And that's all that needed to be said. From here on in he was ready to show me the city.



Before I knew it we were on our way up to the *Piazzale Michelangelo*, a plaza where a not only a bronze copy of *Michelangelo's David* is displayed (the real one is also located in Florence), but one of the most wonderful and gorgeous panoramic views of the city can be had. By this time of day the warm glow of the setting sun cast its light across the city... and did its renaissance inspired skyline sing. The massive red-tiled dome of the Duomo (the common name for the

*Santa Maria del Fiore Cathedral*) stood out proudly, as did its white bell-tower (Giotto's Bell Tower). The river Arno could be seen stretching on for miles and miles; and across it, the Ponte Vecchio (literally Italian for "Old Bridge") stood proudly. Even the residents along the riverfront glowed with pride.

Words cannot do justice to such an awe-inspiring sight.

What a magnificent introduction to Firenze, too. I couldn't wait to get down into the main city to visit some of those places.

From Piazzale Michelangelo, Dominico and I drove around town looking for a place for dinner (a couple of steaks) until we settled upon a small but important township called Fiesole. Fiesole was settled by the Etruscans possibly as early as the 9<sup>th</sup> Century BC, was later conquered by the Romans and during the Middle Ages became one of the most powerful townships in Italy (due to its size at the time), even rivaling Firenze. In fact many wars arose between the two; in 1010 and 1025 Fiesole was sacked by the Florentines, before it was conquered by Florence in 1125. It has the distinction of being one of the oldest cities in the region – older than Firenze in fact!



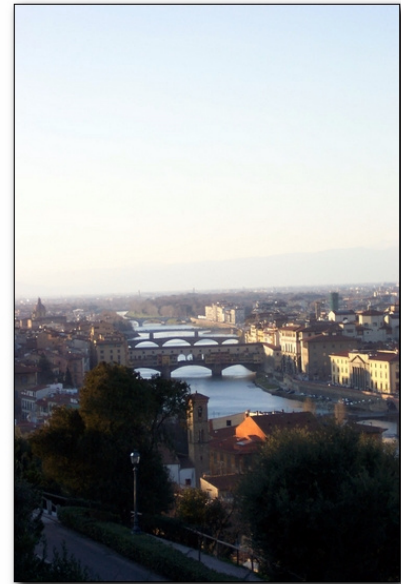
The town itself is petite and very quintessential European. A cathedral stands on its corner, proud and true, hugging the countryside like most of the city; a number of villas reside, and even the remnants of Etruscan walls, Roman baths and Roman theatres. I really enjoyed the little time we spent in Fiesole; it had an Italian old-world charm that could not be beaten.



After dinner in Fiesole, Dominico took me by his place to meet Maria (his sister, whom I apparently had not seen in ages – she remembers taking care of me as a little baby and I, unfortunately, do not remember her. No, that's not true, there may be a faint memory but nothing I can definitely say is her) and his mother (my grandmother on his side, whom I've never met). Unfortunately she has been bed ridden for at least two years and is in constant pain; she wails through the night. It

was quite unnerving to see someone that old in such pain (not to mention awkward – I certainly wasn't prepared for this); apparently she had eaten something she shouldn't have, which irritated her intestinal tract. After a quick photograph (also quite awkward), we took our leave.

Although while at the house I was able to speak to my mom on the phone, tell her a bit about how the meeting had gone and how the trip had gone thus far. It was the first time the two of us had a chance to talk (other than via email) since I had arrived in Europe more than two weeks ago. She also had terrible news for me... apparently the Space Shuttle, Columbia, which had been scheduled to land that day exploded in the atmosphere upon re-entry, spreading debris all across the south-western United States. To say I was visibly shocked, and a bit shaken, is short-changing the description but it was not something I could focus on for long. The call ended, and my father and I said our goodbyes for the evening as he took me back to the hostel.



So, yeah, I think it went well.

Cedric and Maya have just returned, so at their request I'm going to fill them in on today's activities and hit the sack – Dominico is coming by early in the morning to take us to lunch and sight-seeing around town. Maya will join her cousin Mikael on a bike-riding trip to nearby Lucca. Should be fun!



### Firenze, IT

## “Along the Arno”

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 2<sup>ND</sup> – PART I

*Ooooh, my head still hurts.*

*Let me sit here for a moment before I tell you why...*

For the briefest of moments Cedric and I watched the sun slip slowly beyond the Earth's horizon and reveled in the long rays of light casting its afternoon warmth across this magnificent city, before heading inside and calling it an evening. It was the perfect ending to what truly has been a wonderful and memorable day.

As you can guess it's late in the afternoon now; Cedric and I have just returned to *Youth Residence Firenze 2000* after spending the majority of the day with my biological father seeing the sights around *Centro Storico di Firenze*, or the historic center of the city. It's there in the historic quarter where you'll find Florence's famous “old bridge” – the Ponte Vecchio, piazzas filled with a number of the city's famous sculptures and fountains – the Loggia della Signoria, where the infamous “little piggy” statue – Il Porcellino – rests, and where Firenze's beautiful red-tiled dome towers into the sky – at the Piazza del Duomo. And we saw it all... on foot!

Although now we can look back and say what a good day we've had (or at least I think it's been a good day, I, of course, can't vouch for Cedric), it didn't quite start out that way – but when do they ever?

Our day started quite like every other morning in Europe has thus far – a high-pitched *beep-beep-beep* of a wrist-watch alarm clock – this time set for 7:45am. Fortunately this time the beeping wasn't specifically for either Cedric or I. Maya also had a meeting to attend with Mikael, the before-mentioned exchange-student cousin of hers. Even with our divergent schedules the same schedule prevailed: she hopped in the shower first (spending her 30 minutes), then Cedric would go next (taking his 20 min or so), followed by yours truly (with his quick 5-10 minutes), etcetera, and etcetera. See, just the same?

The only kink in our well-oiled machine was my father, who had offered to take both Cedric and I out for the day while Maya went off with her cousin to Lucca, a small medieval town near Pisa. Dominico was supposed to arrive to pick us up by no earlier than 9:00am, thus we set the wake-up call accordingly; however, a knock at our door some time before 8:30am threw all those plans into chaos – Maya had just exited the shower when he arrived, leaving Cedric and I to get quick showers so we could be on our way. Once we were all ready, we all in turn departed – Maya and her cousin first, who arrived while I was taking my shower – then us.

Thus with Cedric in the back-seat and me in the passenger-front, Dominico pushed his foot down and away we sped off down the streets of Florence in search of sights unknown!

### **Piazzalle Michelangelo et Ponte Vecchio**

After a spot of breakfast at a nearby café (cappuccinos and pastries), the three of us arrived at the first destination of the day's tour: at Piazzalle Michelangelo.



Created as part of a major restructuring of the city's walls in 1869, Florentine architect Giuseppe Poggi wished to construct a sumptuous terrace overlooking Florence's historic district dedicated to one of the city's most celebrated artists, Michelangelo, replete with copies of some of his most famous works, including "David" and the "Medici Chapel Sculptures" from San Lorenzo. The design also included the continuation of the main circular

boulevards up into the hills south of the city, which he completed, by demolishing what was left of the third circle of walls built to defend the original city-state between 1284 and 1333. Only a few of the ancient gates into the city were saved from destruction, allowing them to remain in the squares he created along the way (which you can see today): Porta Romana, Porta al Prato, Porta a San Gallo, Porta a Santa Corce, Porta della Zecca Vecchia and Porta a San Niccolò. Unfortunately Poggi's ultimate dream was never fully realized (the restaurant here was intended to be a museum), it's still an outstanding testament to his imagination.

Although Dominico brought me to this magnificent plaza the night before, and I had the chance to catch a glimpse of Michelangelo's David – the bronze copy – at that time – I wanted to share this most wonderful and awesome panoramic view of the city with Cedric. What I didn't expect was how very different the city looked; the massive red-tiled dome of the Duomo (the common name for the *Santa Maria del Fiore Cathedral*) still stood out proudly, as did its white bell-



tower (Giotto's Bell Tower), and the river Arno could still be seen stretching on for miles and miles across the Tuscan countryside with the Uffizi and Ponte Vecchio spanning its shores, and the Palazzo della Signoria and the Bargello, but it all looked different.



With a morning light cast upon Firenze's monuments now, a different song was sung by the skyline than the one I heard the night before. This morning's was stark, strident, and suffused where last night's was harmonic, verbose and eloquent. An amazing contrast but equally as beautiful, for the song this morning was one of vigilance and attentiveness – illuminated to prepare us (and other travelers) for the discoveries we'd find along the city's streets.

With one last look at David, we were off.

Next, we retreated back down the tree-lined wind roadway of Viale Giuseppe Pogge, drove by the Piazza de' Pitti (home of Boboli Gardens) and ditched the car riverside (somewhere along "Via de'Bardi") and then took to Firenze's Central Quarter on foot.



Although you'll find five bridges spanning the Arno in the Centro Storico – the Ponte Amerigo Vespucci, the Ponte alle Carraia, the Ponte Santa Trinità and the Ponte alle Grazie – you'll find none greater, none more picturesque, and none more celebrated than the Ponte Vecchio. Literally meaning "Old Bridge" in Italian, this venerable old structure has been a symbol of Firenze since Medieval times, but it was not the first bridge to span the Arno at its narrowest point.

The first, with stone pillar construction and a wooden superstructure, is believed to be one of Roman antiquity, supporting the Via Cassia's crossing at the exact same point. And although subsequent bridges no doubt spanned the Arno here, the bridge only began to appear in historical records around 996 AD. Since then it has seen its share of natural disaster: swept away twice by the Arno's mighty flood waters, in 1117 and again in 1333, the Ponte Vecchio was reconstructed in 1345 into the form we know and love today – complete with its distinguishing arches, its distinctive color, and its signature shops – with one seventeenth century addition: the shops along the back row (known as "retrobotteghe"), which give the bridge its fascinating life.



### Avete saputo?

Did you know the Ponte Vecchio has a “secret” second-story private corridor? The Corridoio Vasariano, also known as the Percorso del Principe (“Prince’s Route”), was built in 1565 to connect the Palazzo Vecchio to the Palazzo Pitti via the Uffizi. It allowed members of the Medici family to move between their residences without having to step into the streets below.

By the numbers the bridge consists of three segmental arches: the main arch has a span of 30 meters (98 feet) with two side arches spanning 27 meters (88 feet) each. The rise of the arches themselves reaches a height between 3.5 and 4.4 meters (11.5 and 14.5 feet) with a 5:1 span-to-rise ratio, making not only a stable foundation for all its stone but a rather pleasing bridge to behold. Included within is a feature that sets this bridge apart from many of its counterparts: its shops. Although quite common in antiquity (think the London Bridge) their cramped surfaces coupled with their harrowed

locations made living and/or working on such structures a nasty affair (think again the London Bridge of old and its fire), hence most modern bridges are devoid of such trappings.

But not the Ponte Vecchio; its shops are still there – and open for business!

Butchers, tanners and blacksmiths initially occupied the shops along the roadway, but were evicted by Duke Ferdinando I in 1593 because of the noise and stench they created. Present tenants include goldsmiths, jewelers, art dealers and, of course, souvenir sellers. You’ll even find a bust of Benvenuto Cellini (1500-1571) in the middle of the span; he’s one of Florence’s most famous goldsmiths (and he’s still surrounded by gold today, lots of it!). And, if you look carefully, you’ll find the bridge’s dedication stone, now highly weathered, sheltered in a little loggia at the far end.



It’s an amazing feeling to walk across such an amazing relic, to touch it, to breathe in its soul and to be part of it forever. Although, if you’re so inclined, you can become part of the bridge in more than one way: along the cross-walk you may discover a number of padlocks locked to various parts of the bridge (especially the railing). What are these for? After a brief search online I learned the padlocks are a tradition practiced in Russia and Asia, but making inroads

around the world. The idea is connected to love: by locking the padlock and throwing the key into the river, lovers become eternally bonded. I did not partake.



## Piazza della Signoria



Did you know there are no less than three Statues of David sprinkled about Florence? Apparently so! One is situated atop Piazzalle Michelangelo, another (the real one) is housed in the Galleria dell' Accademia, and a third (another copy) in the *Piazza della Signoria*, where the real David once stood for hundreds of years.

Turning north and continuing on-foot for no more than a block or two, you'll come to the *Piazza della Signoria*, an L-shaped square that sits at the very heart of Florence. Named after the *Palazzo della Signoria* (also called the *Palazzo Vecchio*), which rests on one of the plaza's corners, it is recognized as the focal point of the origin and history of the Florentine Republic (the palace was here so here is where the people gathered). It was already a central square in the original Roman town of Florentia, surrounded by a theater, Roman baths, workshops, a church and an enormous basilica; therefore, its continued use as the seat of Florence's civic government only made sense.



As such a number of historical relics, if you will, can be found all around the piazza.

There is, of course, the *Palazzo Vecchio* (“Old Palace”), the *Loggia dei Lanzi*, the *Uffizi Gallery*, the *Palace of the Tribunale della Mercanzia*, the *Uguccioni Palace* and a number of statuary, sculptures and fountains, including the *Fontana di Nettuno* (the “Fountain of Neptune”).

Since time did not permit us to tour the *Palazzo Vecchio*, the *Palace of the Tribunale della Mercanzia* nor the *Uffizi Gallery* I cannot, of course, speak of their historical and artistic riches (although I hear they are aplenty); however, I am thankful we took the opportunity to discover the *Loggia dei Lanzi* and the awesome number of sculptures it housed (not to mention some of the statuary outside of the *Palazzo Vecchio*).

*The Loggia dei Lanzi* was originally constructed in 1382 as a place for housing assemblies of the people and for the purpose of holding public ceremonies, but today it houses copies (and some originals) of bronze and marble works by Florentine Renaissance masters. It’s quite an interesting building, architecturally and artistically: You’ll find its wide arches (it’s main architectural feature, three bays wide and one bay deep) rest on clustered pilasters with Corinthian capitals, trefoils with allegorical figures representing the four cardinal virtues (*Fortitude, Temperance, Justice and Prudence*) on the façade below the parapets, and inscriptions on the sides commemorating the 1750 change-over of the Florentine Calendar (bringing it in-line with the Roman calendar – the Florentine calendar began on March 25<sup>th</sup> rather than January 1<sup>st</sup>) and Florentines who distinguished themselves during the annexation of Milan (in 1865), Venice (in 1866), and Rome (in 1871) into the Kingdom of Italy. On the steps of the Loggia are two Marzoccos (marble lions), heraldic symbols of the city of Florence. The one on the right was sculpted during ancient Roman times while the one on the left was sculpted much, much later (in 1598).

Although the lions captured my attention, the figures under the bay were much more fascinating.

The first of these sculptures is a bronze masterfully crafted by Florentine artist Benvenuto Cellini (1500-1571). Entitled “Perseus with the Head of Medusa”, the piece depicts the extraordinary event from Greek mythology in which the Greek hero (Perseus) holds up the severed head of the gorgon Medusa following his hard-fought triumph over her. He holds up the detached head of Medusa in his left hand while his sword still stands ready to strike in his right. The well-proportioned muscular body of Perseus, nude, stands subdued, poised over Medusa’s body upon on his right leg, intently watching as the blood gushes from her head and neck.

#### Avete saputo?

Did you know that the “Bonfire of the Vanities” occurred in this square? Although the 1987 novel (and subsequent movie) satirized the historical event, burning of materials deemed sinful actually did occur. The most famous (and thus the event used in the book) took place on February 7, 1497, when supporters of the Dominican priest Girolamo Savonarola collected and publically burned thousand of objects. He was later hung and burned in the very same piazza on May 23, 1498. A round marble plaque near the Fountain of Neptune marks this exact spot.



On the statue's pedestal below is a richly decorated marble piece with four bronze statuettes. They are Jupiter (the Roman "King of the Gods", and the god of Sky and Thunder; equivalent of Zeus in Greek mythology), Mercurius (or Mercury, "The Messenger", and god of trade; equivalent of Hermes in Greek mythology), Minerva (the virgin goddess of poetry, wisdom, arts and crafts; equivalent of Athena in Greek mythology), and Danaë (Perseus' mother). The bas-relief on the pedestal represents Perseus freeing Andromeda, which he did upon destroying the Medusa.

It is a magnificent specimen.

A second figure captured my imagination next – this one by Giambologna, an Italian artist of Flemish descent – entitled "Hercules Beating the Centaur Nessus". Sculpted from one solid block of white marble in 1599, Giambologna depicts a scene from the *Tunic of Nessus* story in Greek mythology. As the story goes: Nessus, after carrying Deianeira, the wife of Heracles, across the river in an attempt to rape her, Heracles came to her rescue subduing the centaur. But in a final act of malice, Nessus told Deianeira that his blood would ensure that Heracles would be true to her forever; Deianeira foolishly believed him and spread the centaur's blood on a chiton and gave it to her husband. By the time she realized the blood was a poison it was too late – Hercules lay dying a slow, agonizing death.



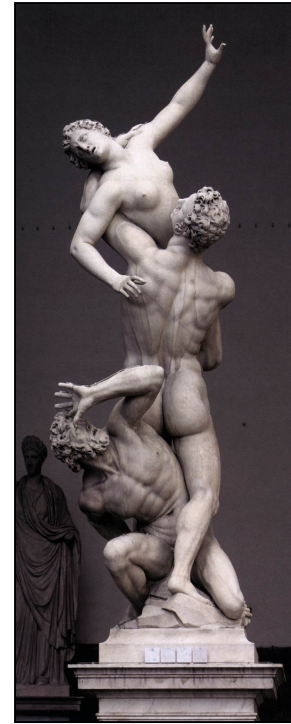
Although a gruesome outcome, I couldn't help but marvel at the tension and sheer strength represented in this magnificent sculpture. As I stood and gazed over the figures, I too choked under the hold Hercules had over Nessus (what amazing form of anguish depicted upon his face too), and awaited the final crushing blow of Hercules' club, hiked up high in the hero's right hand; a blow that would never come.

Giambologna also crafted the "Rape of the Sabines", which occupies the right-side of the Loggia. An impressive piece; made from one imperfect block of white marble, the figure was crafted utilizing a *figura serpentina* (an upward snake-like spiral movement), which gives the piece its non-conformative non-dominant viewpoint. The piece also has the distinction of being chiseled out of the largest block of white marble ever to be transported to Florence.



Much like Jacques-Louis David's *The Intervention of the Sabine Women* (hung at the Louvre) or Nicolas Poussin's *Rape of the Sabine Women* (hung at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City), Giambologna's sculpture depicts a well-known episode from Roman legend: how the first generation of Roman men "acquired" their wives from the nearby Sabine tribe by spiriting them away through nefarious means.

Most artists depict the entire festival (of the Neptune Equester) and the confusion that ensues after Romulus, one of the founding fathers of Rome, gives the signal for his countrymen to fight off the Sabine men and take charge of their women. Giambologna decided to depict just three figures – a Sabine man, a Roman man and a Sabine woman – with the woman being spirited away by the Roman. Whether a true depiction of history or not, the indignant abductees were then implored by Romulus to accept Roman husbands, which they reluctantly did so, solving the Roman population problem and giving Renaissance and post-Renaissance artisans a wealth of inspiration.



For Giambologna, the *Rape of the Sabines* is considered *his* masterpiece, and rightfully so. It is truly a superb image, which we can enjoy from multiple angles.



Donato di Niccolò di Betto Bardi, better known to us as Donatello, is also represented in the *Loggia dei Lanzi* with a famous bronze entitled "Judith and Holofernes". Crafted in 1460 at the end of his career, the work depicts the gruesome account of Holofernes' beheading by young Judith, as given in the biblical book bearing her name. In the story, Judith, a daring and beautiful widow, becomes upset with her fellow Jewish countrymen for not placing their trust in God to deliver them from their Assyrian conquerors. Thus she travels to the foreigner's camp and slowly ingratiates herself to their general, Holofernes, promising him information on the Israelites. After gaining his trust, she is permitted to enter the General's tent one night, whereby, finding him overcome by drink, she decapitates him. The Assyrians, having lost their

leader, disperse, saving Israel from certain demise. Due to the nature of her act Judith is considered to be a symbol of victory of the weak over the strong; here she stands powerful with raised sword, triumphantly holding the head of Holofernes by his hair. It's quite striking. Unfortunately this one is a copy (the original can be seen in the Palazzo Vecchio), but it's no less interesting.

### Avete saputo?

Bandinelli's "Hercules and Cacus" was commissioned by the Medici family, who ruled Florence during the Renaissance, as a metaphor for those who would stand against them. They, of course, are represented by Hercules and all those who oppose them, by Cacus.

Nearby is Bandinelli's "Hercules and Cacus", a marble piece depicting the demi-god Hercules pausing before striking down the fire-belching monster Cacus for stealing eight of his cattle (four bulls and four cows); cattle Hercules himself stole from the fearsome giant of the Greeks, Geryon.

Rounding out the sculptures under the Loggia is "Menelaus Supporting the Body of Patroclus" and "The Rape of Polyxena", two pieces from two very different artists whose work spans 2000 plus years. The first, "Menelaus Supporting the Body of Patroclus" was made in the late First Century CE (AD) and is a Roman copy of a mid-third century BCE original from the Hellenistic Age. The second, "The Rape of Polyxena", by nineteenth-century Italian artist Pio Fedi, dates from 1865. Both take their liberties from Homer's Illiad and other mythological texts written about and set during the Trojan War – the epic ten-year siege on the city of Troy that took place in the 13<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> century BCE.

"Menelaus Supporting the Body of Patroclus" depicts the felling of Patroclus, Achilles' beloved friend, and Menelaus, who supports and protects the body on the battlefield until Achilles can reach them.

The gods, having set the stage for the siege of Troy (that is a long, long story), do not stand idly by. Hera (goddess of women and marriage), who hides no hatred for Troy, seduces Zeus and lures him to sleep so Poseidon (god of the sea) may lend his support to the Greek navy. But Poseidon's intervention angers Zeus who sends Apollo to aid the Trojans, once again bringing the battle to the ships (setting them aflame). Patroclus, in his lust for combat, begs Achilles to lend his armor so he may lead the Myrmidons into battle. Achilles reluctantly agrees, but the Trojans are pursued all the way back to the gates of Troy, defying Achilles' order to break off once the ships were safe; thus Patroclus is stunned by Apollo, and Hector, with the aid of Euphorbus, kills him.



Hector is one of the central figures in Achilles' part of the legend, as Hector's deeds are what brings Achilles back into the battle for Troy (that too is a long story). Hector takes Achilles' armor from Patroclus then retreats, leaving a grief-stricken Achilles to vow bloody vengeance. That brings us to "The Rape of Polyxena", which represents the mythological story of the forcible abduction of Polyxena by Achilles' son.

During the early stages of the war a prophecy comes to light suggesting Troy will never fall if Troilus lives into adulthood; therefore, the goddess Athena encourages Achilles to seek him out. He does so, ambushing him (and his sister, Polyxena) at the well in Thymbra. But Achilles finds lust has stricken him and he attempts to woo Troilus. The young prince refuses to yield to Achilles' sexual attentions and escapes, taking refuge in a nearby temple dedicated to Apollo. Achilles follows him in and, spurned still, beheads him. He spares Polyxena and the war rages on.



Achilles eventually finds and chases Hector all around the wall of Troy before Hector himself is betrayed by Athena (in the form of Hector's favorite and dearest brother). Athena persuades Hector to stop running and fight Achilles face to face. Hector realizes the trick too late and, wishing to go down fighting, he charges at Achilles with his sword, but misses him. Accepting his fate, Hector begged Achilles – not to spare his life, but to treat his body with respect after killing him (Achilles was known for torturing, thus dishonoring the corpses of his victims).

Achilles told Hector it was hopeless to expect that of him, and then took his vengeance, killing Hector with a single blow to the neck and tying the Trojan's body

to his chariot, dragging it around the battlefield for nine days.

Achilles, still stricken with grief over Patroclus's death, finds comfort in Polyxena who (surprisingly) has words of comfort for him. Polyxena eventually offers herself up as slave if Achilles returns Hector's body to the family. He does so, having fallen madly in love with the girl. But, depending on how you see it, Achilles gets his just desserts. Soon after becoming Achilles' consort, he confides to her his only weakness: his heel, which legend suggests is the only part of his body not dipped in the river Styx in the attempt to make him immortal (which in itself is an attempt at keeping prophecy at bay). Polyxena betrays Achilles' secret to her brothers – Paris and Deiphobus, who, with the help of Apollo, ambush Achilles and shoots him through the heel with a poison-tipped arrow, fulfilling a prophecy (that Achilles himself would die from the wound of an arrow).

#### **Avete saputo?**

Did you know it is this mythological event that gives rise to our metaphor for weakness today? The Achilles Heel.

Some scholars suggest that Polyxena committed suicide after Achilles' death out of guilt, but according to Euripides in his plays *The Trojan Women* and *Hecuba*, Polyxena lived until the end of the Trojan War. In an inauspicious turn of events, Achilles' ghost returns to the battlefield demanding that the wind needed to set sail back to Hellas had to be appeased by the human sacrifice of his beloved, Polyxena.



Thus the marble “The Rape of Polyxena” depicts this spiriting away by Achilles’ son Neoptolemos; note how the maiden is encircled within the warrior’s firm left arm whilst his right is uplifted, ready to strike down Polyxena’s mother, Hecuba, who kneels at Neoptolemos’ feet, both imploring his mercy and attempting to cling piteously to her child.

Polyxena, for her role in all this, does not put up a fight – she is eager to die as a sacrifice to Achilles rather than die as a slave. Neoptolemos then goes on to kill Polyxena in the least painful way, allowing her to retain her virginity and dignity.

Although it was not necessary to delve into the legend of the Trojan War just to share my appreciation for these two pieces, understanding the mythology from which these pieces were born can only enriches the experience and presents the pieces in proper context, so forgive me if I got a little long winded.



### Nettuno & Il Porcellino



Last but certainly not least is the *Fontana di Nettuno* (the “Fountain of Neptune”). Although analogous to Poseidon, the Greek god of the sea, there are differences between he and Neptune, the Roman version. The enormous mass of the Fountain of Neptune, a marble sculpture by Bartolomeo Ammannati, with Tritons and water nymphs in bronze by Giambologna, is situated on the corner of Palazzo Vecchio.

Created for the celebration of marriage between Francesco de’ Medici (second

Grand Duke of Tuscany and Cosimo I de’ Medici’s heir) and Johanna of Austria (Grand Duchess) in 1565, the Fountain of Neptune is full of allegorical meaning, though somewhat lacking in power of expression.

The Neptune figure, whose face resembles that of Cosimo I de’ Medici, was meant to be an allusion to the dominion of the Florentines over the sea. The figure stands on a high pedestal in the middle of the octagonal fountain, decorated with beautiful interpretations of Scylla and Charybdis, monsters of the sea. Surrounding the figure are bronze statues of river gods, laughing satyrs and sea horses, which emerge from the fountain’s basin.

Although perhaps striking enough today, when the fountain was originally completed, the sarcastic Florentines did not take well to it. In fact they emblazoned the figure with a nick-name – “Il Biacone” – the White Giant. A name still used to reference the fountain today. And I can see why; there’s no missing that great white colossus!



Next we made our way to the *Loggia del Mercato Nuovo*, a marketplace originally built during the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century for the sale of silk and luxury goods. Today it is mainly a leather goods and souvenir staple, so if you’re looking to shop for a variety of items among street vendors this is one of the places to go; however, lurking here is the *Fontana del Porcellino* – “The Fountain of the Piglet”.

Originally intended for the Boboli Gardens, the fountain figure was sculpted and cast by Baroque master Pietro Tacca (1577 –1640) in 1612, following a marble Italian copy of a Hellenistic marble original. Although this one, like most everything else on public display, is a copy, it holds its own. Visitors are encouraged to place a coin into the gaping boar’s jaws with the intent to let it fall through the underlying grating for good luck (tradition implies that your wish will be granted if and only if the offering tumbles through the grate) and rub the boar’s snout to ensure a return to Florence, a tradition that has kept the snout in a highly polished state.



\* \* \*

And with a drop of a coin and a rub on the snout (I guess my return to Florence is now guaranteed!), the three of us continued on foot to Piazza del Duomo, home to Florence’s famous cathedral and dome (the *Basilica Santa Maria del Fiore* and *Cupola del Brunelleschi*), *Giotto’s Campanile* (the bell tower), and the *Baptistery of St. John*.

*Hold up; Maya’s back! I’m going to say hi and then continue on...*



### Firenze, IT

## “Piazza del Duomo”

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 2<sup>ND</sup> – PART 2

To stand in the middle of the Piazza del Duomo is to stand in the middle of history. Here, set in the heart of Florence is the Santa Maria del Fiore – the Duomo, or cathedral of Florence – and it dominates the city with its enormous dome. Its sheer size typifies Florentine determination to be great in all things, and to this day, no other building in the city stands taller. At 153 meters (502 feet) in length, 38 meters (124 ft) wide, 90 meters (295 feet) wide at the cross, and 116 meters (381 feet high) from the pavement to the top of the dome, the dimensions of the building are simply enormous.

### Il Duomo



The first stone was laid on September 8, 1296 on the site of an earlier cathedral dedicated to Santa Reparata (founded sometime in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC), and took approximately 140 years to complete. By 1375 the old church was pulled down; the nave finished by 1380; the radiating eastern chapels were finished in the early 1400s; and by 1418 only the dome remained incomplete. Meanwhile, work on the exquisite exterior

continued: the walls are faced in alternate vertical and horizontal bands of what is called “polychrome marble”, brought from various places around Tuscany, such as Carrara (white marble), Prato (green marble), Siena (red marble), Lavenza and other cities and communes. This was done to match the already existing bands on the walls of the adjacent baptistery and bell tower, which had been completed well before the Basilica.

The dome, of course, was the last to be completed; work started there in 1420 and ended in 1434. The lantern and the gilt copper ball and cross were set in place in 1466. And the last piece to be finished was the façade, which was completed between 1871 and 1887, over 590 years from the start of the massive project! The basilica is one of Italy’s largest churches, and until the modern era, the largest in the world. It does, however, remain the largest brick dome ever constructed.



Besides the external marbling, there are a number of artifacts to the façade that are worth noting. The three huge doors that dominate the cathedral's entrance were installed as part of the façade's remake in 1887 and date from 1899 to 1903. Each one is lavishly adorned with scenes from the life of Mary, the Mother of Jesus (i.e. the Madonna). The mosaics in the half-moon shaped spaces above the doors (called lunettes) represent, from left to right: *Charity among the founders of Florentine philanthropic institutions*, *Christ enthroned with Mary and John the Baptist*, and *Florentine artisans, merchants and humanists paying homage to the Faith*. And contained within the pediment above the central portal is *Mary enthroned holding a flowered scepter*. On top of the façade is a series of niches with the twelve Apostles with the Madonna with Child in the middle.



Standing beside the Basilica is the Campanile di Giotto, the bell-tower. At 85 meters (276 feet) high, the Campanile is 6 meters (20 feet) shorter than the dome but that doesn't make it any less impressive. Construction began by Giotto in 1334, was carried on after his death by Andrea Pisano, and finished in 1359 by Francesco Talenti. The slender structure stands on a square plan 15 meters (48 feet) per side, and attains a height of 85 meters (278 feet). The sculptural decoration of the tower is extremely rich: 56 relief carvings in two registers, and 16 life-size statues representing the patriarchs, prophets, and kings of Israel, in the niches – all by Florentine masters of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries (among who are Andrea Pisano and Donatello).

On the tower's façade, facing the Baptistery, the hexagonal-shaped reliefs in the lower row depict the creation of man and woman (Adam and Eve), the beginnings of human work (our labors), and the "inventors" (according to the bible) of various creative and mechanical activities: sheep-herding (Jabal), music (Jubal), metallurgy (Tubalcain), and wine-making (Noah). In the upper register are the seven known planets – Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, the Sun, Venus, Mercury and the Moon – beginning with Jupiter at the north corner.

The Bells of Giotto's Campanile				
Name	Date	Size	Weight	♪
Campanone	1705	2.00 m	5300 kg	A2
Misericordia	1670	1.52 m	1817 kg	C3
Apostolica	1957	1.25 m	1200 kg	D3
Annunziata	1956	1.15 m	856.5 kg	E3
Mater Dei	1956	0.95 m	481.3 kg	G3
L'Assunta	1956	0.85 m	339.6 kg	A3
L'Immacolata	1956	0.75 m	237.8 kg	B3

On the other façades, in the lower register we find reliefs on astrology (Gionitus), the art of building, medicine, hunting, weaving and other technical, scientific and liberal endeavors, such as: legislation (Phoroneus), flight (Daedalus), navigation, social justice, agriculture, festivals, architecture (Euclid), sculpture, phidas, painting, harmony, grammar, logic and dialectic (Plato and Aristotle), music and

poetry (Orpheus), geometry and arithmetic (Euclid and Pythagoras).

In the upper registers: on the south, the three theological and four cardinal virtues (Faith, Charity, Hope, Prudence, Justice, Temperance and Fortitude); on the east, the seven liberal arts of the Trivium (Grammar, Logic/Dialectic and Rhetoric) and the Quadrivium (Arithmetic, Geometry, Music, and Astronomy) – the subjects taught in medieval universities; and on the north, the seven sacraments (Baptism, Confession, Matrimony, Holy Order, Confirmation, the Eucharist, and the Extreme Unction).

And over the door, there exists a piece called “The Madonna and Child”, in the lunette, and the “Two Prophets and the Redeemer”, above the entrance door gable. As for the bells (chart above-left), you can attain to their height by climbing up 414 steps for a wonderful panoramic view of the city.



Rounding the corner of Via Roma and Via de' Pecori and coming face-to-face with the beauty of the famous Basilica, and the equally famous bell-tower was an experience that instantly took my breath away – I was wowed beyond words; I didn't know where to look first! Fortunately that dilemma was solved for me; due to our limited time in the area we would not be able to explore inside the Basilica (or climb the 463 steps to the top of its dome), or have the time to climb the 414 steps of the Campanile.

### **Battistero di San Giovanni (The Baptistry)**



We did, however, have just enough time to explore the Battistero di San Giovanni, or better known as the Baptistry of St. John.

This octagonal building stands in both the Piazza del Duomo and the Piazza di San Giovanni, just across from the cathedral and bell tower. The origins of the temple dedicated to St. John the Baptist are uncertain, but according to tradition it was founded in Roman times in dedication to the god of war, Mars. As such it is one of the oldest buildings in the city, built between 1059 and 1128, and highly ornamented. Besides its rich striped marble, the Baptistry is renowned for its three sets of artistically important bronze doors: on the south, north, and east sides of the structure. Those I wanted to see.

### The Southern Gate:

The oldest doors are those here on the south side of the Baptistery, fashioned by Andrea Pisano in the 1330s. These pre-Renaissance doors, depicting the life of John the Baptist, took six years to complete and consist of 28 quatrefoil-style panels; the top twenty show scenes from St. John's life whilst the lower eight depict the eight cardinal and theological moral virtues. They are:



1	2	11	12
3	4	13	14
5	6	15	16
7	8	17	18
9	10	19	20
A	B	C	D
E	F	G	H

**1.** The angel announces to Zachariah. **2.** Zachariah is struck mute. **3.** Visitation. **4.** Birth of the Baptist. **5.** Zachariah writes the boy's name. **6.** St John as boy in the desert. **7.** He preaches to the Pharisees. **8.** He announces Christ. **9.** Baptism of his disciples. **10.** Baptism of Jesus. **11.** St John reprimands Herod Antipas. **12.** Incarceration of St. John. **13.** The disciples visit St. John. **14.** The disciples visit Jesus. **15.** Salomè's Dance. **16.** Decapitation of St. John. **17.** Presentation of St John's head to Herod Antipas. **18.** Salome takes the head to Herodias **19.** Transport of the body of John. **20.** Burial. **A.** Hope **B.** Faith **C.** Charity **D.** Humility **E.** Fortitude **F.** Temperance **G.** Justice **H.** Prudence

The molded reliefs seen in the door were added over a 100 years later by Lorenzo Ghiberti (who would go on to craft the other two sets of doors). A group of bronze statues standing above the gate (not pictured) depicts *The Beheading of St. John the Baptist*, the masterwork of Vincenzo Danti from 1571. And check out the inscription above the door – “Andreas Ugolini Nini de Pisis me fecit A.D. MCCCXXX” – should you have any doubt about the craftsman. It reads: Andrea Pisano made me in 1330.



### The Northern Gate:

In 1401, a competition amongst craftsmen to design the Baptistery's North Doors was announced. Seven sculptors competed, including Lorenzo Ghiberti, Filippo Brunelleschi, Donatello and Jacopo della Quercia. Twenty-one year old Lorenzo Ghiberti won the commission and it took him twenty-one years for him to complete the project. These gilded bronze doors consist of twenty-eight panels in similar Gothic style to those found on the south door; the top twenty depict the life of Christ from the New Testament whilst the lower eight show the four evangelists and other founding fathers of the church.



17	18	19	20
13	14	15	16
9	10	11	12
5	6	7	8
1	2	3	4
A	B	C	D
E	F	G	H

**1.** Annunciation. **2.** Nativity. **3.** Adoration of the magi. **4.** Dispute with the doctors. **5.** Baptism of Christ. **6.** Temptation of Christ **7.** Chasing the merchants from the temple. **8.** Jesus walking on water and saves Peter. **9.** Transfiguration. **10.** Resurrection of Lazarus. **11.** Entry of Jesus in Jerusalem. **12.** Last Supper. **13.** Agony in the Garden. **14.** Christ captured. **15.** The Flagellation. **16.** Jesus before Pilate. **17.** Ascent to Calvary. **18.** Crucifixion. **19.** Resurrection. **20.** Pentecost. **A.** St. John Evangelist. **B.** St. Matthew **C.** St. Luke **D.** St. Mark **E.** St. Ambrose **F.** St. Jerome **G.** St. Gregory **H.** St. Augustine.

Now the panels are surrounded by a framework of foliage; and gilded busts of prophets and sibyls where the panels intersect. Aren't they great? The bronze statues raised above the door here (not pictured) depict *John the Baptist preaching to a Pharisee and Sadducee*, sculpted by Francesco Rustici.

Although the south and north doors are remarkable pieces of work, the real draw is the highly polished panels of the Baptistery's Eastern gate, the very ones I knew I had to see before I left – they're a page straight out of my Humanities book!

### The Eastern Gate:

When Michelangelo cast his gaze upon the eastern doors of the Baptistry, he fell so enamored with them he proclaimed they were fit to grace the entrance to paradise. They became known forthwith as the *Porte del Paradiso*, or the “Gates of Paradise”, a name they are still invariably referred to by to this day. Modeled and cast by Ghiberti between 1425 and 1450, the ten highly-polished bronze panels depict stories (rather than scenes) from the Old Testament in stunning detail and craftsmanship. They are:



1	2
3	4
5	6
7	8
9	10

1. Adam and Eve. 2. Cain and Abel. 3. Noah 4. Abraham 5. Isaac with his sons: Esau and Jacob. 6. Joseph 7. Moses 8. Joshua 9. David and Goliath. 10. King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.

Notice these panels differ greatly from those on the other doors; they're much larger, and no longer framed in quatrefoil, a traditional Gothic technique. The figures are distributed in very low perspective space (a technique invented by Donatello called *rilievo schiacciato*, which literally means “flattened relief”), which gives the works their signature and celebratory principles. An effect most distinguished in Panel 5 – “Isaac with his sons: Esau and Jacob”.

Surrounding the panels is a richly detailed gilt framework of foliage and fruit, and contains statuettes of prophets and twenty-four busts. The two central busts are portraits of the artist and of his father, Bartolomeo Ghiberti. I wish I could share with you the sheer artistic beauty present in these doors; unfortunately I find that I lack not only the proper descriptive vocabulary with which to describe these doors but also time with in to share each and every panel with you. They are every bit as amazing as I had been led to believe – and these are just copies! (The originals lie within the Museo de Batteristo, nearby.)



\* \* \*

Sadly we did not have time to step inside the Baptistery, as we were due for late-lunch in Prato, but I do hope Dominico can bring me back here so I may take the time to explore the Duomo inside and out, climb its steps to the top, and see what lay beyond those gates of paradise at the Baptistery.

Lying approximately 25 kilometers north-west of Florence is Prato, the second-largest city in Tuscany, and the home of my Italian cousins. We arrived right on time and the house smelled simply wonderful! Luciana and her husband opened their arms wide to both Cedric and me, feeding us a plethora of meats (such as bologna, salami and ham), cheeses, breads, pasta (spaghetti) and, of course, red wine – the reason my head still hurts!



The wine served this afternoon was a special blend; in fact, it's the family's own label – straight from the vineyards to the bottle – and it is ever potent. So potent that I can hardly recall the events following our meal (or during our meal to be honest...)!

Seriously.

But I'd wager I had a great time!

Now that we're all back together – fed and watered all – we're going to take it easy. Which is just fine with me; I've got an early morning. By 8:00am, my father is going to swing by and take Maya and me to Pisa – I can't wait for that!

In the meantime I'm already hard at work collecting the Italian versions of the Euro. Can you believe there is a unique design for each individual denomination of coin? Each coin is sculpted by a different designer and depicts the common theme of famous Italian works of art from one of Italy's renowned artists. All designs feature the 12 stars of the European Union (representing the first twelve to adopt), the year of the imprint, and the overlapping letters "RI", for *Repubblica Italiana*.

They're fantastic!





For the 1-cent, 2-cent, 5-cent and 10-cent denominations above, the designs feature: The *Castel del Monte*, a 13th century castle in Andria; *Mole Antonelliana*, a tower symbolizing the city of Turin; *The Colosseum* in Rome, its famous Roman amphitheatre; and *The Birth of Venus* by painter Sandro Botticelli (the original portrait is hanging at the Uffizi in Florence). For the 20-cent, 50-cent, €1 and €2 denominations below, the designs feature: The futurist sculpture *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* by Umberto Boccioni, which is currently on display at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City; *The Equestrian Statue of Marcus Aurelius*, which can be seen at the Piazza del Campidoglio in Rome (a copy – the original is on display at the Palazzo Nuovo; *Vitruvian Man*, a famous drawing by Leonardo da Vinci (stored in the Gallerie dell' Accademia in Venice); and a Portrait of Dante Alighieri by painter Raphael (displayed at the Stanza della Segnatura of the Vatican).



I don't have them all yet – I'm lacking the 2-cent, 50-cent, and €2.

Aren't they great?

*Buona Notte!*  
(Good Night!)





### “Torre Pendente di Pisa”

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 3RD

[I]n my left hand I have a feather, [and] in my right hand a hammer. I guess one of the reasons we got here today was because of [a] gentleman named Galileo, a long time ago, who made a rather significant discovery about falling objects in gravity fields. [W]e thought where would be a better place to confirm his findings than on the Moon? And so we thought we'd try it here for you. The feather happens to be appropriately a Falcon feather for our Falcon and I'll drop the two of them here and hopefully, they'll hit the ground at the same time...

– Commander Dave Scott, Apollo 15

They did, proving that Mr. Galileo was indeed correct in his findings.

Although you might be asking yourself what a quote from an astronaut during the 1970's Apollo moon landings has anything to do with being in Pisa, I find it quite apropos. It was here that troubled mathematician and scientist Galileo Galilei unlocked the secrets of pendulum motion, performed said experiment that led to the development of his own theory of objects falling, and ushered in a new way of thinking that transformed Galileo into the “father of modern science” we know him to be today. How did he do it? By dropping weighted objects from the top of the Leaning Tower, of course!

The sun is low in the skies now as Dominico and I return from a wonderful day at Pisa, its Port, lunch in the commune of Lucca, and all points in between. It's a little hard to write consistently and legibly as Dominico's little car bounces along the highway, but since there's about an hour left to go (it's about 2 hours via car between Florence and Pisa), I'll do my best. It's been yet another amazing day! While there are many, many sights to see in Pisa I came for one purpose only: to see, to touch, and to behold the magnificent Leaning Tower of Pisa. So at 8:30 this morning, I arose and met Dominico at the front gates of my hostel and off we went.



\* \* \*

### *Pisa.*

It is said that the origins of Pisa are so ancient they are lost in legend. Many historians believe that the city dates back to ancient Grecian times to later become an Etruscan and subsequently a Roman colony. It was referred to by Caesar as “Colonia Militare” and later by Augustus as “Julia Obsequens” but regardless of its name, the Port of Pisa became infamous under the Romans: here were anchored the very ships which sailed on campaigns against the Ligurians, Gauls and Carthaginians. With the fall of the Roman Empire Pisa became the invaded: first by Goths, then Lombards and later Franks. Under the Carolingians the city eventually returned to its ancient glory and extended its dominion and influence from Corsica to Sardinia and the Liparir and Balearic Islands down to Sicily.

By taking part in the First Crusade (1099) important trading privileges and possessions were granted to Pisa, which stretched as far as Asia Minor. Pisa was truly the master of all the Tuscan shore.

The rise of Pisa aroused the apprehension of nearby Genoa and provoked irk from Florence and Lucca; all three would ultimately declare their antagonism against the port town, starting a series of wars that would continue *ad nauseum* for scores of decades. In 1282, the Pisa navy was destroyed, heightening the fall of the once proud Republic. Eventually Pisa submitted to the control of the Medici of Florence (in 1405), which allowed the territory to once again regain its previous splendor and contribute to the Renaissance in a number of specialized ways: Pisa was home to Leonardo Fibonacci (famed mathematician; creator of the Fibonacci sequence) and before mentioned Galileo Galilei (physicist & astronomer). Finally, in March 1860, Pisa was united with the Kingdom of Italy, retained its proud heritage, and opened its city gates to the world.

There are few places in the world which have an effect comparable to that produced by the miraculous beauty of the architectural masterpieces which stand at the *Piazza del Duomo* in Pisa. As soon as you walk through the plaza’s gates you’re immediately struck by it all, perfectly framed as if you were walking in a living post card. Popping out of the lush green lawns of the square are four magnificent white-marble structures: in the foreground to the left is the Baptistery, and the Cathedral just beyond it with the famous Leaning Tower beside it, and on the extreme left, the ornamented Monumental Cemetery. A beautiful fountain dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> century at the southern end of the square completes this fine complex of buildings.

Yes, there’s no denying that the *Piazza del Duomo* lives up to its alternate name: the *Piazza dei Miracoli* (the “Square of Miracles”), but the star attraction here is, of course, the *torre pendente di Pisa*, or the Leaning Tower...

## The Campanile

Bonanno Pisano began construction on the accompanying bell-tower in about 1173, and although intended to stand vertically, the tower began listing soon after the onset of construction – a poorly laid foundation and unsuitable subsoil with loose substrate caused the first inclination from the vertical, some six inches. He tried to correct the lean from above, but reached the fourth floor without successfully doing so. Construction was therefore halted for almost a century (remember, the Pisans were continually engaged in battles with Genoa, Lucca and Florence), and was not resumed until 1234, when a gentleman by the name of Guglielmo da Innsbruck completed the tower up to the seventh floor. The full structure was realized by Tommaso Pisano more than a hundred years after that through the addition of the bell chamber in 1350 – with the tower still leaning.



The tower currently lists southwest at an angle of 3.99 degrees, or 3.9 meters (12 ft 10in) from vertical. Prior to restoration work performed in the 1990s, the tower leaned as much as 5.5 degrees, and increased that lean about a millimeter a year.

So, hypothetically speaking, had the lean not been corrected (or stopped) future generations may have referred to the tower as the Fallen Tower of Pisa.

Even so the bell-tower is quite impressive in its current state, thrusting 8 stories tall, 55.86 meters (183 feet) from the ground on the lowest side and 56.70 meters (186 feet) on the highest side; stands perfectly cylindrical with a base diameter of 15.5 meters (51 feet) on the outside and 7.37 meter (24.2 feet) on the inside; the width of the walls at the base is 4.09 m (13.42 feet) and at the top 2.48 m (8.14 feet); and weighs in at a hefty 14,700 metric tons.



Pass under the tower's uniquely ornamented doorway, a lunette containing a sculpture depicting the Madonna and Child between St. Peter and St. John, and begin your climb up the tower's cylindrical marble steps. Only 296 steps separate you from the very top; while Dominico waited for me outside ground-level, I climbed every one of them.

Much like at St. Paul's Cathedral in London, at first the climb was easy enough; I counted the steps as I took them, making great time, and marveling at the prospect that I was following in the footsteps of untold numbers of Renaissance men. But that soon changed: the steps here aren't that easy – the staircase is rather narrow and quarters quite cramped – and soon I became tempted to stop my ascent and turn round. I'm glad I didn't though – wonderful views of Pisa awaited me at the top.

The Bells of the Leaning Tower of Pisa		
Name	Date	Weight
L'Assunta	1654	3620 kg
Il Crocifisso	1575	2462 kg
San Ranieri	1721	1448 kg
La Terza	1473	300 kg
La Pasquereccia	1262	1014 kg
Il Vespruccio	1501	1000 kg
Dal Pozzo	1606	652 kg

From this vantage point the entire skyline of Pisa opens up to you. In one swatch you can see the entirety of the Baptistery, the Cathedral and the surrounding greens of the *Piazza dei Miracoli* and in the next catch glimpses of untold numbers of houses, shops, schools and stadiums – like Pisa's football stadium. And in the distance, the surrounding mountains, covered in a thin layer of snow this time of year. Marvelous. Even the policia enjoy the view from the top!

It is, according to legend, from the top here that Galileo set out to prove Aristotle incorrect in his postulates regarding falling objects. Aristotle, an ancient Greek philosopher who lived in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, said that the Earth was the center of the Universe – everything (the moon, the sun, the planets and the stars) revolved around the Earth. And for hundreds of years no one questioned this idea, especially when the Roman Catholic Church decreed Aristotle correct. But someone did question the church's teaching, a Polish astronomer named Nicholas Copernicus. Copernicus said the Sun was the center of the Universe and that everything, including the Earth, revolved around the Sun. Although we know today that the Universe does not revolve around the Sun, our planet and all the objects in our solar system do revolve around the Sun. Copernican's system was in direct conflict with Aristotle's teachings and thus so the church's.



of the swing's intensity – the Law of the Pendulum was born.

Copernicus was denounced; something that he and Galileo would later share.

Forty-one years after Copernicus' death, Galileo, at the age of 20, noticed a lamp swinging overhead while he was in the Cathedral (the very same here on grounds). Curious to find out how long it took the lamp to swing back and forth, he used his pulse to time the swings.

To his amazement he found the period of each swing was exactly the same regardless



Later, as Galileo became involved in debates surrounding Aristotle's "laws" of nature – namely that heavier objects fall faster than lighter objects in direct proportion to their weight – Galileo set out to do something no one else had thought to do: test Aristotle's conclusions by actually conducting an experiment. So, as the legend goes, Galileo drops objects of different masses and sizes from atop the Tower to demonstrate their time of descent was independent of their mass.

And much like the experiment that took place on the moon, the objects did indeed hit the ground at the same point. Although today we'd have to take wind resistance into account and other factors to get a precise reading, Galileo proved that some fundamental "gospel truths" were wrong and had to be rethought. Galileo also went on to do wondrous things for Astronomy – he mapped the phases of Venus and discovered Jupiter and its four largest moons – Io, Europa, Ganymede, and Callisto – for whom the group is named: "The Galilean Satellites". And in the process led the charge away from Aristotelian cosmology (which held that all heavenly bodies should circle the Earth) toward the heliocentric model of the solar system we now know to be true today.



*There's nothing like a little science on vacation, eh Commander Scott?*

It was quite exciting to stand atop the Leaning Tower of Pisa, perhaps in the very same spot he (purportedly) tossed off his objects, yet I had to press on. I reluctantly descended from the top of the tower and made my way over to the Cathedral, which turned out to be quite a surprise.

### **The Cathedral & Baptistery**



When construction began around 1063, the goal of its architects was to ensure the new cathedral reflected the city's power and glory. At that time Pisa was indeed one of the most powerful cities in Italy, and to showcase its power treasures conquered by defeating other rival city-states were either included in the design (such as the Cathedral's the impressive granite Corinthian columns) or were showcased within (such as its gains during the Crusades).

Much of the marble and limestone blocks used in the cathedral's construction were taken from earlier Roman buildings. Partly because the Pisan's didn't have funds to spare during its construction and also to send a message that Christianity was now the dominant religion in the land and the old polytheistic (multi-god) religion that permeated the Roman Empire was gone, powerless. Perhaps to add insult to injury the Cathedral was built on the site of a villa once occupied Hadrian, a Roman Emperor (reign AD 117 to 138 – one of the “Five Good Emperors”) you might recall from our time in London... he built a “little” wall across Britannia?)

In fact you can still see some of the old Roman inscriptions (often upside-down) in the walls of the cathedral.

For a brief idea of its dimensions, the Cathedral is about one hundred meters long and fifty-four meters high and covered in white and light-grey marble, the Duomo has been described as “a temple of snow-white marble”. Its remarkable façade is a marvel of Romanesque architecture – attributed to Mastro Rainaldo who designed it in about 1200 AD; it is approximately 35 meters wide and 34 meters high. The façade is articulated in five orders of arches, the inferior of which has seven blind arches (arches filled with solid construction so they may not serve as a passageway or window); above are four orders of galleries corresponding to the external lines of the church. The two lateral gates, and one central gate, are separated by columns and pilasters – fifty-two of them to be exact – with capitals in various styles and are ornamented with busts of both animals and people (you'll find a pig and I believe what was supposed to be a bovine amidst imprints of other animals and intricate geometric patterns).

#### **Avete saputo?**

Did you know that Romanesque architecture is a style that combines features of Western Roman and Byzantine structures? Romanesque architecture is known for its massive quality, its thick walls, round arches, sturdy piers, groin vaults, large towers and decorative arcading. Each building has clearly defined forms and is frequently of very regular, symmetrical plans so that the overall appearance is one of simplicity, hiding the opulence of its construction.

The original bronze doors of the Cathedral were made by Bonanno Pisano, but they were remade at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century after a fire struck in 1596. Interesting in its own right – the central door has sculpted scenes from the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the two side doors have scenes from the life of Christ. Of the original bronze doors to the Cathedral, the only one that remains is referred to as the “Door of San Ranieri”, dating from 1180. It has twenty-two panels also depicting scenes from the life of Christ. The doors also give rise to one of the cathedral's alternate names: “Cathedral of Saint Ranieri”, although it could also be because the cathedral houses his bones.

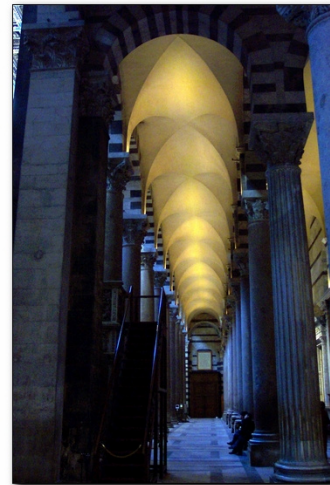
Although some of the cathedral's original art work was destroyed in the fire, one of the elements that did survive is the beautiful mosaic fresco above the main altar, the work of Cimabue and his students. The dome painted by Riminaldi with a scene depicting the ascension of the Virgin is also quite impressive. Giovanni Pisano's richly carved pulpit is another one of the cathedral's must-see features.



The interior of the cathedral is faced with black and white marble and follows a rather complex plan: it has five naves, plus a transept with three naves, and a large apse. Above the point where its four arms meet is the ellipse-shaped cupola (frescoed), standing on a high tambour. The ceiling here is a gilded coffer design carrying the coat of arms of the Medici and the impressive granite Corinthian columns, all sixty-eight of them, which draw your eye fantastically toward the apse, came originally from the mosque of Palermo, which the Pisans captured in 1063 (what a coincidence; about the time they began construction on their cathedral). At the end of the central nave is the elaborately carved pulpit with its octagonal base by Giovanni Pisano, dating from 1311.

Pisano built and carved this massive (17-foot-high) pulpit late in his life but at the height of his reputation. A superb artist but a quarrelsome man, Pisano recorded his frustrations in the lengthy inscription around the pulpit's base. In this message to posterity, he claimed that he had achieved much, had been condemned by many, and took full responsibility for this work of art.

The pulpit is supported by rather plain columns, two mounted on the head of lions and the other two on caryatids (a sculpted female figure) and a telamon respectively: the latter represent St. Michael, the Evangelists, the four cardinal virtues flanking the Church, and a bold, naturalistic depiction of a naked Heracles. A central plinth, with the liberal arts, supports the theological virtues. The upper part has nine bas-relief panels dramatically showing scenes from the New Testament, carved in white marble with a chiaroscuro effect and separated by figures of prophets: the Annunciation of the life of St. John the Baptist; the birth of Jesus; Epiphany; the Presentation at the Temple; the Slaughter of the Innocents; Christ's Passion; the Crucifixion; the Elect and the Damned.



Pisano cut very deeply into the marble's surface to give a nearly three-dimensional effect, such as found in the Nativity scene. His many figures all seem involved in their own tasks but are nevertheless linked with one another around the Madonna and Child. For example, the two shepherds (the head of one has been lost) in the upper right-hand corner appear to be listening to the angels approaching from the left, while in the lower right-hand corner, sheep rest and graze. Such balanced placements are evidence of Pisano's classicizing tendencies. Despite such classicizing, Pisano's relief panel retains a prominent Gothic feature by presenting the Virgin and Child twice, once in the central scene and again in the lower left-hand corner, where a seated Mary, balancing the baby Jesus on her right leg, stretches her left hand to test the temperature of the water in an elaborate basin.



Hanging nearby is “Galileo’s Lamp”, the bronze chandelier legend has that inspired Galileo to think about and come to understand the laws governing the movements of pendulums all by observing the oscillations of this chandelier. In the Presbytery, worth nothing is a painting of “Madonna and Child” (by Sogliani) and one of St. Agnes (by Andrea del Sarto) above that. On either side of the entrance are two sculpted bronze angels by Giambologna, and the Crucifix on the main altar. The four saints on the sides of the pulpits (St. Margaret, St. Catherine, St. Peter and St. John the Baptist) are also by del Sarto and they stand in perfect harmony with the angelic figures painted by Ghirlandaio. Also on the apse’s walls you’ll find an outstanding “Deposition” by Sodoma (also known as Giovanni Antonio Bazzi).



But it’s the large mosaic in the vault that’s quite taking.



This mosaic, depicting the Redeemer, done in the first quarter of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, features rich drapery and chiaroscuro effects (chiaroscuro is characterized by strong contrasts between light and dark). The figure of St. John the Evangelist that accompanies him also stands out because of the considerable use of color in the clothing, with strong similar effects in the folds.

Other notable objects that may be found in the cathedral are: relics brought back during the Crusades, such as: the remains of three Saints (Abibo, Gamaliel and Nicodemus) and a vase that is said to be one of the jars of Cana – used in the “Water to Wine” story (and wonderfully brought to life in picture as the *Wedding of Cana*, hanging in the Louvre). You’ll also find the tomb of Holy Roman Emperor Henry VII (he’s the famous *alto Arrigo* in Dante’s *Paradiso* and the one Dante

alludes to in *Purgatorio*), and prior to the fire of 1595, Pope Gregory VIII’s tomb (alas his was destroyed in the fire).

After exploring every nook and cranny of the highly impressive Cathedral, it was time to wander over to the Baptistery, built in dedication to St. John (or in Italian, San Giovanni). Construction started on the Baptistery in 1152 as a replacement for an older baptistery on site, and took over 200 years to complete. It's the second structure to be completed in the complex and is the largest of its kind in all of Italy – by the numbers the Baptistery is almost 55 meters high with a circumference of about 107 meters.



And with it taking over 200 years to complete, it's an interesting example of transition between Romanesque to Gothic architectural style: the arches in the lower register are rounded where as the upper registers are pointed (denoting the Gothic style).

The portal, facing the facade of the cathedral, is flanked by two classical columns while you'll find the inner jambs are executed in Byzantine style. The lintel, or beam, is divided in two tiers. The lower one depicts several episodes in the life of St. John the Baptist, while the upper one shows Christ between the Madonna and St John, flanked by angels and evangelists. The immensity of the interior is overwhelming, but I found it to be surprisingly bland and lacking decoration. Though you will find a pulpit, sculpted between 1255 and 1260 by Nicole Pisano (father of Giovanni, the artist who produced the pulpit in the Duomo), worthy of note for its classical scenes and depiction of Heracles.

Before departing Pisa for lunch in Lucca, we had one extra stop: the Santa Maria della Spina – the small white marble church hugging the curves of the Arno as it winds its way through the city. The church, erected in 1230, was originally known as Santa Maria di Pontenovo; its “new” name derives from the presence of a thorn allegedly part of the crown dressed by Christ on the Cross, brought to Pisa in 1333 (*Spina* means “thorn”). Its Gothic edifice and richly decorated façade make this church a stand out amongst the natural browns of the homes, offices and shops surrounding it, and a nice closure to a wonderful day in Pisa.



\* \* \*



As for Lucca, while I won't bore you with the nice lunch we had (I'm becoming used to all the wine – we had plenty and it didn't seem to faze me!), permit me to say that walking its calm, historic streets was just what the battered nerves and tired feet needed after the hectic mêlée of tourism that, unfortunately, surrounded Pisa. It's like sauntering through the ages – Lucca is a historical gem.

Much of the road framework is still the same as it was during Roman times and if you look hard enough you'll find other evidence of the Empire here. Over at the Piazza San Michelle, the church – fantastically ornamented with a series of sculptures, arches and columns in exquisite Italian marble – inhabits a site formerly occupied by a Roman forum. Perhaps the very same forum which, in 56 BC, a conference to reaffirm the superiority of the Roman First Triumvirate between Gaius Julius Caesar, Marcus Licinius Crassus and Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus was held. And if you're looking for something more recent, look no further than the standing walls – yep, they're the original Renaissance era walls still proudly defending the city today.



Unfortunately we didn't get to spend too much time in the commune; it and the Pisan coast were fantastic sights. I wish I could say more but I'm losing the light; it's okay though, I'm quite satisfied with how today turned out and can't wait for Rome tomorrow!

*There's been a change of plan – rather than head home now we're off to Prato for a stroll around the Panorama shopping mall, apparently one of the few in the area. I'm not sure what to expect now but away we go!*





## “Roma: The Eternal City”

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 4<sup>th</sup> – PART I

*Clickity-clack... clickity-clack... clickity-clack...*

Greetings, fellow travelers.

You’ve found me this morning aboard an Italia Eurostar train – service #9477 – rapidly leaving Firenze SMN and plunging through the lush green Tuscan countryside on its way to its intended destination. Where might that be so early in the morning? Roma Termini.

ROME!

Legend says Rome wasn’t built in a day, but today is all the time I can spare to visit this incredible city – who could pass that up? Ahem, well, I do know two people who can but needless to say I cannot. To be on my way to Rome now is a dream come true; I can’t wait to hit the city streets and see the Coliseum, the Vatican, the Roman Forum and whatever else in ruin from the Roman Empire I can feast my eyes upon.

Although I can now sit back and relax for the next hour and a half – can you believe it? Way cool! – getting to this seat was a minor monumental undertaking.

In order to keep sane (this *is* quite an undertaking for me) I concocted a plan for the entire journey and laid it out in small phases, which I mulled over and over *ad nauseum* in my sleep, they are: Phase One, get out of bed and out of the room; Phase Two, find a bus and procure a ticket to take me to the train station; Phase Three, hop a train to and from Rome; and Phase Four, navigate the metro to discover my first stop – the Colosseum. Everything else I would let fall where they would; however, it was very important these four phases were completed in order. If not, and I ran into any problems along the way, I certainly wouldn’t have the language skills to overcome the issue.

So far, so good!

Phase One was completed by just getting out of my bed (aargh, damnable watch alarm), showered (cold) and dressed (where are my clothes again?). This proved to be a minor miracle in and of itself; although Dominico and I returned from Pisa and the Panorama Mall in Prato early enough (which was interesting by the way, but your typical two-story shopping mall), I didn’t get to bed as early as I had wanted – my travel mates were still out.

Their decision to join me in Rome still loomed and I just had to know before I nodded off. Would they join me? No, of course not. I really didn't want to go it alone, so when the alarm went off at 7:30am the decision still loomed. That coupled with the fact that I tossed and turned most of the night anyway, I didn't get a whole lot of sleep. Within a minute or two of running through the phases I decided to get up and get on with it.

And it was the best decision I've made thus far!

Phase Two was completed by a quick couple of questions to one of the nice folks who keep the Firenze Hostel. She was very helpful in pointing out where I could catch the nearest bus to the train station (Firenze SMN). This was also important because the only bus route I knew was #12 which brought us to the hostel from the station. Knowing it ran in a circle I could, in a pinch, take the same route back in but I wanted the quickest route. She told me to use bus #13 instead and the stop was just down the road across the tree-lined piazza on Via Pisana (where the supermarket was). The next thing I needed was the ticket for the bus ride and she provided the answer to that as well – a bar on that corner sold them (yep, they had an orange ATAF sticker on the window!). And thus without too much of a problem I was on a bus to the train station and it was just after 8:00am.

It didn't matter that the shop keep on the corner didn't speak English!

Phase Three was completed within a few minutes of my arrival at the main terminal. Since everything was pretty much in Italian it was hard to figure out at first where to pick up the tickets for the high-speed train. At first I tried the queue we found ourselves in upon arrival. This was the very same queue, if I failed to mention previously, Cedric found us in to get information on the city busses when clearly a sign nearby read "train information only", but that's opening up old arguments. Unfortunately all they could give me there were InterCity (IC) trains and that wasn't what I wanted – had I chosen one of the IC routes it would have taken hours because the IC trains stop at various points along the way. No, I wanted to get there quicker. Since they couldn't help me at the train information desk I went to another ticket window and discovered another Italian gentleman who could barely speak English. But, bless him, after all his working with me I eventually got tickets to and from Roma on the Eurostar Italia train, which would depart Firenze SMN at 9:04am and arrive at Roma Termini at 10:40am.

All this for 8-Euro's one way, isn't that great?



On the way I've brushed up on my Roman history, which actually begins with the Etruscans.

Of all the early inhabitants of Italy, the most significant were the Etruscans. It is thought they arrived on the coast of Umbria around 800 BC, several centuries before Rome was built. Within two centuries of their arrival they had subjugated the Tuscany, Campania and Villanova tribes who lived there. The few nervous Latin tribes that remained outside their sway were gravitating to Rome, then little more than a village of shepherders.

The Latins remained free of the Etruscans until about 600 BC. The Etruscans ruled until the Roman revolt around 510 BC, and by 250 BC the Romans and their Campania allies had all but vanquished the Etruscans, wiping out their language and religion. After the Roman republic was established in 510 BC, the Romans continued to increase their power by conquering neighboring communities in the highlands and forming alliances with other Latins in the lowlands. But no figure was more powerful during this time than Julius Caesar, the charismatic conqueror of Gaul. After defeating the last resistance of the Pompeians in 45 BC, he came to Rome and proclaimed himself dictator and consul for life. Conspirators, led by Marcus Junius Brutus, stabbed him to death in the Senate a year later on March 15, 44 BC, which only instigated a grab for power.

Marc Antony assumed control intent on expanding the republic. Anthony met with Cleopatra at Tarsus in 41 BC and stayed in Egypt for a year, completely seduced. When Antony eventually returned to Rome, still smitten with Cleopatra, he made peace with Caesar's willful successor, Octavius, and, through the pacts of Brundisium, found himself married to Octavius's sister, Octavia. This marriage, however, didn't prevent him from marrying Cleopatra. Furious, Octavius gathered the western legions and defeated Antony at the Battle of Actium on September 2, 31 BC. The pair fled back to Egypt where they committed suicide in disgrace.

Born Gaius Octavius in 63 BC, Augustus, the first Roman emperor, reigned from 27 BC to 14 AD. His reign, called "the golden age of Rome," led to the *Pax Romana*, two centuries of peace. Rome became a mighty empire whose generals had brought the Western world under the sway of Roman law and civilization – all political, commercial, and cultural pathways led straight to Rome. But while the emperors, whose succession started with Augustus, brought Rome to new, almost giddy, heights – for every good emperor (Augustus, Claudius, Trajan, Vespasian, and Hadrian, to name a few) there were three or four debased heads of state (Caligula, Nero, Domitian, Caracalla, and others) that brought the empire crashing to its knees. The 4th-century reforms of Diocletian held the empire together, but at the expense of its unity. Diocletian reinforced imperial power while paradoxically weakening Roman dominance and prestige by dividing the empire into east and west halves.

With the eastern and western sections of the Roman Empire split by 395 AD, Italy was left without the support it once received. The Goths moved in. Citizens in the provinces, who had grown to hate and fear the cruel bureaucracy set up by Diocletian welcomed the invaders. And then the pillage began.

Rome was first sacked by Alaric, king of the Visigoths, in 410 AD. More than 40 troubled years passed before Attila the Hun invaded Italy to besiege Rome. Attila was dissuaded from attacking, yet relief was short-lived: In 455, Gaiseric the Vandal carried out a two-week sack that was unparalleled in its pure savagery. The empire of the West lasted for only another 20 years; finally, in 476, the sacks and chaos ended the once-mighty city, and Rome was left to the popes.



The last would-be Caesars to walk the streets of Rome were both barbarians: The first was Theodoric, who established an Ostrogoth kingdom at Ravenna from 493 to 526; the second was Totilla, who held the last chariot races in the Circus Maximus in 549.

Rome during the Middle Ages was a quaint rural town. Narrow lanes with overhanging buildings filled many areas that had once been showcases of imperial power.

The forums, mercantile exchanges, temples, and theaters slowly disintegrated and collapsed. The decay of ancient Rome was assisted by periodic earthquakes, centuries of neglect, and, in particular, the growing need for building materials. Its once-proud population, scattered and unrecognizable in rustic exile, started life again in the swamps of the Campus Martius, while the seven hills, now without water because the aqueducts had been cut, stood abandoned and crumbling.

And although the history of Rome does not stop at the collapse of the mighty Roman Empire, I'm not interested in medieval times or Rome during the Renaissance; I've come to see empirical Rome!

So, we'll see how the fourth phase goes once I arrive but considering how well things have gone thus far I can't imagine any issues. Rome only has two metro lines – Line A (running east-west, marked in Orange) and Line B (running north-south, marked in Blue) – so it should be easy enough to traverse. Just find the icon (above); I have no worries.

*So come with me as I make my way across Rome, won't you?*

\* \* \*

### **Amphitheatrum Flavium (Coliseum)**



*I'm overwhelmed. I'm simply overwhelmed.*

The Coliseum is to Rome as the Eiffel Tower is to Paris and the Tower Bridge and Houses of Parliament/Big Ben are to London – defining monuments that have captured the imagination of the world. But neither Paris nor London can hold a candle to the colossal ruins of Rome in all their antiquity.

Everywhere you look there lays the ruins of the once mighty and massive Roman Empire. And perhaps the Coliseum is the most majestic of those ruins. Today, the Coliseum is in an advanced state of disrepair but you can still catch glimpses of some of its past grandeur whilst walking about outside. Part of the upper rim is clearly still intact and many of its treasures can still be appreciated even if only through the mind's eye.

I can't quite convey to you how long I've wished, after seeing the monument in documentaries on the Roman Empire, studying the structure in Humanities classes, or finding it in all its CGI glory in motion pictures, for a chance to just glimpse the Coliseum with my own eyes. And now I find myself inside the Coliseum, leaning up against one of its stone walls, taking it all in. Amazing isn't it?

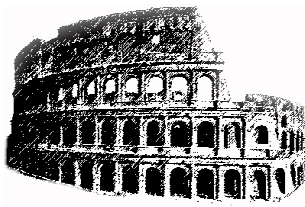


I'm not quite sure where to begin...

Obviously phase four was completed without incident or delay.

Thankfully that last hurdle was easily overcome by finding the metro station within the confines of the terminal; tickets procured through an electronic kiosk granted me passage. I hopped Line B and made my way past two stations before stepping off at "Coloseo", for the Coliseum.

### A History



Construction of the Colosseum began under the rule of Vespasian around 70 AD and completed in 80 AD under Titus, his son. Most are aware of the arena's history and purpose: a long, rather bloody affair used for various public spectacles (called *munera*) – gladiatorial contests, mock sea battles (referred to as *naumachiae*), exotic animal hunts (*venatio*), executions, re-creations of nature (*sylvae*) and re-enactments of famous campaigns – so I don't think I need to tread there (who hasn't heard of Spartacus or seen Russell Crowe's movie?); however, I'd wager that not many know that the Colosseum was built, more or less, as a political maneuver. The ultimate purpose: to appease the Roman public (and thereby winning favor) by giving something rather large and monumental back to their service that which had been "wrongfully" taken away. Let me explain...

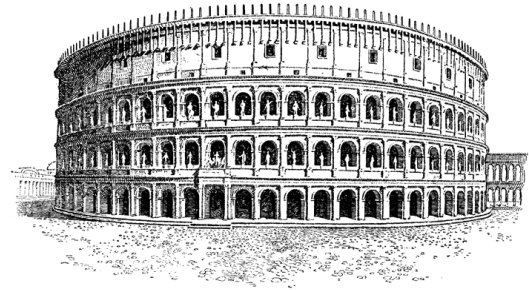
Much of what we see today rose from the ashes of Nero's debauched personal and highly-controversial estate known as the *Domus Aurea*. Lands for which were seized from the Roman citizens following the "Great Fire of Rome" in 64 AD and re-purposed for the emperor's own personal use, replete with an artificial lake, dense gardens and statuary. His golden palace became so hated by the populace – Nero isn't known as the emperor who "fiddled while Rome burned" for nothing – that by 68 AD Rome had had enough – he was forced to commit suicide. Following Nero's death, and the end of the Julian-Claudian dynasty, the empire was thrown into a tumultuous period known as "The Year of the Four Emperors", in which four emperors ruled in a remarkable (and quick) succession.

By 69 AD, Vespasian arose victorious against many rivals in the first civil war the Romans had seen in almost 100 years (the prior was the decisive “Battle of Actium” in 31 BC by which Octavian rose to power and empire that became wholly Roman was born). Vespasian brought stability to the empire wrought by division by lowering taxes and supporting cultural reforms. It also didn’t hurt that he curried favor with everyday citizens by ordering the destruction of Nero’s estate and replacing Rome’s entertainment arena (which was never rebuilt following the Great Fire, thanks to Nero’s indulgence) with a colossal stadium.

### The Exterior

The oval shaped building measures 189 meters (615 feet / 640 Roman feet) long and 156 meters (510 feet / 528 Roman feet) wide, with a base area of 6 acres (24,000 m<sup>2</sup>). The height of the outer wall is 48 meters (157 feet / 165 Roman feet) and the perimeter measures 545 meters (1,788 feet / 1,835 Roman feet).

To be called a colossus would not be an understatement.



#### **Avete saputo?**

The famous epigram “as long as the Colossus stands, so shall Rome; when the Colossus falls, Rome shall fall; when Rome falls, so falls the world” does not refer to the Colosseum as generally believed, but to Nero’s statue. It is often misappropriated to the huge arena (and misquoted). Consequently the statue did eventually fall but that did not mark the fall of Rome.

In fact, the Colosseum earned its name from the term “colossus” but not because the amphitheater itself was large; it derived its name from the colossal statue that Nero had of himself to mark the entrance to his estate. The statue survived – recast as Helios (or Apollo) – and eventually the term evolved to refer to the amphitheater itself, rather than the statue. Originally the Colosseum was known to the citizens as the *Amphitheatrum Caesareum*, then as *Amphitheatrum Flavium*.

Capable of seating 50,000 to 80,000 spectators (sources vary wildly), the Colosseum was used as a venue for entertainment from the moment it was inaugurated through to the early Middle Ages, whereby it became housing, workshops, quarters for religious orders, a fortress, a quarry, and much later, a Christian shrine.

The Colosseum is an entirely free-standing structure, deriving its basic exterior configuration and interior architecture from that of two Roman theatres placed back-to-back. Although it has suffered extensive damage over the centuries, with large segments having collapsed following earthquakes, the outer wall is estimated to have required over 100,000 cubic meters (131,000 cu yards) of travertine stone, which were once held together by iron and bronze clamps (now long since pillaged for their metal). The north side of the perimeter wall is still standing, though the remainder of the present-day exterior is in fact the original interior wall.





The surviving part of the outer wall's façade comprises three stories of superimposed arcades surmounted by a podium on which stands a tall attic, both of which are pierced by windows interspersed at regular intervals. The arcades are framed by half-columns of the Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian orders, while the attic is decorated with Corinthian pilasters. Each of the arches in the second- and third-floor arcades framed statues at one time, probably

honoring divinities and other mythological figures. And, if you look closely, you'll see the remnants of mast corbels positioned around the top of the attic. In its heyday, two hundred and forty of these originally supported a retractable awning, known as the *velarium*, which kept the sun and rain off spectators. This consisted of a canvas-covered, net-like structure made of ropes, covering two-thirds of the arena and sloped down towards the center to catch the wind providing a breeze for the audience.

It's too bad the Velarium no longer exists – with the light rains here this morning we could sure use some cover.

Spectators entered the Coliseum through one of eighty entrances at ground level – 76 of which were used by ordinary spectators. Each entrance and exit was numbered, as was each staircase. The northern main entrance was reserved for the Roman Emperor and his aides, the western portal (*porta triumphalis*) served as the entrance for gladiators and musicians, the southern entrance was reserved for elites (priests, senators, vestal virgins and magistrates), and the eastern portal (the *porta libitinaria*) served as the exit for the gladiators (either alive or dead). All four axial entrances were richly decorated with painted stucco reliefs, of which fragments survive. Many of the original outer entrances have disappeared with the collapse of the perimeter wall, but entrances XXIII (23) to LIV (54) still survive. One of which I used to walk into the Colosseum this morning!

### The Interior

On the inside it's a whole new world. Although mostly stripped of its stone and covered with vegetation, it's not hard to imagine the bloody spectacles that must have played here. In fact, just about where I'm standing the emperors of Rome once urged on the games through all their bloody conquests, overlooking the spectacular arena with wild-eyed abandon. And behind them the crowd cheered. Can you hear them?



The central arena, where all the action took place, is an oval 87 meters (287 feet) long and 55 meters (180 feet) wide, surrounded by a wall 5 meters (15 feet) high just below me. Above that rise the various tiers of seating, arranged by class. Special boxes were provided at the north and south ends for the Emperor and the Vestal Virgins. Flanking them at the same level is the senatorial class' podium.

Above the senators is an area known as the *maenianum primum*, occupied by the non-senatorial noble class or knights (*equites*). The next level up, the *maenianum secundum*, was reserved for ordinary Roman citizens (*plebians*) and was divided into two sections: the lower part (the *imum*) for wealthy citizens, while the upper part (the *summum*) for poor citizens. Another level, the *maenianum secundum in legneis*, was added at the very top of the building and comprised a standing-room only gallery for the common poor, slaves and women. Thank Domitian for that.

One found their assigned seat through the *maeniana*, *cunei*, *gradus*, and number – the section, wedge, row and seat respectively.



The stage itself measured 83 meters by 48 meters (272 feet by 157 feet / 280 by 163 Roman feet) and was comprised of a wooden floor covered by about 10 centimeters of fine sand.

Below that an elaborate underground world known as the *hypogeum* existed.

Although little remains of either the floor or the underground, the latter is still plainly visible.

The *hypogeum* consisted of a two-level subterranean network

of tunnels and cages where gladiators and animals alike were held before contests began, where scenery was concealed and stored, and whereby even the elite could come and go without mingling with the commoners. Eighty vertical shafts provided instant access to the arena floor during a performance, accommodating all sorts of beasts and things.



Thanks to centuries of neglect there's not much left to see. That being said, however, you can walk over a re-creation of the stage and peer down into the *hypogeum*, take a gander from one of the Emperor's boxes, and even give thumbs-up, thumbs-down to the action around you if you so choose, just like the emperors are said to have done. Either way, do take a moment to reflect upon where you are. I know I am!

"We who are about to die salute you!"

*I've spotted the Arch of Constantine through one of the scores of windows and it looks magnificent, so I'm going to sit and gaze for a little while longer then make my way over!*

### **The Arches of the Roman Forum**

Between the Colosseum and the Palatine Hill, and upon the foundation of the Meta Sudans (a fountain from which legend suggests Roman gladiators drank from and bathed in before and after the games), proudly stands one of the last triumphal arches to be dedicated in Empirical Roman times, the Arch of Constantine.



Dedicated in 315 AD to commemorate Constantine I's victory over rival Maxentius at the Battle of Milvian Bridge, which in turn gave Constantine complete control over the Empire; at the time it had been ruled by a tetrarch with Maxentius in control of the Western-half of the Empire, the arch stands 21 meters high, is 25.7 meters wide and 7.4 meters deep and spans the Via Triumphalis, the imperial route taken by emperors entering the city upon attaining victory, usually in battle.

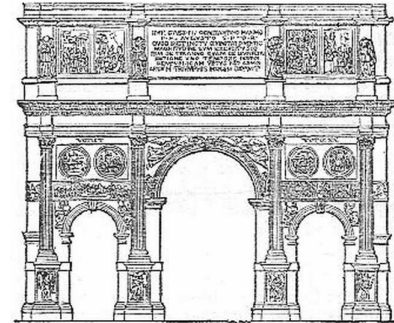
Emperors celebrating the *triumphus* would start the antique route at the Campus Martius (a swath of land annexed into Augustian Rome; it's where you'll find the Pantheon, the Aqua Virgo and the Baths of Agrippa), and led through the Circus Maximus (the infamous chariot racing stadium and entertainment venue) and round the Palatine Hill (the centermost of the seven hills of Rome and nearest to the Roman Forum); immediately after the Arch of Constantine, the procession would then turn left at the Meta Sudans (the before-mentioned fountain, which in its hey-day was estimated to have stood 17-meters high) and continue along the Via Sacra to the Roman Forum and on to the Capitoline Hill, passing both the arches of Titus and Septimus Severus in the process.



I'll be taking that exact route shortly, but for now let's examine the Arch of Constantine in more detail.

### Arch of Constantine

The general design – with the main body structured around detached columns with a brick-work attic riveted with marble – is modeled after the nearby Arch of Septimius Severus and Arch of Titus. It differs from the arches of Septimius Severus and Titus by adding secondary arches, thereby classifying the construct as a tri-arc design. By the numbers, the central archway is 11.5 meters high and 6.5 meters wide whereas the lateral archways are 7.4 meters by 3.4 meters each. Upon them are friezes and reliefs detailing the life, times and campaigns of Constantine I; however, they are not wholly original to his reign. In fact, many of the decorative items here were “re-purposed” from other, older, empirical monuments from the “golden age” of Rome under Emperors Trajan, Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius.



They, and the arch's inscription, do well to help illustrate Constantine's campaign and subsequent triumph; it reads:

IMP · CAES · FL · CONSTANTINO · MAXIMO · P · F · AVGUSTO · S · P ·  
 · Q · R · QVOD · INSTINCTV · DIVINITATIS · MENTIS · MAGNITVDINE ·  
 CVM · EXERCITV · SVO · TAM · DE · TYRANNO · QVAM · DE · OMNI ·  
 EIVS · FACTIONE · VNO · TEMPORE · IVSTIS · REM-PVBLICAM · VLTVS ·  
 EST · ARMIS · ARCVM · TRIVMPHIS · INSIGNEM · DICAVIT

*To the Emperor Caesar Flavius Constantinus, the greatest, pious, and blessed Augustus: because he, inspired by the divine, and by the greatness of his mind, has delivered the state from the tyrant and all of his followers at the same time, with his army and just force of arms, the Senate and People of Rome have dedicated this arch, decorated with triumphs.*

Flanking the inscription on both sides are pairs of relief panels above the minor archways, eight in all, taken from an unknown monument erected in honor of Marcus Aurelius commemorating his war against the Marcomanni and Sarmatians from 169 – 175, which ended with his triumphant return in 176. On the north side, left to right, the panels show: his return to Rome after the campaign (the ceremony of “adventus”), the emperor leaving the city and saluted by a personification of the Via Flaminia, the emperor distributing money amongst the people (referred to as “largito”), and the emperor interrogating a germanic prisoner. On the south side, left to right, they show: a captured enemy chieftain led before the emperor, a similar scene with other prisoners, the emperor speaking to the troops (referred as “adlocutio”), and the emperor sacrificing pig, sheep and bull (referring to the traditional rite of “suovetaurilia”).

On top of each column stand statues of marble depicting Dacian prisoners from the time of Trajan, probably taken from Trajan's Forum. Two large (3m high) panels decorating the attic on the small sides of the arch and two other reliefs inside the central arch also show scenes from the emperor's Dacian Wars.



On the main façade, you'll find the general layout the same on both sides. It is divided into four columns of Corinthian order, which stand on bases of victory figures (in front) and captured barbarians and Roman soldiers (on the sides). The spandrels of the main archway are decorated with reliefs depicting victory figures with trophies, those of the smaller archways show river gods. Above each lateral archway are pairs of reliefs dated to the times of Emperor Hadrian. They display scenes of hunting

and sacrificing: On the north side (left to right), we find: the hunting a boar, a sacrifice to Apollo, hunting lion, and a sacrifice to Heracles; on the south side (left to right), we find: the departure for the hunt, a sacrifice to Silvanus (a Roman deity of woods and fields), a hunt of a bear, and a sacrifice to Diana (the Roman goddess of the hunt, of the moon and of chastity).

The head of the emperor (originally Hadrian) has been reworked in all medallions into either Constantine in the hunting scenes and into Licinius or Constantius I in the sacrifice scenes.

The only pieces from the time of Constantine are the friezes running round the monument under the round medallions, a strip above each lateral archway and a strip upon the small sides of the arch itself. These reliefs depict scenes from the battle the arch is supposed to commemorate: Constantine I's campaign against Maxentius. The frieze starts at the western side with the "Departure from Milan" and continues on to show "The Siege of Verona" and the "Battle of Milvian Bridge". On the eastern side "Returning to Rome", depicting Constantine and his army entering Rome, and on the northern face "Constantine Speaks on the Roman Forum", depicting Constantine speaking to the citizens of Rome and distributing its wealth to the people.

All together the pieces are quite impressive.

Constantine I may have been grabbing for power when he announced himself Augustus in 306 AD (thereby creating the issue with Maxentius in the first place), but his accomplishments during his tenure and the ramifications after his retirement earned him the honorific name we know him by today: "Constantine the Great", and one of the best triumphal arches in the land.

Besides being best known as the first Christian Roman emperor, Constantine proclaimed religious toleration in the Roman Empire through the issuance of the Edict of Milan in 313 AD (which reversed the persecutions of Christians throughout the Empire under Diocletian, his predecessor), he fought successfully against the Franks, Almanni, Visigoths and Sarmatians during his reign, he re-claimed lost lands and provinces long since abandoned, re-united the Empire under one Emperor, and transformed the ancient Greek colony of Byzantium into a “new Rome” he called Constantinople, from which the Eastern Roman Empire would be ruled for the next thousand years. Not a bad 30-year rule if I do say so myself.

### Arch of Titus

Turn right and follow the ramp a few meters down (or is that up?) the Via Sacra and you’ll stumble upon the Arch of Titus, juxtaposition in triumphs. Although stumble isn’t quite the right word for it – the arch is huge and easily spotted!

Dedicated in 85 AD by the Roman Emperor Domitian shortly after the death of his older brother Titus, the arch was constructed to commemorate Titus’ victory in the Siege of Jerusalem (of 70 AD) whereby he besieged and conquered the city, destroying it and its famous temple (the Temple of Herod). The sack, historically speaking, was a result of an upheaval in Judea, then a Roman province, over taxation and occupation, and Rome’s lost patience regarding the city’s siege.



As such the arch is a magnificent specimen.

Constructed of marble from Greece’s Penteliko Mountain (near Athens), the arch stands 15.40 meters high, is 13.50 meters wide, and 4.75 meters deep. The archway itself has impressive dimensions – 8.30 meters high by 5.36 meters wide – with articulated engaged columns and Corinthian capitals. Above the main cornice rises a high, weighty attic 4.40 meters in height, on which is a central tablet bearing the dedication inscription (preserved only on one side), which reads:

SENATVS  
POPVLVSQVE · ROMANVS  
DIVO · TITO · DIVI · VESPASIANI ·  
F(ILIO)  
VESPASIANO · AVGVSTO



*The Senate and People of Rome (dedicate this) to the divine Titus Vespasianus Augustus, son of the divine Vespasian.*



At the inside of the arch are two panels of reliefs considered to be the most important sculptures of the Flavian period; one depicts the spoils taken from the Temple via litters (called “fercula”), such as a seven-branched Menorah, the Silver Trumpets and the Table of the Shewbread; whilst the other depicts Titus as *triumphator*, shown in a chariot accompanied by the goddesses Victoria and Roma (guardian spirits, called “genii”) and his servants (referred to as “lictors”). Other reliefs once existed on the exterior columns, but these were lost during the Middle Ages when the arch was incorporated into medieval defensive walls. The attic too was also handsomely crowned, perhaps with a quadriga (as shown).

The Sack of Jerusalem in 70 AD was a highly-significant event for its time contributing greatly to the great Jewish Diaspora throughout Europe during the era – and we all know where that lead almost two-thousand years later. Consequently the Temple has never been rebuilt and all that remains is the original Western Wall. On the Roman front there is, of course, the Arch of Titus – now the general model for many of the triumphant arches erected since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, including the Arc de Triomphe in Paris.

### Arch of Septimius Severus

Continue down the Via Sacra and you’ll come upon the last of the triumphal arches at the Roman Forum, that of Septimius Severus. Commemorating the victories of the Emperor and his two sons (Caracalla and Geta) in the campaigns against the Parthians (194-195/197-199 AD), the structure is built of white Proconnessian marble from the Sea of Marmara in the traditional triple-arched form. Its scale rivals that of its later neighbor, the Arch of Constantine, and completely surpasses that of nearby Arch of Titus – it stands approximately 21 meters high and 23.27 meters wide. It has three passages flanked on each side by lofty Composite order columns on high plinths. The inscription on the attic dates the construction to 203 AD –



IMP CAES LUCIO SEPTIMIO M FIL SEVERO PIO PERTINACI AUG PATRI PATRIAE PARTHICO ARABICO ET  
PARTHICO ADIABENICO PONTIFIC MAXIMO TRIBUNIC POTEST XI IMP XI COS III PROCOS ET  
IMP CAES M AURELIO L FIL ANTONINO AUG PIO FELICI TRIBUNIC POTEST VI COS PROCOS P P  
OPTIMIS FORTISSIMISQUE PRINCIPIBUS  
OB REM PUBLICAM RESTITUTAM IMPERIUMQUE POPULI ROMANI PROPGATUM  
INSIGNIBUS VIRTUTIBUS EORUM DOMI FORISQUE S P Q R

*To the Emperor Septimius Severus, Son of Marcus, Pius, Pertinax, Pater Patriae, Parthicus Arabicus, Parthicus Adiabenicus, Pontifex Maximus, having held the tribunician power 11 times, acclaimed emperor 11 times, Consul 3 times, Proconsul, and Emperor Marcus Aurelius [Caracalla], Son of Lucius, Antoninus, Augustus Pius, Felix, having held the auspicious tribunician power 6 times, Consul, Proconsul, Pater Patriae, Highest and Strongest Princes for having restored the State and enlarged the Empire of the Roman people, by their visible strengths at home and abroad, the Senate and People of Rome [made this].*

-- and is a rather long, drawn-out dedication as you can see.

But just who was Septimius Severus?



Septimius Severus came to power in 193 AD after a six-month period of confusion known as the “Year of Five Emperors” following the assassination of Commodus (the disturbed son of Marcus Aurelius, the last “good emperor”). Following Commodus’ death on December 31, 192, the throne was taken up by Pertinax, city prefect and an old general of the Praetorian Guard; then by Didius Julianus, another general, after the soldiers

lynched Pertinax following their frustrations in his rule. Three others would throw their hat in the ring to become Emperor: Gaius Pescennius Niger, proclaimed by the armies in Syria; Clodius Albinus, proclaimed by the troops in Britain and Gaul, and Septimius Severus by the legions in Illyricum and Pannonia. Although the other two laid claim to the title of emperor, Septimius was the only one to march on Rome and dispose of Julianus (rather bloodily) and have the Senate recognize him as Emperor. Once that action had been completed, Septimius waged war against his rivals, eventually putting them down and ending this tumultuous period in Roman history.

After assuming full command of the Empire, he attacked the Parthian empire (which just so happened to have supported Gaius Pescennius Niger in his quest to become Emperor), and laid it to waste. The Senate awarded him a triumphal entry into the city and the arch we see today.

The arch’s 4-meter by 5-meter bas-reliefs shows scenes from the wars against the Parthian empire, such as: preparing for war, battling the Parthians, and liberation of Nisibis and Osroene, Roman allies. On the left-hand side of the eastern face you’ll find images from the first Parthian campaign; the right-hand side depicts acts of aggression in Edessa, the capital of Osroene, and Nisibis – on the bottom relief see how the town was

attacked by battling rams, in the center an image depicting the king's surrender, and on the top Septimius Severus announcing the annexations of both into the Empire. On the opposite side, left (facing the Capitoline), reliefs depicting the second Parthian campaign are described. Here is the depiction of the attack on the river-city of Seleucia, followed by the fleeing Parthian soldiers, and later the citizens surrendering to their new Roman overlords. On the right-side, the siege and sack of Ctesiphon, the capital city of Parthia, is shown in three sections: more battling rams (bottom), surrendering of the city (center) and Severus declaring his oldest sons – the before-mentioned Caracalla and Geta – co-emperors (upper).

I wish I could say that Caracalla and Geta got along; they did not. After Septimius' death, Caracalla had Geta killed and his image virtually erased from history. The depiction of him here as also been defaced, but then again most of the reliefs here are damaged in some way. In fact, a good portion of this arch was buried in silt for much of the medieval period, middle ages and beyond. Only recently, upon full excavation of the forum, has the grandness of the arch been fully realized. And thanks to its submersion some of it has been nicely preserved.

So there you have it, the Arches of the Forum.

*The ruins of the Roman Forum itself aren't that spectacular in the rain, so with regret I'm going to press on to the Vatican to see if I can't get a glimpse of the famous painting on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel and get an audience with the Pope (er, well, perhaps the first, not the second), so I'll catch up with you again there!*

{To Be Continued...}



### Firenze, IT

## “Roma: The Eternal City”

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 4<sup>th</sup> – PART 2

*That was a nice little ride on the metro...*

It's raining again. It had let up quite nicely as I made my way back above ground from the Colosseum and Roman Forum; however, now that I'm here at the Vatican, the skies have decided to curse me by opening up once again and reward me with rain.

Though it does echo my mood at the moment – I've missed my one and only chance of seeing the famous frieze atop the Sistine Chapel's ceiling. Can you believe the Vatican museums closed for the day not but a few moments ago?!

Heartbroken, I took to tracing the Vatican's protective wall on foot so I could make my way here, the Piazza San Pietro, or most commonly known as Saint Peter's Square.

### Saint Peter's Square

*You know, it's more the shape of an oval than a square...*



Trapezoid, actually, but who's to know? Constructed on the ancient site of Nero's Circus and on the foundations of the “old St. Peter's” (built by Constantine), is this magnificent plaza – the Piazza di San Pietro – by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, a monument to Baroque design aesthetic. From the moment I walked under the colossal Tuscan colonnades, I was immediately struck by the enormity of this plaza (it is 340 meters/1,115 feet long and 240 meters/787.3 feet wide!)

and all of the Vatican. It is thanks to Peter, the first Apostle and the first pope and leader of the Church that this Basilica was built in Rome.



According to the Bible, Peter was given his name by Jesus because he was destined to be the foundation “stone” (“Pietra” means “stone” in Italian; “Petros” the same in Greek) on which the church would be built. He was later imprisoned by Herod, King of Judea, and then miraculously released (rescued by an angel actually), following which he left Jerusalem and headed for Rome. Here he became bishop and then reigned as the first Pope for 25 years before his crucifixion under Emperor Nero.

A shrine was erected on the site of St. Peter’s tomb at this spot in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and the first great basilica, ordered by Emperor Constantine to honor him, was completed around 349 AD. What we see today is the second basilica – by the 15<sup>th</sup> century the original had deteriorated beyond usefulness. Pope Julius II laid the first stone of a new church in 1506 and took more than a century to finish; all the great architects of the Renaissance had a hand in its design – Bernini, Raphael and Michelangelo most noted amongst others.

Upon setting foot here I was immediately drawn into the immensity of the plaza’s oval shape and the Egyptian obelisk that rises within.

We’ll start with toe obelisk; this red-granite monstrosity, known as “The Witness”, measures 25.5 meters (84 feet) in length but stands 40 meters (130 feet) in total height thanks to elevation granted by the base (of lions made of bronze) and the cross affixed at the top. Originally erected at Heliopolis and raised in the Forum Julium in Alexandria (Africa) on Augustus’s orders around 30-28 BC, it was brought to Rome by Caligula in 37 AD to adorn the median strip (called a “spina”) for his circus near what would become the Vatican enclave. The obelisk was later relocated to the center of St. Peter’s Square by Pope Sixtus V in 1586 AD, where it now firmly rests.

A unique obelisk it is, as it has no hieroglyphs to speak of and remains the only obelisk in Rome to remain standing since its removal from Egypt (i.e. it has never toppled). Consequently it’s also the second largest standing obelisk in the world. The largest is also found in Rome; weighing over 230 tons and commissioned by Pharaoh Tuthmose III (later to be completed by his grandson, Thutmose IV), the obelisk near Lateran Palace and Basilica of San Giovanni was originally erected at the Temple of Amun in Karnak, Egypt. Brought to Alexandria by Constantius II in 357 AD to commemorate his *ventennalia*, or 20 years on the throne, it later made its way to Rome to decorate the spina of the great Circus Maximus.

#### Avete saputo?

Did you know that Roman Emperor Constantine I ordered what is now known as the Lateran obelisk to be removed and taken to his new capital Constantinople? Unfortunately he died before the obelisk ever left Egypt; therefore his son and successor had the obelisk transported to Rome, instead. Consequently, during the Middle Ages it was believed that Julius Caesar’s ashes were those preserved in the bronze globe at the tip. Nothing was ever found, however.

The Vatican obelisk is known by its nickname because it presided over Emperor Nero’s countless games of brutality and fierce persecution and execution of Christians. It is also said it have bore witness to St. Peter’s crucifixion sometime between 64 and 67 AD, which took place at the circus. Today, while the titular focal point of the entire plaza, the obelisk is also a huge gnomon (or shadow caster) for a huge sundial. Circular stones were

set around the obelisk in 1817 to mark the obelisk tip's shadow as it entered each of the signs of the zodiac at noon.

Unfortunately it was too cloudy to see – although the stones were there.

The obelisk is flanked on either side by matching granite fountains; the original by Carlo Maderno and a second by Bernini himself; and a magnificent colonnade, composed of 284 columns and 88 pillars in quadruple row – to complete the masterful illusion. The disks of the fountains indicate the focal points of an ellipse, an illusion you can test by standing to on either side of the two fountains. The four columns merge into one seamless line! Two wings link the colonnades to the basilica – one on the right end at the *Scala Regia*, and one on the left at the *Arco delle Campane* – each some 93 meters (306 feet) long and 20 meters (64 feet) high. Over 140 sculptures top the wings of the colonnade symbolizing the “gathering of Christianity” here to one of the holiest sites in the Catholic world.



Although thoroughly fascinated by the square itself, it wasn't long before I started poking around inside.

With a capacity to seat 60,000 plus worshipers, the total length of the basilica clocks in around 220 meters (730 feet) and stands 150 meters (500 feet) wide, occupying a space some 21,095 m<sup>2</sup> (or 227,070 ft<sup>2</sup>) or more than five acres. If you count to the tip of the cross, the basilica comes in at 138 meters (or 452 feet) high. Wow! The façade, with its giant order of columns, stretches 51 meters (167 feet) high by 114 meters (375 feet) wide, across the end of the square and is approached by a series of steps which stand two 5½ meter (18 feet) statues of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, the first apostles of Rome. Behind the façade stretches a long portico (called a “narthex”) – a long barrel vault decorated with ornate stucco, gilt and marble.

The basilica itself is cruciform in shape, with an elongated nave in the form of the Latin cross. The central space is dominated both externally and internally by one of the largest domes in the world – masterfully created by Michaelangelo himself – spanning 136.5 meters (448 feet). The barrel-vaulted nave, the highest of any church, leads to the dome. It spans 218 meters (715 feet) – that's more than 1/8 of a mile! – and is approximately 27 meters (90 feet) wide and 46 meters (151 feet) high. It's so long that along the marble floor one will find markings showing the lengths of other church naves around the world.

There are a number of chapels, altars and tombs of Popes surrounding the central dome too many to mention individually; however, there are a number of artifacts worth a second glance, these are:

*The Throne of St. Peter in Glory* – you’ll find the throne in the domed apse; look up to the window above to find Bernini’s Baroque sculpture of 1656-1665. It lights the image of the Holy Spirit, shown as a dove amid clouds, rays of sunlight, and flights of angels. *The Monument to Pope Alexander VII* – In an alcove on the left of the transept; this is Bernini’s last work, finished in 1678, and is a magnificent sculpture of the Pope sitting amongst the figures of Truth, Justice, Charity and Prudence. *The Papal altar*, which dates back to the reign of Clement VIII (1592-1605); it is a plain slab of marble found within the Forum of Nerva. It stands under Bernini’s *Baldacchino* – a magnificent canopy of gilded bronze supported on spiral columns 20 meters (66 feet) high – and overlooks the well of the confession, the crypt where St. Peter’s body is reputedly buried. *The Pieta*, Michelangelo’s famous sculpture, stands in a chapel aside the nave. Protected by glass since being damaged in 1972, this sculpture is considered one of Michelangelo’s best works – he finished it in 1499 when he was only 25 years of age! And, of course, the *Porta Santa*, the Holy Door, which is only opened during a Holy Year. The door is ceremoniously knocked upon by the Pope wielding a bronze hammer. Once opened, it remains so for the entire year of the celebration.

*Well, since I’ve decided not to pursue walking the 440 steps to the top of the duomo (my poor feet!), I guess I’ll pick myself up and be on my way. It’s back to the metro now and Spagna, where I hope to find the Spanish Steps.*

### **Piazza di Spagna**

*Even in this weather it sure is busy here at the Scalinata della Trinità dei Monti.*

One of the most majestic, highly-trafficked, and most recognizable plazas in all of Rome is this one – the Piazza di Spagna, home to a set of cascading steps said to be the longest and widest in all of Europe. With its characteristic butterfly plan, this plaza is considered to be the meeting spot of choice for visitors and locals alike and as such you’ll find any number of steps occupied throughout the day and night.

Finding the steps is rather easy. The aptly-named metro station, Spagna, deposits visitors a mere two blocks from the Spanish Steps, at its very top, overlooking the staircase and granting visitors one gorgeous view of the city. The Trinta dei Monti, a Catholic church, dominates the upper echelons of the steps (closest to the metro), whilst at the foot of the stairs, the famous *Fontana della Barcaccia* (Barcaccia Fountain) – the work of Pietro Bernini and his son, Gian Lorenzo – rests.



And as expected, a number of people find themselves walking up and down these “Spanish Steps” this afternoon, just like me! Currently, though I’m resting my weary feet at the bottom near the Barcaccia, having traversed all 138 of the steps (that’s twelve flights!), sitting on the edge of the fountain’s basin – much like everyone else here. The rain, which once again began to pour from the heavens, has let up and so the fountain and its steps have become a refuge from the over-bearing (but equally awe-inspiring) structures at St. Peter’s Square.



As for the fountain, it’s referred to as the “Fountain of the Old Boat” for obvious reasons (its construction has taken the form of a sinking ship), and recalls a historic flood of the Tiber River in 1598, which refers to a folk legend whereby a fishing boat carried away by the river’s waters was found at this exact spot. In reality the sinking boat visage was aptly invented by Bernini to overcome a technical problem – the water pressure from the aquaduct feeding the fountain is

rather low at this point, so cascading spouts were out of the question.

The sun and bee ornamentation found on the fountain is a symbol of the Barberini family and a reference to Pope Urban VIII who commissioned the work. As for the steps, they were constructed in 1723-1725 on the request of Pope Innocent XI as a means to link the Bourbon Spanish Embassy (for which the steps and square are now named) with the Holy See, thereby expanding the Vatican’s reach across Rome (as if they needed to do so).

Although quite an imaginative way to ornament the square (especially if you just had to have a fountain), it pales in comparison to the Trevi Fountain, an image of which I saw moments ago at the Vatican gift shop. According to my map Trevi appears nearby so I think once I gather up my wits I’m going in search of it! How can I pass it up when I’m so close by?

*Okay, let’s march on!*

### **Fontana di Trevi**

*Three coins in the fountain / Each one seeking happiness / Thrown by three  
hopeful lovers / Which one will the fountain bless?  
Three coins in the fountain / Through the ripples how they shine / Just one wish  
will be granted / One heart will wear a valentine.*

Make it mine, make it mine, make it mine!



Greetings travelers; without too much effort I've found myself sitting here on the marble-edged basin of the *Fontana di Trevi*, or Trevi Fountain – One of the most spectacular fountains I have ever laid eyes upon. How I've come to discover the fountain is quite interesting, but needless to say, after spying the fountain's splendid façade on a postcard at St. Peter's Square, I knew I had to seek the fountain out in person – so I'm quite overjoyed to have stumbled upon it. It is every bit as impressive as it was eluded to be. And it's massive, at 25.9 meters (85 feet) high and 19.8 meters (65 feet) wide, Trevi is the largest Baroque-style fountain in the city.



Tucked behind a series of non-descript avenues (and just two blocks from Piazza di Spagna), the fountain stands at the junction of three roads (*tre vie*) which have converged here since antiquity, marking the terminal point of the “modern” *Acqua Vergine*, the revived *Aqua Virgo*, one of the ancient aqueducts that supplied water to ancient Rome. The *Aqua Virgo*, commissioned by Emperor Augustus in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, led water into the infamous Baths

of Agrippa (Agrippa you may or may not know was instrumental in the development of the Roman Empire, having served Octavian/Augustus through many campaigns and put down the insurrection by Mark Anthony and Cleopatra in the naval *Battle of Actium*) and served Rome for more than four hundred years before the city was besieged by Goths. The *Aqua Virgo* fell into disrepair after the fall of the Roman Empire and was not seen in service until a millennia later, when Pope Nicholas V consecrated a new *Aqua Virgo* in 1453 and revived an ancient Roman custom of building handsome fountains at the endpoints of its aqueducts.

Thus Trevi Fountain was born, although (naturally) not in its current form.

Nicholas V had a simple basin built at the terminus of the *Acqua Verigne*, which went unchanged for many, many years, but subsequent Popes (such as Urban VIII in 1629) found that earlier fountain to be “insufficiently dramatic” and became obsessed with making it grandiose; therefore, artisan sketches on possible renovations were asked for. Bernini, quite the prolific builder of fountains in Rome, chose the Piazza Trevi as the stage for his Baroque masterpiece, but the death of the Pope saw his plans quietly forgotten. It would take another Pope some one-hundred years later to get the job done – Pope Clement XII. In the mid-18th century, Nicola Salvi won a papal competition to adapt Bernini's original design and complete the project, but not without controversy of course (seems the original awardee was a Florentine; Roman outcry had Clement award Salvi, a Roman, instead).



Work began in 1732 but neither Clement XII nor Nicola Salvi would live to see its completion. Giuseppe Panini would see the fountain through to completion in 1762 (with still yet more modifications), with the magnificent statue of Neptune/Oceanus placed in the center.



The backdrop for the fountain is the Palazzo Poli, given a new facade with a giant order of Corinthian pilasters, arches and inlays that help not only to bridge the two main themes of the enormous sculpture, but to frame it as well. In fact the entire façade seems to have been inspired by Roman triumphal arches, such as the Arch of Constantine and Arch of Titus I passed earlier today near the Coliseum and the ruins of the Roman Forum.

*Taming of the Waters* is the theme of the gigantic scheme that tumbles forward, mixing water and rockwork, and spilling into the fountain's basin. Tritons guide Oceanus' (Neptune; god of the sea) aquatic chariot, taming hippocampi (a.k.a. sea horses). Notice that of the two horses one of them is wild (as if angry) while the other is calm and tame. Together they represent allegorical aspects, or moods, of the sea – one raging the other tranquil. In the center is superimposed a robustly-modeled triumphal arch who's niche, or exedra, frames Oceanus perfectly, thrusting our gaze invariably toward him. In the niches flanking Oceanus, a piece representing *Abundance* (health), spills water from her urn and another for *Salubrity* (well-being), holds a cup from which a snake drinks.

They were to be statues of Agrippa and the virgin Trevia before Panini's modification.

Above the fountain, bas reliefs illustrate the Roman origin of the aqueducts, especially the *Aqua Virgo*. It reads, according to legend, that a young virgin girl named "Trivia" showed Roman soldiers where they might parch their thirst one hot afternoon, leading them to a nearby spring. Having found the waters sweet and pure, the soldiers reported to their superiors and they theirs, thus Augustus had the well tapped for all of Rome. Agrippa, his right-hand man, then is said to have named both the aqueduct and nearby terminating fountain after her. Although others suggest that fountain retained its name from the Roman neighborhood of Trebium, for which is served.



Much like everything in antiquity it seems legend precedes it. Which of these origin stories are correct? Who is to say for sure? In the end the origins of Trevi Fountain beyond what we already know from the Renaissance are irrelevant. What remains is a superlative example of Renaissance ingenuity and Baroque style tied to the wondrous beauty of running water.

What more can you ask for?

You know, tradition has it, much like was written in the song above – “Three Coins in the Fountain” – that a wish will be granted (perhaps guaranteeing a visitor’s return to the city) to one who casts a coin (in this case at least a 20-cent Euro coin) into the pool. I wonder... do you... do you think anyone would mind? I have a 20-cent Euro coin here...

*I’m gonna give it a go before I make my way back to the Spanish Steps!*

### **The Pantheon**

*Whew, I feel so much better now.*

You’re not going to believe where I find myself now – well, yes, okay, as the heading at the top of the page suggests I’m near The Pantheon, but that’s not quite where I am at the moment. Care to guess? No?

*McDonalds.*

Okay, okay, I know, I know. How can I be walking around Rome, much less be in Italy, with all the various gastronomical choices available to me and yet I decide on McDonalds for lunch? Wait, hear me out! I skipped breakfast to catch the train here this morning don’t you know (and you do... did I mention stopping for food this morning?) so please allow me this one transgression.



I had seen one earlier in the day and stopped in for a bite then only to find out it was just a “coffee bar” McDonalds. Since coffee is such a major portion of the diet here (actually, espresso, especially in the mornings) it only makes sense for McDonalds to have their own branded bar, especially if they want to grab the attention of the locals. In either case the bar didn’t help my search for sustenance any, but when I came upon the McDonalds here at the Pantheon it was a sign, so I decided to give it a try. And considering it would also most likely be the only opportunity to try a McDonalds outside of the United States, since Cedric doesn’t care for fast food, I ponied up to the counter and looked hungrily over the McMenu.



McMenu – that’s what they call it here (consequently the drive thru is referred to as the McDrive). On the menu were some familiar items (like the Big Mac, and Fillet-o-fish) and others with names that were not so familiar (the Quarter Pounder is called the McRoyal, for instance). I ordered the McRoyal meal and took it to an inside table and have so far devoured it heartily.

Mmmmmmmm, just what I needed.

It’s so good! The McDonalds restaurants outside of the United States seem to have much better quality ingredients, I have to say, but it tastes virtually the same only without as much of the grease. I guess a McDonalds is a McDonalds no matter where you are!

But I’m sure you couldn’t care less about my meal... so, how did I get here?

After watching the coin I tossed in (assuring my return to Rome) sit at the bottom of the pool for a few moments, I turned and walked off. I wasn’t sure in which direction I should be traveling (as I didn’t have a map worth a hill – is that the Capitoline, Quirinal, Viminal, Palatine, Aventine, Celian or Esquiline hill? – of beans) but I was absolutely sure I was moving toward some kind of metro station.

I was wrong.

The walk took me farther from, not closer to, the station at *Piazza di Spagna*. And in the process I ended up here, outside the Pantheon amidst the twists and turns of the neighborhood surrounding the *Piazza della Rotonda*; another very interesting find!



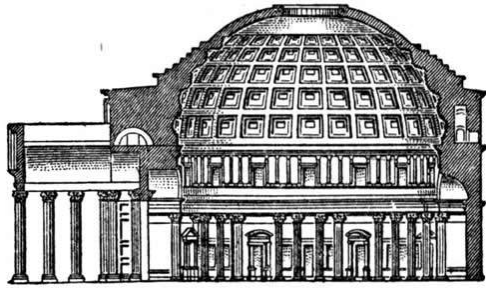
At first glance the Pantheon doesn’t look like much to behold; it is seemingly out of place here, shoehorned between buildings and roadways that have grown up to swallow it whole or crowd it out, but it hides much of its splendor. When Michelangelo first saw the Pantheon in the early 1500s he proclaimed it to be “angelic and not [of] human design” and studied the temple’s dome before working on the one for St. Peter’s Basilica. In fact, much of the Pantheon’s

marvel comes from its engineering – a brilliance of technique and design – which has allowed the temple to withstand not only the test of time (for more than 2000 years) but do so relatively intact.

Today the Pantheon is a consecrated Roman Catholic Church (as *Santa Maria dei Martiri*; or to the Virgin Mary and all martyrs); in antiquity it was commissioned by Marcus Agrippa (in 27 BC) as a temple to the deities of Ancient Rome (thus lending the structure its name; “*pan theos*” meaning “all the gods”) and given to the Roman people.



But, not surprisingly, the current Pantheon is not the original. Agrippa's Pantheon was destroyed in a fire that raged across Rome in 80 AD. Emperor Domitian had the Pantheon rebuilt but it too befell misfortune; claimed by lightning in 110 AD. The current structure was rebuilt by Emperor Hadrian in 126 AD who envisioned a grand sanctuary, conceived as a solar quadrant that should "reproduce the likeness of the terrestrial globe and of the stellar sphere" so as to place all gods at the same level of importance.



Reminiscent of Greek temples, Hadrian's plans called for a structure with three main parts: a portico replete with Corinthian columns, a circular domed rotunda, and an interior more elaborate than anything Rome had yet seen. The rotunda's internal geometry would create a perfect sphere, since the height of the rotunda to the top of its dome would match its diameter –

150 Roman feet (or 43.3 m / 142 ft) and at its top, the dome would have an oculus, a circular opening, with a diameter of 30 Roman feet (8.2 m / 27 ft), as its only light source and seen as the gateway to heaven.

The Pantheon was maintained and restored through the years by emperors Septimius Severus (reign: 193-211 AD) and Caracalla (reign: 211-217 AD) and functioned as a temple for at least three centuries – a number of animals were sacrificed and burned within in tribute to the gods. With the Roman conversion to Christianity, the Pantheon became irrelevant and eventually fell out of disuse. By 609 AD the Byzantine (or Eastern Roman Empire) emperor Phocas gave the building to Pope Boniface IV who converted it into the Christian church it is today.

The building's consecration as a church saved it from the abandonment, destruction, and the worst of the spoliation that befell the majority of ancient Rome's buildings during the early medieval period (such as the 12-day pillage by Byzantine Emperor Constans II in 663 AD). Even so, many of the structure's external decorations – such as its metallic roof, many of its fine marble finishings and Corinthian capitals – have gone missing, or were appropriated for other uses; some of the damage was even done by the Catholic Church itself. Pope Urban VIII ordered the bronze ceiling of the Pantheon's portico melted down, for instance, which was then used in the construction of ornamentation for St. Peter's Basilica.

#### Avete saputo?

Did you know that the Papal fleeing of Rome led to the famous Roman proverb: *Quod non fecerunt barbari fecerunt Barberini* - "What the barbarians did not do the Barberinis did"? Barberinis was Urban VIII's family name.

Shall we go in?

In antiquity we would have approached the building via a flight of steps away from the hustle and bustle of downtown, but the ground level in the surrounding area has risen considerably since then, not to mention a boom in construction – would you believe the Pantheon was on the outskirts of town when it was built?



The main entrance is thoroughly impressive: double bronze doors some twenty-one feet high (6.4 meters) guard the entrance-way. Although still grand they were once covered in gold. The twenty ton (each) doors are protected by a high, broad Portico, or porch, consisting of three ranks of huge granite Corinthian columns – eight in the first rank and two groups of four behind. These columns are quite special, they were quarried in Egypt and brought here by barge down the Nile, across the Mediterranean and lastly down the Tiber. Each is 12 m (39 ft) tall, 1.5 m (5 ft) in diameter and weighs 60 tons. The pediment would have been ornamented in antiquity, of course, but with what has been lost to history (stolen, actually). The inscription on the Pediment reads:

*M·AGRIPPA·L·F·COS·TERTIVM·FECIT*

*Marcus Agrippa, Lucii filius, consul tertium fecit*

*Marcus Agrippa, son of Lucius, in his third Consulate, built this*

Like most of his rebuilding projects around Rome, Hadrian did not claim the rebuilding of the Pantheon as one of his own. He had the original inscription chiseled into the façade (then bronze lettering added), which you can still see quite vividly above the portico (sans the bronze, and the lettering), attributing the structure to Agrippa.

Walk further in and find the interior opens into a huge checker-board floored rotunda (made up of both square and circular marble slabs), under the infamous coffered, concrete dome – the vault of heaven.

Boy did I feel tiny; the space is absolutely huge!

I can almost imagine what the every-day Roman citizen must have felt walking into this amazing structure and finding statues of their gods surrounding them. It must have been absolutely humbling to stand in such an expansive space, with light from the heavens washing over you, while the gods looked upon you (hopefully) with favor. Of course the Corinthian-columned niches that once held the seven-most important deities to the ancient Romans have been replaced by altars, and Christian funeral monuments today, they're no less splendid.

Although I did not explore the Christian icons in detail, you'll find the main altar of the church directly opposite the main entrance and above it, the original 7<sup>th</sup> century icon of the Madonna and Child; the apse is decorated with a wonderful mosaic of golden crosses; and the niche just to the right of the huge doors carries a fresco of the *Annunciation* by Melozzo da Fori dating to the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

Since the Renaissance the Pantheon has been used as a tomb. Renaissance artist Raphael, Vittorio Emanuele II (the first King of a unified Italy), and his successor, Umberto I, are interred here. Raphael is by far the most visited – I found him on the left side as I entered.

The most interesting piece of the Pantheon, in my opinion, is Hadrian's dome. Unlike most temples – where the Cupola is topped with a lantern or other small accoutrement – a 9 meter diameter opening, or oculus, exists. Here the only light omitted into the temple (other than from the front doors) penetrates from above, streaming down like a pulsating river. Rain too. Thankfully, the concave nature of the stone and a series of drainage passageways under the oculus collects, and spirits away, any accumulation – a great (originally designed) feature that has come in quite handy today!



What a blast it's been to learn about the Pantheon. To be able to walk inside, see and touch something tangible from the ancient Roman Empire, to have that connection with it – something I've only read about up to this point – excites me to no end. Isn't it amazing?

Besides being one of the best preserved Roman buildings left, it does boast one other amazing feat – the Pantheon holds the record (still) for the world's largest unreinforced concrete dome. As I said, it's a marvel the dome still stands.

*Finding and exploring the Pantheon has been a real treat, but I must press on. Let me discard the remainder of my lunch and consort the map. I must find a metro station!*

### **Trajan's Column**

Clearly I didn't find a metro station... I found Trajan's Column instead!



Located in the very heart of the city, quite close to the Coliseum actually, in a plaza named after Venice – Piazza Venezia (named as the Palazzo Venezia sits adjacent, the former embassy of the Republic of Venice) – is Trajan's Column.

Although I was not drawn to the Piazza because of Trajan's Column – much like everything else today, I've just stumbled upon it – I was actually on-foot in search of

a nearby metro station. I had thought I was moving in a direction that would return me to the B-Line; however, as it turns out, now that I've found myself here I was actually walking away from it! And thus I ended up here at the Piazza Venezia.

The Plaza Venezia is mostly famous today due to the huge white-marble monument dedicated to the first King of a united Italy – Vittorio Emanuele Maria Alberto Eugenio Ferdinando Tommaso – or Vittorio Emanuele II.

Historically, following the collapse of the Roman Empire, Papal Rome turned toward Europe, where the papacy found a powerful ally in Charlemagne, a king of the barbarian Franks. Although Charlemagne pledged allegiance to the church and looked to Rome and its pope as the final arbiter in most religious and cultural affairs, he launched northwestern Europe on a course toward bitter political opposition. The successor to Charlemagne's empire was a political



entity known as the Holy Roman Empire (962-1806). The new empire defined the end of the Dark Ages but ushered in a period of long, bloody warfare. Italy dissolved into a fragmented collection of city-states and independent kingdoms.

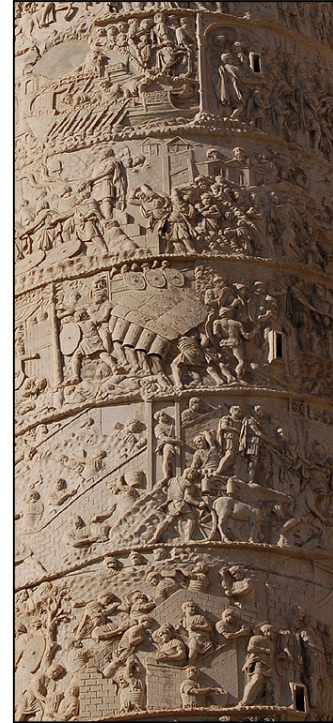
During the years of the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Counter-Reformation, Rome underwent major physical changes. The old centers of culture reverted to pastures and fields, and great churches and palaces were built with the stones of ancient Rome. This construction boom, in fact, did far more damage to the temples of the Caesars than any barbarian sack had done. Rare marbles were stripped from the imperial baths and used as altarpieces or sent to limekilns. So enthusiastic was the papal destruction of imperial Rome that, as I discovered over at the Pantheon, it's a miracle anything is left. The great ruling families, especially the Medicis in Florence, the Gonzagas in Mantua, and the Estes in Ferrara, not only reformed law and commerce but also sparked a renaissance in art. Out of this period arose such towering figures as Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo.

Following the Renaissance, turmoil continued through a succession of many European dynasties. Napoleon made a bid for power in Italy beginning in 1796, fueling his war machines with what was considered a relatively easy victory. During the Congress of Vienna (1814-15), which followed Napoleon's defeat, Italy was once again divided among many factions. Some had attained formidable power under such signori as the Estes in Ferrara, the Medicis in Florence, and the Viscontis and Sforzas in Milan. Political unrest became a fact of Italian life, but Italy was eventually unified by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century during a tumultuous period known as the "Risorgimento" or "Resurgence". A unity we can thank Victor Emmanuel II for.

So I understand the need to immortalize him, and the memorial is quite impressive, I've been taken more by Trajan's Column... something I certainly was not expecting to stumble across.



The free-standing column, dedicated in 113 AD to commemorate Trajan's two victorious military campaigns against the Dacians, stands about 35 meters (98 feet) in height, 35 meters (125 feet) including its large pedestal, and is made from a series of 20 colossal Carrara marble drums – 3.7 meters (11 feet in diameter) – weighing about 32 tons each. Winding about the shaft more than 23 times is a spiral bas-relief, 190-meters (625 feet) long, that artistically describes the epic wars between the Romans and the Dacians; the lower half illustrating the first (101-102), and the top half illustrating the second (105-106).



The scenes depict mostly the Roman army in military activities, such as setting out to battle and engaging the enemy, as well as construction fortifications, listening to the emperor's address and the successes he has accomplished. The carvings are crowded with sailors, soldiers, statesmen and priests – showing about 2,500 figures in all. Emperor Trajan himself alone makes 59 appearances!

Inside the shaft, a spiral staircase of 185 stairs provides access to a viewing platform at the top – accessed by a non-descript door at the base. The capital block of the column weighs in at a hefty 53.3 tons, which at one time was to be topped with a statue of an Eagle; however, by the time the column was finished, a handsome statue of Trajan himself was put in its place. Unfortunately this statue disappeared during the Middle Ages. Today you'll find a statue of Pope Sixtus V with a bronze figure of St. Peter crowning the top of Trajan's column, placed there on December 4, 1587 – yeah, it's the same one.

For the curious, its inscription reads: The Senate and people of Rome [dedicate this] to the emperor Caesar, son of the divine Nerva, Nerva Traianus Augustus Germanicus Dacicus, *pontifex maximus*, in his 17th year in the office of tribune, having been acclaimed 6 times as *imperator*, 6 times consul, *pater patriae*, to demonstrate of what great height the hill [was] and place [that] was removed for such great works. Isn't it impressive?

SENATVS • POPVLVSQVE • ROMANVS  
IMP • CAESARI • DIVI • NERVAE • F • NERVAE  
TRAIANO • AVG • GERM • DACICO • PONTIF  
MAXIMO • TRIB • POT • XVII • IMP • VI • COS • VI • P • P  
AD • DECLARANDVM • QVANTAE • ALTITVDINIS  
MONS • ET • LOCVS • TANT<IS> • OPER>IBVS • SIT • EGESTVS

*Okay, so I think one more pass down by the Roman Forum and a last glimpse of the Colosseum is all I'm going to have time for – I've got to get to the terminal or I'll miss my train back!*

*Ciao, Roma!*

\* \* \*

*Pronto!*

Phew, I'm back aboard the Eurostar train now bound for Firenze, and I'm pooped. It's been one hell of a day here in Rome though, and I'm still reeling from all the various monuments I took in. The capital of the Roman Empire of all places!

Veni. Vidi. Vici.

I came. I saw. I conquered.

Today has been a dream come true; I'm overjoyed beyond all words that I mustered enough gumption to crawl out of bed this morning and make my way down here all by myself. Have Cedric and Maya missed out on a day or what? But hey, to each their own, I'm sure they're having their own brand of fun today.

I tell you, I will have no trouble sleeping tonight, that's for sure!

I would try and get some rest on the way back but who can with all the Italians yelping "pronto!" all the time, which, consequently, I found out they do when answering the phone as a means to tell the caller – "Okay, I'm here... whadda ya want!?" – only in a nicer way.

Still doesn't make for a quiet ride home.

Oh well...

*Clickity-clack... clickity-clack... clickity-clack...*





### Firenze, IT

## “Duomo, David & Giardino di Boboli”

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 6+H

*Wow, what a view!*

Good afternoon travelers; sleep well?

I most certainly did – so well in fact that it’s two days later! After tromping around Rome all day on Tuesday I needed some serious sleep – so I slept for two days! Actually, no, I didn’t really, but I probably could have if I wanted to. Actually again, no, I don’t think I would. There’s still plenty of exciting adventures to partake in here in Florence; who could sleep with that hanging over their heads?

Not me!

It is Thursday now, though, so that means I have some ‘splaining to do (where’s yesterday’s adventure?); and I will. But for now let me just sit here quietly, peacefully, soaking up the view that I find myself looking upon – it’s the whole city of Florence.

Ahhhhhhhhh...

Doesn’t it look fantastic?

Right now I’m high in the hills above the city in the *Giardino di Boboli*. Part of the Medici’s Florentine villa, the Palazzo Pitti, Boboli Gardens was arranged in the sixteenth century for the wife of Cosimo I de’ Medici, the Grand Duke of Florence. Since that time the gardens have been enriched and enlarged by the ruling families into the form we see today. A garden that extends from the hill behind the Pitti Palace as far as the Porta Romana – one of the largest of its kind – covering 45,000 square meters (11 acres)!



They’re simply beautiful; expansive and breathtaking. Paths from the central entrance (which appears to be an amphitheater) lead off in at least twenty different directions. From those, twenty more lead off in equally opposite directions. Sometimes you’ll end up where you started from, but for the most part each path takes you to a new and exciting partition of the gardens, whether it was to a fountain (such as the “Fountain of Neptune”, by Soldo Lorenzi/1571 – commonly called the “Fountain of the Fork” by Florentines), a

grotto (such as the “La Grotta Grande”, a vault which at one time contained Michelangelo’s incomplete “Prisoners”; today concrete copies are installed, as well as housing Vincenzo de’ Rossi’s “Paris with Helen of Troy” and “Venus Bathing” by Giambologna), a statue (such as “The Abundance”, by Sebastiano Salvini, Gianbologna, and Pietro Tacca/1608-1637), or a lookout.



Before we set out on foot to explore these gardens, the three of us – that’s me and my other two travel mates, Cedric and Maya – decided to go our separate ways and meander alone. The only agreement was to be back at the entrance by 4:00pm – otherwise enjoy!

And so far I am. Oh, I am.

The concept of the gardens has provided at least three good places to view the city and surrounding environs, and oh my, are they fantastic. The first Cedric and I converged upon (strangely enough) about the same time; that was a lower lookout point. Its determining feature was a rather large statue of a “shattered” face (called “Monumental Head, by Igor Mitoraji), but the view was magnificent. A second was found at the top of the gardens, which featured an overhang looking into the city from both the back and front, and a viewpoint across to Fiesole and other surrounding communities – equally magnificent. A third I’ve found alone here near a shuttered snack bar, but the view is spectacular. The skies are blue, the sun is shining, the air crisp and cool; what more could you ask for?

I’ve just finished reading the newspaper I bought down at the train station this morning and can hardly take my eyes off of the city now. Though why would I want to? Alas, speaking of the train station, since today is Thursday it means our final day in Firenze is upon us. We had no choice but to pack up and leave the hostel early this morning – by 9:30am – so already it’s been quite a full day, the gardens non-withstanding.

Mikael, Maya’s cousin, met us at the room right at check-out time and for the first time on our trip, we were actually ready to depart on schedule. The three of us packed our bags completely the night before so the only items left for us to tick off our list luggage wise was just to get our day-packs in order and place any last-minute items in our bags. Once we made a sweep of the room for stragglers we were off to the train station.





Yep, back to Firenze Santa Maria Novella, or Firenze SMN for short. Firenze has many stations for trains and more currently being built, but the one we needed today (or tonight rather), was the one we came in on. It wasn't as if we needed tickets though, our Eurail pass would suffice for the trip to Wien (Vienna), but we wanted to check on the trip from Wien to Praha (Prague). Actually, we just wanted to drop off our bags at the station so we wouldn't have to carry (or in my case roll) them around all day long!

Cedric and Maya confirmed our sleeper-car reservations the previous day so really our motive for the station was pure indulgence.



After dropping off our luggage at the station we once again turned to the streets of Firenze, but not in search of relics, antiquities and history. We were in the hunt for a Mail Boxes Etc. MBE, as they are called for short, is an American shipping company that operates worldwide and, as such, has many facilities throughout Europe. Unfortunately it didn't seem as if they had any stores in Paris (if you recall that sordid story). Be that as it may, now that I

have even more swag from Firenze, Pisa and Roma, I really, really, really needed to ship items home. As it turned out, the nearest MBE location wasn't that far of a walk from the train station.

What a welcome sight the MBE logo was and it's 'Yes, we're open!' sign. Not only did I need to send home the books and pamphlets I picked up in Paris, Firenze, Pisa and Rome, but also the two bottles of vino that were given to me by my father's cousin out in Prato. One of the bottles was an after-dinner wine (a port) and the other was one of their home-made reds. Recall I had a taste of their red earlier in the week and while I'm not big on wines, it was quite delicious. And if I might interject here: Italy has had that effect on me too, as far as wines go. It seems that I'm drinking three glasses of red wine every meal and it's not inhibiting me in the slightest. Furthermore, it seems that I'm really enjoying the wine too (not to mention the Cappuccino's).

Italy has turned me into a wino and a coffee hound!

Not that I'm complaining too loudly mind you.



Nevertheless, once everything was neatly and securely packed in the box to be sent state-side, the gang and I left MBE and headed for destinations unknown. Our train didn't leave until after 10:00pm so we had 12 hours to kill.

Mikael was with us for quite some time, too. He left not long after noon to attend his classes for the day, but apparently not soon enough for Maya. On our wanderings about town this morning she ended up at an intimate's shop where she drooled and ogled the fancy lacy undergarments. However, in order for her to be comfortable in the store she banished Mikael and myself to the outside, allowing Cedric to remain and help in the selection. So Mikael and I walked around the block, taking a gander at the various booths setup for tourists, we ran into the "little pig" statue and even walked into a bookshop before returning. By the time we had done so Maya had finished and was in the process of paying for her purchases.

After Mikael departed we walked across the Ponte Vecchio and spent a couple of hours at a nearby Internet Café then ended up here, across the street, at Boboli Gardens.

Yesterday was equally busy.

\* \* \*

As I said, after tromping around Rome all day I needed some serious sleep, as apparently did my friends. Not a one of us was awake before 10:30am. As soon as we tossed our last turn, I got up and contacted Dominico; he rushed over and thus I left with him to points unknown for our final day together.

### **Michelangelo's Lantern**

The car took us to Piazza del Duomo, home of the before-mentioned "Cattedrale de Santa Maria del Fiore", and its famous double-shelled dome, which dominates the Firenze skyline like no other.

Constructed by Filippo Brunelleschi, between 1420 and 1434, of enormous dimensions – 45 meters in diameter and 114 meters in height – the dome was erected without the traditional use of scaffolding from the ground up. Brunelleschi employed a system using a double wall made of bricks laid herringbone fashion reinforced by a system in stone chains. The construction rose in circles ever smaller, ever tighter to the top. Thus with an inner and outer shell, the architect left space in between for a stairway, which you can climb its 463 steps to "Michelangelo's Lantern", the top of the dome, for unprecedented views of the city and the frescoes decorating the inner dome.



That's what I came back for.

However, before I took up this enormous challenge (I was getting tired of climbing up hundreds of steps you know), Dominico and I breezed back through the Baptistery (for its interior and frescoed dome, since we didn't have time to browse the inside earlier in the week), and the Cathedral's Crypt (where one can catch a glimpse of the cathedral's predecessor – the ancient Cathedral of Santa Reparata – replete with (what I can only assume is) its old altar piece.

The Baptistery, which sits next to the Duomo, recalls the vast interior of the Pantheon in Rome. And why not; it was, after-all, a Roman temple. As such the interior is rather dark – clad in dark green and white marble with inlaid geometrical patterns – and is divided into two halves: a lower part with columns and pilasters, and an upper part with an ambulatory. The only light enters through small windows in the ambulatory and, of course, through the lantern at the top. The niches are separated by monolithic columns of Sardinian granite, which only breathes more life into the harsh, hard, and cold look.

Although the doors on the outside of the Basilica may be constituted as the main attraction of the Baptistery, the painting on the dome's ceiling is equally impressive – if not just as important historically and culturally, so I wanted to be sure to catch a glimpse of it while I was in the neighborhood.

It didn't disappoint!

Looking up, we find a huge Christ, and under Christ's feet, the dead rising from their sepulchers. These figures represent the Last Judgment, when the Risen Lord will summon living and dead alike to account for their actions. To Christ's right are the souls of the righteous "in the bosom" of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (the Patriarchs of Ancient Israel), to his left is Hell. In the remaining five sectors of the dome, horizontal tiers of mosaic decoration tell the stories of St. John the Baptist, Christ, the Patriarch Joseph, and the beginnings of human life (Adam and Eve, Cain and Able, Noah and his family). In the uppermost tier, nearest the light, are choirs of angels.



The Crypt, on the other hand, turned out to be more of an archeological excavation than a tomb. As it is the location of a second, much older church (the Santa Reparata) from which the Duomo and surrounding structures were built upon, a number of historical artifacts was abound. In fact, some of the old tile floor and roadway pavement stones were still visible (at least I think that's what I was seeing), odd and ends items discovered were on display (such as tombstones recovered from previous excavations), and even the survival of some of the wall mosaics; they were on display.



One of the most interesting items within to survive the construction above was a tiny altar piece and a number of original (again I assume) wooded benches where many of the church's patrons must have worshiped; truly an amazing thing to gaze upon.

But not nearly as amazing as the cathedral itself.

Entering the Cathedral one is immediately struck by the building's vastness and the sobriety of its furnishings. The color and rich patterning of the exterior, which serve to relate the mass of the structure to the smaller scale of surrounding buildings, here give way to a simplicity that underscores the titanic dimensions of this church (the largest in Europe when it was completed in the 15<sup>th</sup> century: 153 meters long, 90 wide at the crossing, and 90 meters high from pavement to the opening of the lantern).

Santa Maria del Fiore was built with public funds as a "state church", and important works of art from the 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries in the side aisles constitute a "civic program" honoring illustrious men. This program includes: frescoed equestrian monuments to military leaders Sir John Hawkwood (by Paolo Uccello, 1436) and Niccolo da Tolentino (by Andrea del Castagno, 1456); a painting by Domenico di Michelino showing Dante in Florence, dated 1465; and sculptural portraits of Giotto, Brunelleschi, and Marsilio Ficino.

Besides this civic iconography there is a religious program as well.

Two large images at opposite ends of the central nave suggest the religious emphasis: a mosaic over the principal entrance (by Gaddo Gaddi in the early 1300s) and the circular stained-glass window high above the main altar (the only one of the eight "eyes" of the drum visible from the nave), designed by Donatello between 1434 and 1437. Both of these works depict "The Coronation of the Virgin" – Mary's elevation to glory after her death. A colossal clock over the main door suggests, among other things, a rootedness in historical time. Painted by Paolo Uccello in 1443, it is a "liturgical" clock which calculates the 24 hours of the day starting at sunset of the previous day – just as the Church calculates the beginning of religious festivities.

Thus you'll find there is a convergence of meanings found between the civic and religious programs, they both illustrate the dignity of man: his human greatness and the elevation God gives him.



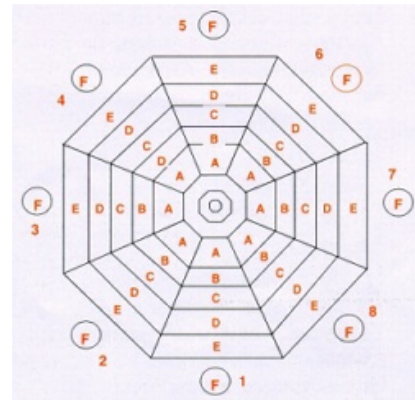
The Cathedral's 44 windows constitute the most extensive stained-glass program in 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century Italy. The windows depict Old and New Testament saints (in the nave and transepts), and scenes from the life of Christ and Mary (in the circular windows of the drum). The list of artists includes the greatest Florentines of the early Renaissance: Donatello, Ghiberti, Paolo Uccello and Andrea del Castagno. From the crossing, under the dome, one has a sweeping view, and the iconological purpose of the window-program becomes apparent: to evoke the spiritual light in Christ, Mary and the saints which enlightens believers.



The interior of the dome, however, is the most celebrated.

As finally executed by Giorgio Vasari and Federico Zuccari, between 1572 and 1579, the decoration of the dome is not in mosaic but rather painted. The iconographic theme however is the same as in the Baptistery: The Last Judgment. 3,600 meters of painted surface illustrate traditional Catholic belief in a Heaven and Hell which human beings "merit" on the basis of virtues or vices cultivated during their live on earth, and after a final "judgment". There are six rings in the fresco plan of the dome, which depict various scenes from the Life of Christ.

**A** - The Elders of Revelation 4. **B** - Angelic Choirs with the Instruments of Christ's Passion. **C** - Christ, Mary and the Saints. **D** - Virtues, Beatitudes and Gifts of the Holy Spirit. **E** - Vices and Hell. **F** - Windows in the drum: 1) Donatello, Coronation of Mary. 2) Paolo Uccello, Resurrection of Christ. 3) Andrea del Castagno, Deposition. 4) Paolo Uccello, Nativity of Christ. 5) Paolo Uccello, Annunciation (destroyed). 6) Lorenzo Ghiberti, Presentation in the Temple. 7) Lorenzo Ghiberti, Agony in the Garden. 8) Lorenzo Ghiberti, Ascension.



In the center, above the high altar, the Risen Lord appears amid angels bearing the instruments of his Passion. This dominant image of the dome was meant to be seen in relation to a sculptural group carved by Baccio Bandinelli 20 years earlier for the high altar: a monumental dead Christ and a Figure of God the Father blessing. These statues, removed in 1842, were the first part of a unified message – on the altar, believers saw the dead Christ, but – lifting their eyes – beheld the same Lord in glory.

The up-close, personal view of this work you get by taking the climb to the top of the dome is very much worth it; not to mention the spectacular view of the city awaiting you once you get there.



The climb, much like all the others thus far in Europe, was just as grueling (so I'll spare you the details about every step). The view was magnificent, and with the weather cooperating, the entire city was within my grasp! Amazing was the only word I could think of to say, as I hung onto the railing up there; the cold wind blowing. Round and round I went trying to soak in the beauty that was Firenze, the birthplace of the Renaissance, without really understanding why I was doing so. Unfortunately I did have to come down – be careful of step number 400; it's a doozy – but the view, not to mention the experience, was simply breathtaking. It's something I think I will never forget.



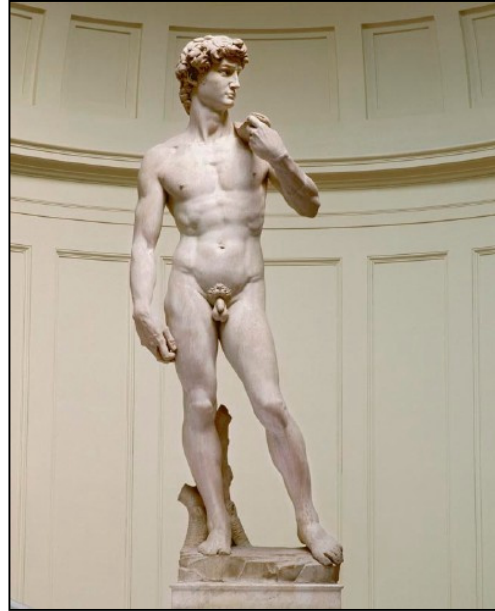


I later rejoined my father on the ground and we made our way over to the *Accademia di Belle Arti Firenze*, home of Michelangelo's David.

### **Michelangelo's David**

Throughout history there have been many depictions of David, some of them quite famous in their own right, by: Donatello, Andrea del Verrocchio, and Gian Lorenzo Bernini; however, there is only one that is the most lauded, the most renowned, the most celebrated, and perhaps the only one to achieve the rank of absolute masterpiece – Michelangelo's David.

There are, of course, three versions of David in Firenze – a bronze version at the Pizzale Michelangelo, a marble copy at the Piazza della Signoria, and the real David at the Galleria dell'Accademia within the Academy of Fine Arts. Although the bronze at Pizzale Michelangelo and the replica at Piazza della Signoria are interesting in their own right, this David is nothing short of impressive.



Reading about the statue online, I found the history of its creation equally interesting:

Prior to Michelangelo's involvement, the Overseers of the people of Office of Works of the Duomo (Operai), consisting mostly of members of the influential woolen cloth guild, the Arte della Lana, had plans to commission a series of twelve large Old Testament sculptures for the buttresses of the Florence Cathedral. Until then, only two had been created independently by Donatello and his assistant, Agostino di Duccio. Eager to continue their project, in 1464, they again contracted Agostino to create a sculpture of David. A block of marble was provided from a quarry in Carrara, a town in the Apuan Alps in northern Tuscany. Agostino only got as far as beginning to shape the legs, feet and the figure, roughing out some drapery and probably gouging a hole between the legs. His association with the project ceased, for reasons unknown, with the death of his master Donatello in 1466.

Antonio Rossellino was commissioned to take up where Agostino had left off, but his contract was terminated soon thereafter, and the block of marble remained neglected for twenty-five years, all the while exposed to the elements in the yard of the cathedral workshop.



This was, of course, of great concern to the Operai authorities, as such a large piece of marble was both costly and represented a large amount of labor and difficulty in its transportation to Florence. By 1501 the Operai were determined to find an artist who could take this large piece of marble and turn it into a finished work of art. They ordered the block of stone raised up so that a master experienced in this kind of work might examine it and express an opinion. Though Leonardo da Vinci and others were consulted, it was young Michelangelo, only twenty-six years old, who convinced the Operai that he deserved the commission.

On August 16, 1501, Michelangelo was given the official contract to undertake this challenging new task. He began carving the statue early in the morning on Monday, September 13, a month after he was awarded the contract, and would continue to do so for three long years. When the statue was unveiled to the Florentine public they were astounded just as we continue to be today.

Standing 4.34 meters (13 ½ feet) tall and weighing in at a hefty six tons, he is the epitome of male form, standing in “self-assured perfection” in a specially designed rotunda. Michelangelo’s colossal David, captures the balanced ideal of High Renaissance art in Classical contrapposto style with such pose and presence, standing there long enough you might begin to believe he’ll leap off his pedestal and attack, or simply turn his head back around and speak out to you.

Notice the “closed” right side with its tensed hanging arm echoes the right leg, which supports the figure’s weight; in the same way, the “open” left side with its bent arm is the precise counterpart of the disengaged left leg. Further tension arises from the contrast between David’s fixed stare and the grasping motion made by the right fist, which holds the stone with which he will kill Goliath. Through these means, Michelangelo reinforces the image of a young man wavering between thought and action. But Michelangelo also made minor deviations from Classical principles in his rendition in the name of higher ideals. David’s large hands and feet, for example, are outside classical proportions and suggest a youth who has yet to grow to his potential. And his furrowed brow violates the Classical ideal of serene faces but reflects his intense concentration.

#### **Avete saputo?**

Did you know that David was deliberately designed to symbolize the virtues of Republican Florence and freedom of foreign and papal domination? It was smartly placed at the very heart of the city – the Piazza della Signoria – with eyes gazing toward Rome. More recently, however, David has come to symbolize the ultimate symbol of the artistic and intellectual ambitions of the Renaissance.

Although David is the main attraction at the Gallery, among the other works housed in the Galleria are Giambologna’s original plaster copy of the *Rape of the Sabines*, Botticelli’s *Madonna and Child* and *Madonna of the Sea*, and a few works by Perugino, Filippino Lippi, Pontormo, Domenico Ghirlandaio and Bronzino.



There is also an extensive collection of plaster models from the 18th century, an unfinished sculpture by Michelangelo of Saint Matthew, as well as early 13th century religious works by Giovanni di Milano ("Pieta"), the Orcagna brothers, Taddeo Gaddi and others that were followers of Giotto.

But the most important of these must be Michelangelo's "Prisoners", a series of marbles that were once crafted as a part of a grandiose project for the tomb of Pope Julius II, a project that Michelangelo was never able to finish and that was cause of profound disappointment and frustration for the artist.

These four statues were brought here from the "grotta" of Buontalenti in the Boboli Gardens where the Grand Duke Cosimo I originally had them placed after receiving the works as a gift following Michelangelo's death. The statues are amongst the most perturbing ever sculpted; what is most striking is the sense of oppression and the sign of struggle between the spirit and the material found within them. In this very personalized style, the so called "non finito" or "unfinished", one still sees the marks left by the artist's chisel. But most of all we are allowed to participate in the creative process, able to intuit the inspiration that accompanied Michelangelo every time he picked up his tools. With just a little imagination it seems that inside these blocks of marble (just barely worked into), the figures already exist. Their force and beauty are such that we wait, fascinated and certain that they will slowly but surely liberate themselves.

The four presented here are *Atlantis*, *The Young Slave*, *The Bearded Slave* and *The Awakening Slave*, and are additional pieces to the pair presented at the Louvre, in Paris (which, if you recall, I also had the privilege of viewing). They masterfully line the corridor to David's enclave.

Michelangelo's David was so successfully received that he was recalled to Rome by the Pope himself, Giulio II, for whom he would then paint the famous Sistine Chapel.

After taking one last look at David, I rejoined my father and we made our way out to Prato to visit the family once more before I left the country. Although we arrived a bit early (Luciana was still in her robe and none too happy to be seen in it) we had a great time sipping coffee, talking and taking pictures with my nifty digital camera. Gaia, a cousin of mine, found the camera quite fascinating, too, showing off some of the pictures I took in Rome. Though that drained my battery something awful!

\* \* \*

Okay, so, it's getting to be about that time.

It's time to say goodbye; or, as they say here in Italy, arrivederci.

Our time here in Firenze has been quite enjoyable and relaxing, despite the reservations I had coming in. Seeing my biological father for the first time in many, many years was a point of stress upon arrival, but it is no longer so. And I find I don't really want to leave for Prague tonight – I'm not done exploring the countryside!



I'm going to make another quick walkabout the gardens before meeting Maya and Cedric down at the entrance. I'm not sure what's next on our agenda, except to vote for grabbing a bite to eat to tide us over until dinner. Mikael will be re-joining us later this evening – he has suggested a restaurant near the Duomo called Olio's around 7:00pm-ish, so we still have plenty of time to make our way around town.

To think of it, I could use some pizza, a pastry and a cappuccino to warm my heart (and stomach) and I know just the place, too – it's right across the street!

Arrivederci, Italia.  
Grazie, grazie!

Next stop: Wien and Praha!