

Maria Rita Zappelli



# HOME STREET HOME

*- Perugia's history told through its streets -*

**Morlacchi Editore**

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- *Perugia's history told through its streets* -

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## **PIAZZA GRANDE** *Large Square*

*Piazza IV Novembre* → *Piazza della Repubblica*

Today divided in Piazza IV Novembre, Corso Vannucci, and Piazza della Repubblica.

Such was the name by which the elongated area at the very heart of the city, partially corresponding to the ancient Roman forum, was known throughout the Middle Ages. Here the five royal ways leading in town from the five *borghi* converged, and public buildings, the cathedral, and the most prestigious residences and landmark monuments rose.

“Grande,” as it was indeed large and grandiose in comparison to the more diminutive market squares dotting the urban landscape, and in sharp contrast with the Piazza Piccola, the “small” square (now Piazza Matteotti). The two were connected by a series of tiny alleyways, the *rimbocchi*, which housed a crowded assembly of homes, stores and workshops.

We must remember that, in its original topography, Perugia rose atop not one but *two* hills, the Colle Landone and the Monte del Sole. The area here described was in fact a deep valley, separating the two hilltops—about as deep as the present-day Cupa on the one side and the Fosso de’ Bottinelli on the other.

Levelling works began at an unspecified time in history, sometime in the city’s remotest past, and continued on throughout the ages. The gap was filled in slowly (and discontinuously), using any material available at the time: under today’s Corso Vannucci there are successive layers of earth and stone. Piazza Matteotti, which bore the brunt of the hillside’s weight, was more carefully filled in with stonemasonry, dry masonry walls, and arches.

In the Etrusco-Roman era, the main road, the *cardo*, ran north to south along the town center, starting at the Etruscan Arch. From there, it climbed up today’s Via Rocchi, crossed the area currently occupied by the cathedral, and opened into the former Roman forum (which extended from Piazza IV Novembre to Via Mazzini). It then crossed Corso Vannucci, ran down Via del Forte and into Via Bagliona (the road which is now the main underground passage inside the Pauline Fortress), to end near Porta Marzia, the Marzia Gate. That said, we should not imagine a singular orderly passage-way, but rather an irregular composition of buildings, alleys, squares and knolls,

as the topography was still strongly dependant on the natural geography of the two hills.

Slowly but surely, the area was leveled out, and the center’s constructions acquired a more orderly look. A wide street came to be defined as the town center, beginning at the cathedral (Piazza IV Novembre) and ending at the Church of Saint Isidoro (Piazza della Repubblica). This area came to be known as Piazza Grande, while the parallel, smaller opening over the city walls was named Piazza Piccola or Del Sopramuro (now, Piazza Matteotti). In the year 1591, Cardinal Pinelli ordered the levelling of a section of the area between the Church of Saint Isidoro and the papal fortress. “But it took centuries and centuries for this work to be completed: [...] we, as older men, still remember the climb it took to cross from one end of the Corso to the other, and the valley opening from the Arco dei Priori to Palazzo Baldeschi. Until the year 1863, when plans were being presented for the buildings which would replace the fortress, if you stopped anywhere between Via Nuova (Via Mazzini) and Via Cappellari (Via Danzetta), you could not stretch your gaze beyond Palazzo Donini, nor see the people walking there [...]. It was thereby necessary to dig down about two meters in the area around that building, and to access the doorway a stairway was built, while before one could drive a carriage straight inside” (R. Gigliarelli, 1907).

Siepi, drawing on very old sources, writes that the area was first paved in 1253, and redone in 1512. The street was originally paved in brickwork, laid in a herringbone pattern (*opus spicatum*). Only from 1797 onwards was the Corso paved in stone, most recently around 1877 and in 1978. We also learn from Siepi (who cites Pellini’s work), that in 1328 the central area of the city was defended at the cross-roads with the various streets opening onto it, by thick iron chains “to avoid public uprisings and in particular to block the access of riders on horseback who came up these roads and led the crowds to revolt, a quite frequent occurrence at the time. But the cumbersome defense represented by these chains was rendered useless after stronger measures were taken by Pope Paul III in order to keep the peace, and they were everywhere removed in 1540” (S. Siepi, 1822).

Obviously, the most prominent section of the Piazza Grande—where the main civic and religious

buildings were concentrated—was the area now occupied by Piazza IV Novembre, centered around the magnificent Fontana Maggiore (see *PIAZZA DEL COMUNE*).

As for the buildings flanking what later came to be known as the Corso, we first find Palazzo dei Priori (also called Palazzo del Popolo or Del Comune), a monumental representation of Perugia's might and glory. It incarnated—with remarkable continuity through the ages—the public, judiciary, and administrative powers, and today is the City Hall.

The palace is known as “dei Priori” because the oligarchical rule of the *priori*, or Priors (the elected city magistrates), who established it as their headquarters in 1353. In the fifty years prior, the priors had met in a building alongside the cathedral. That said, it was architecturally meant to represent “the absolute prominence of the popular, democratic assembly over the watchful, and watched upon, elected assembly of magistrates,” the original building being composed “very simply and almost primitively by two immense halls, one atop the other, as if they were two covered squares, with a few extra rooms for the administrative offices” (O. Gurrieri, 1976).

The building was constructed in stages. The first section was built between 1293 (or, according to Siepi's sources, 1281) and 1297, and consisted of the central part of the existing structure, with a stairway rising up the façade to the central portal, looking onto the square. The second building phase lasted for the first half of the 1300s, when the structure was expanded in the direction of Via della Gabbia. The palace absorbed within its mass the old Church of San Severo, which gave the façade its current, asymmetrical look. A few private buildings rising along the Corso were expropriated as well, in order to enlarge the Palazzo all the way to the cross-roads with Via dei Priori. This latter section was built using stones from the main buildings of Bettona, taken as spoils by the Perugian army after it basically tore the town to pieces. A third phase, 1429 to 1443, saw the Palazzo expand *beyond* Via dei Priori, with the building of new housing for the elected magistrates, including the tower of Messer Limosina, still standing, and the very old Church of San Giovanni “*de foro*.” The final, Renaissance-style expansion took place from 1575 to 1588; the main

objective now was to create space for the library after Prospero Podiani left the city his extensive book collection in his will. High up along the wall we can still make out a dedicatory inscription placed in honor of this cultivated man: *Augustae Perusiae Museum Prospero Podiano Pub. Com. Institutum Ill. dec... - XI.*”

Unfortunately, the new wing was almost immediately discarded, being too small for the collection from the very beginning, and the library moved first to Palazzo Meniconi (where the central post office is today) and then into another part of Palazzo dei Priori. The historian Siepi, writing about the building (which he refers to as the Comunitativo Apostolico, the Apostolic Houses, because the Papal Legates were headquartered here for many years), states that a further addition was made in 1790. Three rooms, on three different floors, were built over the Vicolo dei Pentolini (the “Small Pans Alley,” no longer existing as such, but today enveloped by the Cassa di Risparmio bank headquarters), connecting the municipal building to Palazzo Lippi.

Having thus grown in length alongside the Corso, the building acquired a new, majestic portal, which has come to be perceived as the main entrance, and the Palazzo's balance finally shifted to the side.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, slow years of decadence were accompanied with a loss of artistic taste and respect for the great works of the past. The Palazzo itself was a victim of numerous careless—and tasteless—renovations which ruined many a fine architectural detail, marring its classical beauty. Fortunately, restoration works began in 1832, culminating in a great flurry of activity around 1860 (the year of the Italian unification) with the aim of returning the building, if not to its original state, at least to its original dignity.

The portal, dating from the end of the fourteenth century, is surrounded by a fine frieze of leaves and Solomonic columns (helical columns twisting like a corkscrew), as well as by a thick band made up of 58 scenes, each representing allegorical figures: the emblems of Perugia, of the royal house of France and of the allied cities of the time (Rome, Florence, Bologna, Pisa and Venice). Another panel shows a citizen holding a paper which reads: *Entra puro movi sicuro*, i.e. “Enter pure of

heart, walk in safety.” “Just like the bas-reliefs and statues around the Fontana Maggiore, so also the portal’s panels represent a complex encyclopedia of medieval knowledge” (O. Gurrieri, 1976). The three figures presiding the intricately carved lunette represent an old tradition, first written down by Crispolti and “uncritically accepted and merely rephrased by all subsequent Perugian artistic literature [...] up to the most recent guidebooks” (M. Roncetti, 1992). It was said that they represented Saint Lawrence and Saint Herculanus, patrons of the town, and Saint Louis of Toulouse (the son of Charles of Anjou, King of Naples).

The latter was honored as patron saint of the building itself, because it was in the Chapel of the Priori that the pope had entrusted him with the bishopric of Toulouse, because (probably) he was canonized in Perugia. It was also in homage to the King of Naples, his father, who had disbursed consistent amounts of money for the construction of the palace. The Chapel of the Priori, inside the palace, is also dedicated to Saint Louis and Saint Herculanus, and so are the frescoes with which it is decorated. A new study by Mario Roncetti, as well as a recent analysis of the wooden statues, has rebuffed this tradition, naming the third statue, more logically, as the third patron saint of Perugia, Saint Constance. This information has certainly come as glad news for the Perugians, who, in their heart of hearts, have never doubted the solidity of that saintly triad: Lawrence, Herculanus and Constance of Perugia.

Gigliarelli informs us that the three statues’ arms were removed to make room for a papal emblem, replaced in its turn in 1809 by a Napoleonic eagle.

The portal is flanked by two basements, each topped by a lions (perhaps merely decorative supports, common in Romanesque architecture, perhaps symbols of the Guelph faction), holding up two pillars with allegorical figures (on the one side Humility, Fertility and Avarice, on the other Haughtiness, Virginity and Generosity). Above the pillars there are two ledges, each holding up a griffin and a calf. The unusual bovine symbol would represent, according to some, the Butchers’ Guild, which contributed to the expenses of building the palace, together with the Wool-carders, represented by the lamb on the side facing the

square. This hypothesis is nonetheless still open to interpretation as, however large the contribution, it still seems a bit excessive to celebrate the “sponsor” in such a prominent way.

The two columns facing the portal used to hold up a chain.

The statue at the very top, between the two crests of arms with the griffin, close to the bell-tower, represents Saint Peter, and another statue of the apostle was set to the back of the building, close to Via della Gabbia.

The bell-tower over the arch in Via dei Priori was built in 1569, on the site of a yet older tower. That tower had been built between the fourteenth and the fifteenth century as a “cell held up by four large octagonal pillars in white and red stone bands, the parapet all merloned, a flag-holder in wrought iron and at the bottom it was flanked by two wings, merloned as well, with many gargoyles of frightful appearance for the drainage of rainwater,” as described by Gurrieri. It was demolished after falling into ruin due to lightning and the vibrations caused by its own bells.

As for the bells themselves, one of them was probably originally from the tower of the destroyed Fortress of Porta Sole: “the largest was molded in April, 1388 [...]. The second on the 1 October of the same year 1388 but, having broke, was remolded by Angelo and the Crescimbeni brothers in the year 1478 [...] customarily this bell sounds the hour, and is rung to mark the time of school studies, then three hours before nightfall, two hours before the same, and at midnight. The largest bell later broke as well, a part of the bottom having been hit by a bolt of lightning, and remained for the longest time cracked, sounding unpleasant and shrill to the ear. In 1816, the blacksmith Teodoro Zucchetti suggested to the magistrates that the bottom part of the bell be sawed off [...] and the enterprise was greatly rewarded as once the broken section was removed (and was then made to fit inside one of the pillars of the same bell-tower) the bell was returned to its ancient glory [...]. From then on it came to be used to toll the Hail Mary, Midday and Evening prayers, previously tolled by the second bell. The third, much smaller one, rung to sound the quarter of the hour, was re-molded in 1702 by Cosimo Figliastrelli from Panicale [...]. There was also a smaller bell rung three hours

before the dusk to call the persons working in the service of the Magistrates to their offices” (S. Siepi, 1822).

Siepi is also full of information on the clock: “a complete renovation of its machinery began in 1796 at the hands of a Mr. Praga, a German, who worked with his tools in the hallways of Sant’Anna, but after his death the work was completed and set up by Federigo Matteucci from Città di Castello, in 1804. In 1816 it was restored by the aforementioned Teodoro Zucchetti [...]. The custom of marking the hours according to the astronomical system was introduced in 1798 under French rule, ceased the following year, and was resumed in 1805. The system known as the ‘French hours’ had twelve-hour intervals starting at midday and midnight, whereas the previous system (called ‘Italian’ or ‘Bohemian’) divided the day into twenty-four hours. It ran from sunset to sunset, meaning the hours varied from one day to the next, with bell-towers requiring constant adjustments.”

The old clock had a complex dial which was repainted at various stages from the sixteenth century to the year 1804. This is how Siepi describes it in that year: “it marks in two large circles the hours, accounted based on the astronomical and on the Italian system. Above it, in another circle, there are marked the eight main winds and below, in a globe, the phases of the moon [...]. In the lower corners there are painted two majestic seated figures representing Day and Night and, in the top corners, the Genies of Time” (S. Siepi, 1822).

A plaque set high above the left-hand portal is inscribed in Latin and reads, in translation: “Charles the Emperor / magnanimous towards the Perugian State / consigned as a gift these privileges / which this stone shelters.” The words refer to a metal coffer (long ago kept behind one of the wall’s stones). It contained parchments attesting to the privileges granted to the city on 18 April 1355 by Charles IV of Bohemia, on the occasion of his meeting, in Pisa or Pavia, with Perugian ambassadors. Most of these special privileges were assigned thanks to the mediation of a *giureconsulto*, the epoch’s version of a legal advisor. The advisor in question was the celebrated Baldo, much beloved by the emperor. In these papers, among other things, the University of Perugia was placed under the

Holy Roman Emperor’s personal patronage. Each folio was sealed in the finest gold; moved around throughout the centuries, they were eventually removed from the wall, according to Siepi, in 1725.

On street level, at the corner with the Via dei Priori, there are some stone steps. Just above, on the wall, you can make out a small iron door and a lock, which was used to hold up the chain of the condemned to the stocks. On the same topic, we should note that a metal cage used to hang from the Palazzo’s wall on Via della Gabbia: here, sentenced convicts were left exposed to the elements and, more often than not, died of starvation or thirst. From Gigliarelli we also learn that the lovely triple lancet windows at the top of the building were not only meant for enjoying the view, and that the old *luminoni*, lantern-holders hanging from the upper walls, were not simply used for lighting the way: both were also employed as tools for summary punishments, as unfortunate citizens were hurled down the windows or left hanging from the lantern-holders. According to Graziani, in a single day “there were counted, of those killed, hung or thrown out the windows, over 130 people.”

Less violent—most of the time—public events were also held in front of the Palazzo, including many games and local competitions (see *PIAZZA DEL COMUNE*). Shows were also held inside the building: “early dramas and plays were held in the communal halls, and many years passed before the appearance of private theatres, and then came the public theaters of the Sapienza, the Pavone, the Morlacchi and the Carmine” (R. Gigliarelli, 1907).

A manuscript from an author named Macinara tells of an unusual entertainment: “on Sunday, 28 April 1630, in the evening there arrived an animal called an Elephant, accompanied by eight or ten men, and it was taken to the Palace of the Priors in the council hall and there displayed, and a ticket was paid by everyone to see it, and both men and women came there.” What is amazing is the type of animal, not so much its presence inside the richly decorated hallways: for centuries, as the palace slowly fell into ruin (and until a formal prohibition was established in 1852), donkeys laden with wood, oil, wine or other goods would habitually be seen climbing up the stone stairway to the top floor.

The ground floor of the Palazzo was originally

used for furnaces and workshops. One of these stores was taken over in 1390 (in exchange for a donation of 1,500 *florini* for the building of the palace) by the Merchants' Guild, the Collegio della Mercanzia. The guild's symbol is still carved above the entrance. As far back as 1279, the Merchant's Guild is cited as one of the most powerful in town, and was certainly the most powerful of all from the fourteenth century onwards. Suffice it to say that of ten Priors ruling the city, two came from the Guild and that, in solemn ceremonies, members of the Guild walked just after the Podestà, the Capitano del Popolo and the Priors themselves. The Guild's emblem was a griffin standing above a wrapped package. Its interests extended from commerce, including settling disputes among merchants and establishing measurement units, to a certain degree of control over the city's administration and over public safety. In view of these extensive powers, from the Middle Ages onwards one of the areas of town where criminals could not be arrested, there being a right of asylum over them, was the Merchants' Guild at the corner with the arch of Via dei Priori (others included all churches, and a section of the Piazza Piccola).

Back on the street, to the left of the Arco dei Priori, there is a lovely portal, dated 1505, decorated with "numerous majolica panels, made in a workshop in Perugia, at the site now occupied by the shooting range in Borgo XX Giugno. Some are colored, some monochrome, some molded in the shape of heads or other decorations. In the center of the arch there is a Dantesque hooded bust" (R. Gigliarelli, 1907). This is the entrance to the Collegio del Cambio, the splendid offices of the Money-changers' Guild, painted in 1452-1456. Their symbol was a griffin standing over a coffer, as depicted on the stone next to the doorway, together with the words *Aere camporum proprio*, "with the coins of the money-exchangers." This was another major guild, first referred to in a document from 1259. Perugia was one of the first Italian cities to issue its own gold coinage and therefore an exchange was established very early. The Collegio del Cambio was also entrusted with mediating trade disputes and other similar economic matters.

The magnificent wooden carvings and painted decorations of these offices are sound enough proof of the power and wealth of the Cambio and of the

Mercanzia, to the point that these two came to be distinguished from the other guilds by being known as the "major arts," the *arti grosse*.

It was customary for such powerful associations to contribute heavily to the public and social life of the city, thereby influencing the policies of the Commune itself. Members of the guilds were registered on the *matricole*, elaborate parchments finely decorated with gold and miniatures. Nobles were first registered at the end of the 1300s, but soon came to dominate the major guilds, to a point when, in 1670, there were only noblemen in both guilds. The guilds were eventually shut down by the French imperial government, who commandeered the halls of the Merchants and Money-Changers for the Justices of the Peace.

As for the two doors opening to both sides of the Cambio, one led to the Church of San Giovanni di Piazza (of the Square) or Del Mercato (of the Market), anciently known as the Forum Church, being on the site of the old Roman forum (the same title was shared by Santa Maria del Mercato). The Church of San Giovanni belonged to the Cistercian order of Montelabate from 1110 onwards and later, from 1163, to the cathedral. It was established as a parish church as far back as 1285 and then demoted to chapel of the Money-Changers' Guild in 1506. The associations of Philosophers and Theologians began meeting here in 1627 (previously, their meetings were held in the Church of Santa Maria del Popolo, this after the demolition of Santa Maria dei Servi). Their rent was paid to the Guild yearly, and not in coins, but in precious wax.

The second door gave onto the Collegio dei Legisti, the Lawyers' Guild. It had previously employed the churches of Santa Maria del Popolo and of San Giovanni di Piazza for assemblies and meetings. They were given free use in exchange for paying for the construction of the beautiful wooden seats still to be seen in the Money-Changers' Guild.

Of the 42 guilds listed in the statutes from 1342, all the main ones (the Notaries, the Shoemakers, the Wool-Carders, the Tailors, the Blacksmiths, the Innkeepers and so on) had an *udienza* (an assembly hall) in the city center, many of which were torn down around 1437 to make room for the building of the cathedral. Other, smaller guilds would generally meet in churches

placed under their patronage (Santa Maria del Mercato, Santa Lucia in Sopramuro, etc.).

Having passed the City Hall, we continue walking along the Corso, which here looks more or less like a continuous, unbroken stone building (discreetly interrupted by narrow cross-roads) but is actually composed by a series of mostly private palaces and residences.

The first is Palazzo Alessandri Lippi, built in the seventeenth century by the Counts Lippi. During the nineteenth century it belonged to the Cutini and the Franceschini families and has been the headquarters of the Cassa di Risparmio di Perugia bank since 1909. The ground floor was occupied by two famous Cafés, the Falci and the Vitalesta (today's Bar Ferrari). Two narrow lanes ran between Palazzo Lippi and its neighbours: one was Vicolo dei Pentolini, representing the border between the *rione* of Porta Eburnea and Porta Santa Susanna. It divided Palazzo Lippi from Palazzo dei Priori, but was later covered over and then completely incorporated into the buildings above. The other alley was Via Scura, which is still walkable but is covered by a vault which forms part of the neighbouring Palazzo.

Next in Corso Vannucci are the two Graziani residences. The first one, designed by the architect Vignola, was built in the sixteenth century. It was later inherited by the noblemen of the Graziani

clan. The last living heir, Anna Graziani, left all her possessions to the Music Conservatory (which promptly took the name of Conservatorio Graziani), and the palace itself was sold to the Sereni family. In 1886 it was taken over by the Cassa di Risparmio and then, after undergoing complete renovations, sold to another bank, the Commerciale Italiana. "Part of the building was rented out in 1814 as post station lodgements, and four years later it was visited by the brother of the Russian Emperor who, wishing to witness in Perugia the same ardent fireplaces he was accustomed to in Moscow and Saint Petersburg, caused a serious fire and the destruction of two precious paintings" (R. Gigliarelli, 1907). Two months after the accident, the hotel was visited by Maria Luisa of Parma, wife of Charles IV of Spain. As with all the other noble palaces on the Corso, Palazzo Graziani had beautifully frescoed and furnished rooms.

The next palace, also designed by Vignola in the sixteenth century, is located where the Corso widens into Piazza della Repubblica. In the early eighteenth century, the palace had a small wooden theatre known as the "Golden Lion." It was replaced by a larger theater, also in wood (built between 1717 and 1723), below street level, on the site of the old "Jews' Inn." The enterprise was led by aristocratic Perugians, members of the



THE DOORS OF THE COLLEGIO DEL CAMBIO

“Noble Casino Academy.” It later changed its name to Accademia del Pavone (The Academy of the Peacock), whence the name of the theater. The Pavone was redesigned by Carattoli around 1765 and restored in 1831 and 1949. The ground floor was employed from 17 March 1822 onwards by the Accademia dei Filedoni or Conversation Rooms Society, an association founded in 1816 in Palazzo Anselmi. The group’s main objective appears to have been a permanent (intellectual) dispute with the noblemen of the Accademia del Pavone. In later times, the two somehow made peace and combined in a single entity, this time headquartered in Palazzo Graziani Monaldi.

The floor above was occupied by the “group known as ‘of the Newspapers’, because here were brought and read the most credited pieces of literary criticism written in various parts of Italy and to the other side of the Alps, the Association being connected to the Filedoni Society” (S. Siepi, 1822). The Pavone is more or less the far limit of the old Piazza Grande, nevertheless let us continue on listing the buildings which flank the main street all the way to Piazza Italia.

After Piazza della Repubblica (also known as Piazza del Corso) we find: Palazzo Patrizi, which used to belong to Atalanta Baglioni and housed the old “della Gran Bretagna” or “della Posta” hotel, previously in Via Papale and in Palazzo Graziani, respectively. Next comes Palazzo Montesperelli, formerly known as Ballerini, Moroni, and Monti, dating back to the seventeenth century. Then, the eighteenth-century Palazzo Ansidei, formerly belonging to Signorelli family and now home to the “La Rosetta” hotel and the Banca Toscana. On its façade facing Piazza Italia, one can see “a lovely portal, topped by a balcony held up by two ionic columns in grey granite, originally placed in the external ring of columns of the church of Sant’Angelo in Porta Sant’Angelo” (S. Siepi, 1822).

Retracing our steps back to the cathedral, we will now examine the other side of the Corso. It is much more fragmentary, interrupted by a number of cross-roads. These were no more than alleyways in the Middle Ages, but were turned into wide, straight lanes in the sixteenth century, all connecting the Corso to Piazza Matteotti.

The first building we encounter (on the corner of Piazza Italia) is the imposing Palazzo

Donini, built by the Donini clan between 1716 and 1724. The Doninis, whose older surname was Attolini and who came from Florence, but were of Venetian origin, acquired great prominence in Perugia thanks to a flourishing commerce of silk and velvet, as well as a series of marriages with the local aristocracy. In 1819, when the Imperial Court of Austria visited the city, this is where the Chancellor, Prince Metternich, stayed. Also in 1819, a store selling fine silks moved here from Piazza del Sopramuro, only to be replaced, in 1886, by Vittorio Ascoli’s textile warehouse. There being no heirs, the palace was later sold by the Donini family to the City of Perugia. It was used for a few years as the home of the university’s Department of Letters and Philosophy, and for the Etruscan and Roman Antiquities Museum. Today it is the seat of the Regional Council of Umbria. The entrance, as mentioned before, was originally at the ground floor. The steps leading up to it had to be built once the street level was lowered (in an effort to level the Corso).

The next building is the so-called “new” Donini palace (1780-1786), which was originally intended as an extension of the old one, until the City prohibited its owners from continuing construction operations in the same architectural style, probably in an effort to preserve the two chapels upon which the *palazzo* leans.

The other religious building facing Piazza della Repubblica was the Church of Sant’Isidoro, of which only the façade remains. For a long time, the inside rooms have been used for secular activities, including the headquarters of the Donini printers in the early twentieth century and, from 1940 onwards, a department store and then a clothing store. Of ancient origins, it was in all likelihood built over the ruins of a pagan temple. It was restored, in the sixteenth century (probably by Giulio Danti).

Documents mention a well placed somewhere in front of the church. “The well of Saint Anastasius rose above a major spring, but despite being called a well it was actually an underground spring, accessed by climbing down a spiral staircase running along the walls, similar to the Well of St. Patrick in Orvieto. On the bottom, according to legend, there were the two bronze Griffins and Lions, which were brought up to the surface

once a year, on the Feast of Saint Herculanus. Political and administrative reasoning dictated the commissioning of Arnolfo di Cambio to decorate the surface above the well which was connected to the palace of the mayor, taking as a model the Gaia fountain of Siena” (E. Casinini, 1983). The well—known as of Saint Anastasius from the name of an older church, now gone—was covered over and replaced with a fountain, designed by Arnolfo di Cambio in 1281, then torn down in the fourteenth century. Five fragments from this work are preserved in the National Gallery (Women at the Fountain, Crone at the Fountain, Sick Man at the Fountain, and Two Scribes) and there is mounting consent over Arnolfo di Cambio’s fountain being the original home of the bronze Griffin and Lion now housed in the Malconsiglio hallway of Palazzo dei Priori (the bronzes towering above the Sala dei Notari’s portal being copies).

According to fourteenth-century documents, the same area housed one of the most ancient and renowned hotels of the “auld land,” or town center, the “Hotel delle Chiavi” (Of the Keys). “The building placed between the end of the square and the palaces of the Baglioni clan is owned by various associates, illustrious members of the city oligarchy, and has been visited throughout the years by many illustrious guests [...] and by the Capitano del Popolo who established his main residence here at the end of the fourteenth century.” This move would have recreated, “albeit briefly, the semblance of a second seat of power, balancing the Priori’s palace at the far side of the Piazza Grande, as had been in the past with the presence here of the lodgings of the Justice of the Peace, later torn down to make room for a widening of the square itself” (P. Monacchia, 1987). This widening created space in a part of town which presented a double advantage: it was in the absolute center but, at the same time, did not have the same restrictions of the opposite side (Piazza IV Novembre), which was limited by the presence of major civic and religious buildings. Given these characteristics, the square was most suited to non-official events, especially the most colorful ones.

For example, around the end of the sixteenth century, great floats and parades were generally set up in this square. Here is an extract from Siepi’s rendition, inspired by chronicles from the time: “On

the Monday of Carnival, the night of 17 February 1586, a mock duel was held in the Piazza del Corso between Galeotto Baglioni and Ettore Graziani, the first going by the false name of Florindo, the second as Clorindo [...]. A Castle was erected, with admirable artistry, in the middle of the square [...]. Moments later a contraption shaped like a huge Rock was seen coming from the side of the Citadel, and none could see how it moved. On the top sat a maiden who pretended to guide it by the grace of her magical arts. Around the machine, twenty men dressed up as cyclops carried lit torches. Once the Rock reached the square, in front of the fake castle, the Damsel sung a few lines and her song was followed by the sounding of battle drums. Then the Nymph touched the rock with a scepter she held in her hands and out came a burst of fireworks, which exploded in the air with great racket. Next, the Rock itself opened and out came three Knights [...] in full armor, all gilded and decorated with crystal ornaments, with red velvet boots and mantles trimmed in silver, wearing helmets topped with high plumes [...].

At the same time, from the same side of the Citadel there appeared a magnificent carriage, abundantly decorated, representing the Chariot of Venus. It was led by two great Swans, made with such great artistry and so resemblant to nature that they could move their heads and necks, beat their wings and looked like they were real. The chariot was driven by a youth dressed up as Cupid [...]. Another chariot appeared, coming this time from Piazza del cathedral. It was led by two Griffins, also life-like in size and the charioteer was a man symbolising the river Tiber [...]; within was a seated woman on a throne representing Perugia [...]. With her came five Knights [...]. As those Knights represented the five parts of the City, so their precious garments and the plumes on their helmets were of the colors known to represent said *rioni*. [...]

Finally, from afar a wide and beautiful garden appeared. It was made of plants, herbs and flowers arranged symmetrically and made in silk with such industry that it looked like art had surpassed nature. In the middle was a fountain which juttred water from various places to a basin below...” (S. Siepi, 1994). As well as having amazing special effects, these performances were enlivened by a vast

number of “extras” in full costume who surrounded the main actors, usually selected from amongst the various noble families.

Returning to our route, we are now between Piazza della Repubblica and the Corso, where we find Palazzo Baldeschi, built, as is clear from its irregular appearance, in many stages between the fourteenth and the seventeenth centuries.

Between Via Mazzini and Via Fani stands Palazzo Ajò (previously belonging to the Della Corgna family), restored in 1917, as a plaque in Via Fani tells us. In the same year, the interiors of some of the halls on the ground floor were decorated in Neo-Gothic style. Note high up above street level a projecting band of stone running along the building: it emphasizes the junction between floors, here decorated with animal heads and human faces. During a most interesting part of its history (in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), the building housed the stores of some members of the small Perugian Jewish community (including the Veneziano and Servadio shops), to which the Ajò family belonged. Today, it is the headquarters of the Banca Popolare di Spoleto.

After the corner with Via Fani we find Palazzo Capocci, built in 1361 by Cardinal Nicolò Capocci, a student of the *giureconsulti* (or legal advisors), Baldo and Bartolo. The palace was for a time headquarters of the Collegio della Sapienza, founded by a cardinal, before it moved to a more permanent home in the quieter Via della Cupa.

The building was popular as a provisional headquarters: in 1370 it was thus employed by the three War Deputies; in 1375 by the Priors, exiled for a few months from their own palace by the not-particularly-friendly Abbot of Monmaggiore; in 1388 by the Capitano del Popolo; in 1392 by the Priors again, who this time had graciously lent their palace to Pope Boniface IX during his stay in Perugia (at the time, a bridge was built to connect the two palaces, which face each other). Later, it was used as lodgings for various public authorities. In the sixteenth century, the palace was bought by the Alfani family, then by the Della Staffa and by the Conestabile. In 1830, it became property of the Vajani family, and is now divided in various business and residential spaces. The floors are connected by a lovely covered stairwell, which can be seen from Via del Forno. Next to this palace is

the fifteenth-century Palazzetto dei Notari, the Notary Guild’s headquarters. Their symbol—a griffin with an inkwell and two pens—presides over the entrance. It became property of this Guild in 1446, following the demolition of their previous meeting place to make room for an enlargement of the cathedral. The Notaries occupied this building until they took over the hall by the same name in Palazzo dei Priori, but they used the Palazzetto until the end of the eighteenth century. During the French occupation, on the other hand, they had to relinquish both, as the Sala dei Notari had been commandeered as headquarters for the “Criminal Courts.” In 1778, the Palazzetto housed the famous Baduel printers, coming after a similar business by the name of Tipografia Verga. The façade, which looks like a part is missing, was in fact cut in two in 1591 to make way for the opening of Via Pinella, today’s Via Calderini.

As far back as the Middle Ages, a certain decorum has always been required of events to be held in the Piazza Grande, with particular reference to the area between the City Hall and the cathedral, with strict rules applied to games and festivals held here.

From the city *Statutes* of 1342, for example, we can read of the rules applied to commerce: spices could be sold here and (on market days) shoemakers could set up their trade, but the area was forbidden to rope-makers, fur-sellers, tanners, saddle-makers, and vendors of animals or hay.

The site was also venue for the main fair in Perugia (and, for a time in the Middle Ages, one of the main fairs in all of central Italy) the “Fiera di Ognissanti,” the All-Saints’ Fair. It was also known, from 1821 onwards, as the “Fiera di Morti,” the Fair of the Dead. It was always held around these two religious holidays (the first and second of November), which is obviously the best time of the year to hold trade fairs in an agricultural society, when the harvest is finished and winter is yet to begin. Overall, the fair could last any time from two weeks to an entire month. The oldest document we have on the subject is dated 8 October 1273, when the Council decreed that the market should last fifteen days before and fifteen days after All Saints’ Day. A fair lasting a month was not an exceptional occurrence for the era, but it does prove the importance of the event.

Throughout the centuries, the duration of the fair varied greatly, but a cancellation was a rare instance indeed, and happened only in case of grave pestilences and during the French occupation. In the *Statutes* of 1279, Piazza Grande is named as the main site for the fair, and Borgo San Pietro for the animal market. The same document also lists rules related to the appropriate locations for the various stalls.

Until 1958 the main piazza was the site of the Fiera dei Morti, which was an unmissable event for any Perugian. After that date, the Fiera was shifted around to various sites: first Corso Cavour and Borgo XX Giugno, then the cattle market of Borghetto di Prepo (1969-1970), Via Ripa di Meana (1971-1972), and finally moved to Pian di Massiano, where it takes place today.

During the fair, other events and games took place in town: one was the Bull Hunt in Campo di Battaglia. At some point, this apparently took place in the main square itself, as a plaque dated 1790 (now in the cathedral's cloister), prohibits the show from taking place directly in front of the cathedral. Another was the Ring Tournament in the center of the square: knights on horseback would attempt to spear rings with their lances). Lastly there was a Palio, or horse-race, along the Corso. For this competition, the prizes were originally a silk or velvet *palio* (i.e. a precious decorated cloth) for the winner, a hunting falcon for the runner-up, a *porchetta* (the ubiquitous Perugian stuffed pork roast) and a basket of bread for the third, but more precious prizes were offered in later times.

## PIAZZA GRIMANA

*Facing the Etruscan Arch*

Previously known as Pianello del Borgo.

Currently known as Piazza Fortebraccio.

Although the name was officially changed in 1871 (first to Piazza dell'Arco Etrusco, Etruscan Arch Square, then to Piazza Fortebraccio), the Perugians (and foreign "temporary citizens") still call it Piazza Grimana.

Cardinal Marino Grimani (Venice c.1488-Rome 1546), papal legate to Perugia from 1535, decided a year after his appointment to restore this area. The square was at that time divided by a deep ditch, and Borgo Sant'Angelo could only be reached from the old city by ways of a bridge. The

Cardinal had the ditch filled, and improved with new buildings the first part of the road going up to the Borgo (today's Corso Garibaldi).

Nevertheless, the square was of little interest until the eighteenth century, with the building of the imposing Gallenga Stuart palace between 1740 and 1758, on a commission by the Antinori family. The palace was designed by the Roman architect Francesco Bianchi, with Pietro Carattoli as head of building operations. Later, it was owned by the Gallenga Stuart family and, in 1926, Romeo Gallenga donated it to the city at the condition that it be used for educational purposes. This led to the founding of the Italian University for Foreigners, which initially bore the more cumbersome name of "National Institute for Secondary Education, Specialized Structure." The idea came from Astorre Lupattelli, former tutor of the Gallenga family, who had begun organizing courses in Italian language and culture in 1921, using the halls of the main university and the Sala dei Notari.

For years, the back part of the building remained unfinished, until it was enlarged and completed in 1938 thanks to a healthy donation (\$100,000 in 1931) by the American Count Frederic Thorne Rieder, alumnus of the school and honorary citizen of Perugia.

The square was further worked on in the 1900s: first of all, the houses hugging the side towers of the Arch were demolished (traces can still be seen where the rooftops touched the ancient stones) then, in 1906, Via Battisti was opened (then called Via Nuova), providing new access to the area. In 1939, a group of houses known as "La Spina," which used to occupy the area now covered by trees and a basket-ball court, was torn down. The initial project called for some building to complement the mass of the Stranieri, but the Second World War disrupted plans, and after that it was turned into a public garden.

The name "Spina" may have derived from the "House of Monte Spinello," a school for poor girls, opened here in 1819. It started in a "house known as the Holy Monte Spinello, having belonged to Sebastiano Spinelli, who in his will left a sum to be given as dowry to poor girls of the area of San Fortunato by instituting a Monte di Pietà (basically, an institutionalized pawnbroker)" (S. Siepi, 1822).