

Maria Rita Zappelli



HOME STREET HOME

- Perugia's history told through its streets -

Morlacchi Editore

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the two principal open spaces of the city, until then characterized by slovenly buildings. These works included the creation of Via Nuova (Via Mazzini) and Via Pinella (Via Calderini).

Between Via Nuova and Via della Chiavica stood the Meniconi building that hosted in 1514 the mint and from 1623 the civic library. Next to it was the fish market, built in 1787. Because of its neoclassical façade it was referred to ironically by Perugians as the “Temple of Carp.” In 1911, these two buildings were demolished to make way for the postal building designed by O. Armanni. The windows are the work of Lodovico Caselli Moretti of the illustrious family of glaziers while the decorative griffins in bronze outside the building are by the sculptor Giuseppe Frenguelli, a noted artist of the period. In the 1600s there was a fine fountain in front of the entrance to the university, at the beginning of Via Nuova

In April 1810, in front of the palace of the Captain of the People, a column was erected with a weather vane at the top. “The reason for the erection of this column was the frequent flooding of the piazza due to a lack capacity in the drain openings that led to the sewers below: hence under the pedestal of the column one can see a drain that takes water from all directions and sends it down a large hole underneath. The new law promulgated by the French government that provided for public illumination at city expense gave rise to a lantern atop the column” (S. Siepi, 1822). Previously, the only form of illumination on the streets had been devotional candles placed in front of sacred images. “Citizens were forbidden to go out at night after the third bell; and, if necessity required them to go out, they had to bring their own light” (R. Gigliarelli, 1907).

The Sopramuro column, which had come from Sant’Angelo, was returned to its original location in 1887 and now stands on the grass in front of the temple. In the same year the canopy was removed from along the tribunal, the fountain was replaced by a monument to Giuseppe Garibaldi (crafted by Cesare Zocchi), and the piazza repaved. The statue remained there until 1931, when it was moved to its present location at Largo Cacciatori delle Alpi.

The piazza was first paved in 1424-1425 with bricks, according to Graziani, that came from the

demolition of the keeps of Sant’Antonio and San Matteo.” The stones of the aforesaid keeps were donated by the community to the brothers of San Domenico to embellish the church while the bricks were brought in to pave the Sopramuro” which was “lightly paved as far as the Campione, then paved over in herring-bone style with the new bricks.”

VIA DELLA SPADA *Sword Street*

Sidestreet of Corso Garibaldi

Various sword-makers lived in the area of Porta Sant’Angelo, traditionally home to many craftsmen, and this was probably where they had their workshops. A winged sword is also one of the symbols of this *borgo*, as it is placed under the protection of Saint Michael, the warrior Archangel.

VIA DELLA SPINA *Thorn Street*

Sidestreet of Corso Garibaldi

Gigliarelli describes it as “small, rather dark; at the end there is a fifteenth-century doorway.”

Just below it, around piazza Fortebraccio, there used to be a group of old houses, known as *la Spina*, demolished in 1939. It was the seat of the charity institute, “The House of Mount Spinello” from the name of its founder (see *PIAZZA GRIMANA*).

VIA DELLA SPOSA *Bride Street*

Porta Trasimena → Porta Santa Susanna

Gigliarelli recalls an event that occurred in 1351: a certain Marta di Giapeco who lived near the Church of Santa Mustiola and who ardently loved a man named Armanno. One day, apparently without any reason, he abandoned her. She became gravely ill and a rumor spread that she had been put under a spell by a certain Luminuccia. After the intervention of the priest of Sant’Andrea on the feast day of the Madonna of Monteluca, this Armanno returned. Though Marta was on her death bed, she made a rapid recovery. On the day of their wedding the bride, much celebrated, walked along the street.

Speaking of magic, the crossroads at the top of the street, below the Trasimeno Gate, had (as with other crossroads like Porta Pesa, Piazza Grimana

and Tre Archi) the dubious honor of being considered a place of bad luck because “enchanted” objects were brought here to be burned. Moving down the street, on the left are two buildings with eaves decorated in Art Nouveau style. The second has three designs in ceramics with the following sentences: “War is barbarity,” “Work is happiness” and “Peace is civility.”

VIA DELLE STREGHE *Witches Street*

Piazza della Repubblica → Via Larga

Previously Via Mattonella.

It begins beside the Pavone theater, which has a security exit onto this street.

“It is so tortuous that one can believe it was once inhabited by witches and fortune-tellers who, claiming their powers to be of divine origin, were entrusted with knowing the sex of a baby in the womb, the sincerity of a lover and the cause of an illness. But there was no shortage of evil witches: the first woman burned to death for witchcraft was Matteuccia da Ripabianca of Deruta in 1304” (*Guide Electa – Perugia*, 1993). Siepi, speaking about the Campo Battaglia, cites sources which note that in 1445 another woman burned for witchcraft was “a certain Santuccia of Nocera, brought here upon an ass to be tortured, with her facing the animal’s tail and with a miter bearing an image of two demons placed upon her head.”

In the Middle Ages in Perugia, there were many trials for witchcraft, a sign that it was much practiced (not that today it is not). Punishment of “witches” varied depending on their deeds but was based on the chapter “De Maleficiis” in the *Statute* of 1342 which recommends flogging through the streets of the city, the payment of 400 *libbre*, and burning at the stake.

VIA DELLO STRUZZO *Ostrich Street*

Via Baglioni → Via Baldo

It is said the street takes its name from an ostrich given by Ludwig I of Bavaria to his beloved marquise Marianna Fiorenzi. The animal was kept in a kind of hanging garden attached to her residence right above this street. In centuries past it was a quirk of noble families to keep exotic animals.

VIA TEDESCA *German Street*

Corso Garibaldi → Via Lupatelli

There are numerous references as to the presence of Germans in Perugia from the fourteenth century onwards. Among the foreign students (the so-called *ultramontane*, “those from beyond the mountains”) who frequented our university, Germans were the largest group and a few were even lecturers.

Though there is no objective proof, the name of this street appears to be linked to a local colony of Germans who printed and sold books and paintings. Perugia was one of the first (around 1471) Italian cities to commence printing under the guidance of German typographers. “Braccio Baglioni brought Pieter of Cologne and Johannes of Bamberg to Perugia, and with them and his local partners founded a typographic company in one of his houses” (L. Bonazzi, 1879). Still in the 1400s, after the Tuscans, the Germans made up the majority of the proprietors of taverns, hotels, and brothels in the city.

With regards to the more recent German presence here, one learns that in the first half of the 1800s there was a wave of German painters, poets and historians who passed and stopped by Perugia. The city was a stop in their cultural pilgrimage through Italian cities, a journey (called “the Grand Tour”) that was considered obligatory once they had completed studies in their respective universities. It seems, however, that these people had a certain predilection for the San Francesco al Prato area.

VIA DEL TEMPIO *Temple Street*

Sidestreet of Corso Garibaldi

This street is so named as it leads to the temple of Sant’Angelo, a rare example in Perugia of a church with a circular design (along with the Church of Sant’Ercolano and the now-gone San Giovanni Rotondo).

In a cavalier legend of the fourteenth century (*Conto di Corciano e di Perugia*), it was narrated that the church was constructed as a pavilion. It was built on the place where Orlando camped when he came to Perugia, instructed by an angel to liberate it from a pagan overlord and to set the imprisoned Olivieri free. Olivieri was said to have then donated