

Maria Rita Zappelli



HOME STREET HOME

- Perugia's history told through its streets -

Morlacchi Editore

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By *Maria Rita Zappelli*

Translated by *Deborah Rim Moiso*
& *Alan Whykes*

Edited by *Zachary Nowak*

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toponym that in fact appears in a document from 1073 (found in the archives of the Abbey of Montelabate).

Gigliarelli recalls this part of the city as a “preferred place of relaxation of the Perugian nobility and of the principal authorities, at one time abundant in greenery.” Probably in the summer, as in the winter the north wind is very stiff here (as in the nearby Via dell’Aquilone), and a Perugian saying goes: *Se vuoi patir le pene d’inferno, Borgna (o Cupa) l’estate e Verzaro d’inverno* (If you wish a taste of Hell’s fury, Borgna (or Cupa) in the summer and Verzaro in the winter).

At number 3, we can make out a tower that surpasses the contiguous buildings in height. It has preserved, at ground level, its very narrow entrance. “Although we have no clear indications, it is possible to conjecture that it belonged to the noble family Montemellini, as we know that they possessed a complex fortified with towers in the Verzaro area” (F.I. Nucciarelli, 1989). Mottoes can be found on the lintels of various doors. At number 35: *Qui se exaltat se umiliat* (“He who praises himself shames himself”); at number 49: *Omne datum optimum et omne perfectum. Deus sursum est a presentia luminum* (“All was created good and perfect. God is at the luminous summit”); at number 53: *Johannes Antonius de iudicibus de Nizzaliar; civis perusinus sibi amicisque paravit* (“Giovanni Antonio of the judges [guild?] of Nizzaliar, Perugian citizen, had this house built for himself and his friends.”).

Via del Verzaro retains many other memories of the past whose traces are visible on its buildings, even though it has been adversely affected by major renovations in the area of university buildings. “In the centuries preceding the seventeenth century, there was within this parish a quarter known as La Cartoleria (the Stationer), as here there was a factory producing parchment ” (S. Siepi, 1994).

PIAZZA DEL VESCOVATO Square of the Bishopry

Via della Gabbia → Via Maestà delle Volte

Today Piazza IV Novembre.

This was the name of the area between the bishop’s residence (see *PIAZZA DEL COMUNE*) and the Fontana Maggiore, while the area in front of the cathedral,

on the other side of the fountain, was called Piazza San Lorenzo. The two denominations were reunited in 1871 under the title of Piazza del Municipio.

VIA VIBI

Corso Cavour → Via Podiani

It was so named because it was the residence of the Vibi family, gentlemen from Montevibiano and Montecastello Vibio, among whom were several celebrated jurists. The palace here then passed to the Della Pennas, then later to the Opera Pia della Penna Ricci and today belongs to the city of Perugia. The Vibis were said to be descendants of Vibio Treboniano Gallo, Roman emperor from 251 to 253 c.e. He was of Perugian origin and gave the city the title of “colony” (creating a closer relationship with Rome). This is evident from the *Colonia Vibia* inscription on the Marzia Gate. Inside the aforementioned building are some remains from an ancient Roman amphitheater.

In the 1800s, the precious collection of the Della Penna family (in the fifteenth century the Arcipreti clan had acquired the Penna name, along with its castle) was well known. The collection, rich in paintings by great artists, was broken up upon the sale of the building (1875). Almost as if continuing a tradition, today the building hosts the Museum of Modern Art. Where the street curves is a medieval gate called, variously, Dei Funari, Dei Vibi or Dei Della Penna. The gate appears “sunken,” due to the raising of the street level outside the walls.

VIA DELLA VIOLA Violet Street

Via Alessi → Piazzetta del Duca

One of the names little appreciated by Gigliarelli, he wrote: “the fragrant name possibly has its origins in a vase of violets (here in the popular parlance almost any vase of flowers was called a *testaccia*), spotted accidentally by one Romeo of 1810 at the window of an elusive Juliet. The vase was wedged in a ring of steel, or placed on a window ledge behind a railing, or free in a stone pot sticking out from the wall.” And this is how he described the street: “All nooks and contortions, it’s so narrow that it’s impassable by carriage without the likelihood of

having to retreat, making the horse shy: small, but an important artery in the vital ring around lower Perugia, it is much frequented...” Thus we know therefore that even in the 1800s the old town center had traffic problems!

At the beginning of Via della Viola was the convent of San Fiorenzo (see *VIA SAN FIORENZO*), transformed, after the unification of Italy, into a school building. Today it is home to various social services as well as a pizzeria, which was previously the jazz pub “Drink’s House.”

PIAZZA VITTORIO EMANUELE II

Between Corso Vannucci, Via Baglioni and Viale Indipendenza

Previously Piazza del Colle Landone, Piazza Rivarola, Piazza Napoleon Bonaparte, and again Piazza Rivarola.

Today Piazza Italia.

It was named in honor of the first king of Italy after national unification. Victor Emmanuel II (Turin 1820-1878), son of Charles Albert of Savoy and King of Sardinia, was crowned the first king of Italy (title assumed 17 March 1861). Under his reign, the process of “unification” continued with the annexation of Veneto (1866) and Rome (1870).

The piazza was inaugurated on 2 June 1861, while the equestrian monument of the king (erected in the center of the gardens) was inaugurated on 14 September 1890 in the presence of Umberto I. “Of the old kings, the only one to survive in commemoration, thanks to his title of ‘father of the nation,’ is Victor Emmanuel II. Though not with a street or a piazza, he keeps his monument. His father Charles Alberto, however, disappeared completely, and became Viale Indipendenza. His son, Umberto I, did even worse: his piazza became that of the Republic” (D. Magnini, 1974). To this we say: *Sic semper tyrannis*.

Before the gardens were established and the monument located there, this piazza several times hosted the circus. It was known at the time as “The Great Caravanserai.” One year there was also “The Cabinet of Maritime Curios,” which exhibited, among other things, a twelve-meter-long embalmed whale. These travelling zoos generated an enormous amount of curiosity and the people, not used to exotic voyages and television documentaries, rushed en masse to see them.

In 1873, eighteen gas candelabras were installed; two survive beside the entrance to the Prefecture.

VIA DELLA VOLPE Fox Street

Via Pinturicchio → Via Scoscesa

Frezzini describes it so: “It opens into a black vault, then as one ascends to the right are the rear walls of the houses that face the main street (Pinturicchio), to the left the supporting wall of the gardens that abut the foundations of the old Fortress of Porta Sole.” Siepi locates the entrance to an underground passageway, perhaps dating from the epoch of the abbot’s fortress, in the basement of a house in this street.

VIA VOLTE DELLA PACE Vaults of Peace Street

Piazza Matteotti → Via Bontempi

Previously Via delle Stalle.

This street, which goes back to the fourteenth century, traces exactly a curving section of the Etruscan walls. They ran in this area from a long-vanished gate that stood at the beginning of Via Alessi and the archway in Via Bontempi. It was originally a long, wide portico with windows that looked out over Via dei Calderari (now Via Alessi) with a panorama towards the east.