



The Florence of Dante



Dante Alighieri (Florence, 1265 - Ravenna, 1321) is universally known as the author of the Divine Comedy, a poem written in terza rima in the vernacular language of his time, divided into Inferno, Purgatorio and Paradiso. For its grandeur of construction, its power and variety of form, and its immense richness of expression, the Divine Comedy is acknowledged as one of the supreme masterpieces of world literature. In Florence we find buildings that were familiar to Dante, and works of art that celebrate his memory.

This itinerary takes us through the heart of ancient Florentia, starting from the Baptistery of San Giovanni, where Dante was christened and where he hoped in vain to receive the poet's crown he knew to be his due (Par. xxv, 1-9). Inside the Cathedral there is a painting by Domenico di Michelino showing Dante illuminating Florence with his Poem (1465), and outside it there is the "Sasso di Dante", from which the poet is supposed to have observed the construction of the Cathedral (begun in 1296). From the Via Proconcolo we reach the Corso, site the old Porta San Piero, and pass the houses of the Portinari, where Dante's beloved Beatrice lived (cf. La Vita Nuova and Pur. xxx, 31-33).

We continue beneath the arch of Via Santa Margherita and come first to Dante's Church and then to the so called "House of Dante", a small museum illustrating the poet's life and work. In the small square there is a marble plaque listing the monuments existing in Dante's day, such as the Torre della Castagna, used by the Priors of the Guilds, and the Badia, where the Marchese Ugo of Tuscany lies buried (cf. Par. xvi, 127-130).

Nearby stands the imposing mass of the Palazzo del Bargello, built in 1255 for the Captain of the People, and later used as the castle of the Podestà. It was here that Dante's banishment for Florence was proclaimed. In the chapel on the first floor, a fresco attributed to Giotto has a portrait of Dante, standing among the Elect in Paradise. We proceed eastwards towards the Franciscan church of Santa Croce (1294), which has a large statue of Dante (1865) by Enrico Pezzi on the steps outside.

Inside the church the cenotaph to the "Altissimo Poeta" is by Stefano Ricci (1829). We continue along Borgo Santa Croce, with the old tower houses of the Alberti, along Via de' Neri and Via della Ninna to the Palazzo dei Priori (later known as Palazzo Vecchio, 1299), which stands beside the Romanesque church of San Pier Scheraggio (later incorporated into the Uffizi), where Dante took part in city assemblies.



of Piazza Signoria was recalled by Dante as the site of the houses of the Ghibelline Uberti, which were demolished after the triumph of the Guelfs. We proceed along the Chiasso Baroncelli, Via Lambertesca and Via Por Santa Maria (rebuilt after the second world war), and come to the Ponte Vecchio (1345). Nearby is the Tower of the Amidei, associated with the famous incident of the murder of Buondelmonte (cf. Par. xvi, 136).

We walk westward along Borgo Santi Apostoli, passing the Piazzetta del Limbo with the church of the Santi Apostoli (11th century), and the Palazzo Spini (13th century), to reach the Piazza Santa Trinita. Inside the church of the same name, Dante would have known Cimabue's Madonna and Child, which is now in the Uffizi. By the Via Tornabuoni we reach the church of Santa Maria Maggiore, where Dante's teacher Brunetto Latini lies buried (cf. Inf. xv, 82-85). Finally we visit the church of Santa Maria Novella, to admire the great Crucifix painted by Giotto, and the frescoes by Nardo di Cione in the Strozzi Chapel, which show Paradise and Hell (1350-57) according to Dante's schemes.

Places related to Dante in Florence:

Baptistery of San Giovanni, piazza San Giovanni
Cathedral of Santa Maria Del Fiore, piazza del Duomo
“House of Dante”, 1, via Santa Margherita
Church of Badia Fiorentina, via Dante Alighieri
Bargello Palace and National Museum, 4, via del Proconsolo
Church of Santa Croce, piazza Santa Croce
Palazzo Vecchio, piazza della Signoria
Palazzo Spini, piazza Santa Trinita
Church of Santa Maria Maggiore, 1, vicolo di Santa Maria Maggiore
Church of Santa Maria Novella, piazza Santa Maria Novella