

OUR HISTORY. AN EXCITING EXPERIENCE.

ART AND RELIGION

A past of art and worship: St. Michael's Church

In 1517, Pope Leo X made a gift of the church to the congregation of priests of the "Visitation" and its name was changed once again into the "Church of the Visitation". A terracotta relief "Visitation" from the workshop of Giovanni della Robbia was installed in the facade above the portal.

The building had already been home for many years of another "Visitation", this one by Mariotto Albertinelli dated

1503, which is now exhibited in the Uffizi with its predella. In 1729 the church was comprehensively renovated in Baroque style.

Subsequently, in 1785, the parish was suppressed and the building became a simple home. All the works of art were destroyed or lost, with the exception of the painting the "Visitation", which is on display in the Uffizi today.

AT THE DAWN OF HISTORY

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The Pagliazza Tower, whose uncertain origins date back to between the sixth and seventh centuries, is the oldest building still standing in the historical centre of Florence, in the very heart of the city and just a stone's throw from the Duomo. According to some theories, the Tower was built by the Byzantines during the Gothic War as part of the city walls. According to others, it was built a century later by the Lombards simply as a tower-shaped home. In the twelfth century it began to be used as a women's prison, which is why it came to be known as the

"Pagliazza" (from 'paglia', the Italian word for straw), because of the straw bedding used by the inmates. At a later date, St. Michael's Church was built near the tower and then renovated in Romanesque style, in about 1100, by the Nuns of St. Ambrose, to whom it had been donated. In 1450, the church took on the name St. Michael of the Trumpets following the unusual decision taken in 1390 that obliged the municipal trumpeters to live in the old parish church.

OBLIVION

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In the eighteenth century, following the widening of Via de' Calzaiuoli, the holy building's walls were incorporated into a big urban block that also contained the remains of another ancient church, Santa Maria Nipotecosa.

The Pagliazza Tower and St. Michael's Church area, divided into three floors, was occupied by the modest Giglio hotel, which looked out onto what today

is Piazza Santa Elisabetta. The same block was also home to the "Massimo D'Azeglio" hotel on Via delle Oche and the "Stella d'Italia-San Marco" hotel in Via de' Calzaiuoli.

One by one, the three hotels closed for business and for many years the buildings were forgotten, along with their treasures.

The return to its former glory and the recovery of the Roman caldarium

In 1980 the Istituto Nazionale delle Assicurazioni [National Institute of Insurers] decided to restore the entire hotel complex and uncover the relics of its past. Architect Italo Gamberini had the idea of liberating the Pagliazza Tower from the superstructures behind which it had been almost entirely hidden, in a project that uncovered the ancient Lombard walls and gave Florence back a piece of its history.

Subsequently, studies performed by the local authorities led to the recovery of a caldarium too, which originally formed part of the Roman spa in the buildings' cellars. This is why a museum has been created inside the hotel to exhibit the carefully restored archaeological finds and extensive photographic

documentation. The ceramics found in excavations in the tower area are truly remarkable. In addition to a few Roman fragments, the showcases contain articles from the medieval period and a valuable collection of Renaissance pieces, most of which attributable to Montelupo: compendiario" style plates decorated with landscapes, animal figures and polychromatic circles, plus a series of "harlequins" from the first half of the 17th century.

This makes the Hotel Brunelleschi, which is named after the district where Filippo Brunelleschi lived, both a prestigious hotel and a point of cultural reference not only for its guests, but for the city as a whole.

SPLENDOURS OF THE PAST



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