

Mysterious Places in Florence and Surroundings

It is a well-known fact that for a long time Brunelleschi's Dome of the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore was the largest ever built – the inner shell has a diameter of 45 metres, while the outer one is 54 m – , but what few people know is that on the left-hand cornice of one of the chapels situated around the dome, an ox was carved in honour of the animals that contributed to the construction of the building! Near the entrance Porta della Mandorla (Almond Door), you will see, watching up, the head of this ox, that is quite a strange decoration, especially for a church.



There is another romantic and spicy legend on it. During the construction of Brunelleschi's Dome (1419–1436) were erected wooden structures in this side of the complex, in front of the actual Via dei Servi, and in one of these forstanding houses lived a pretty young seamstress, who often spent time on the terrace overlooking the dome, or more probably her lover, who worked there and built the bovine head to mock her husband forever.

This is the story of another stone-head, that of the so-called Berta. Way back in the 13th century there was a poor cabbage-seller named Berta. She did not have a husband or children and lived alone. Very poor and devoutly religious, she was a well-known figure in the neighbourhood. She decided to leave her savings to the monks of Santa Maria Maggiore, asking them to cast a bell for the belltower and to ring it every day at dusk to warn the peasants in the fields to get back inside the city walls before the gates shut for the night. As a gesture of thanks, the inhabitants of the quarter decided to get the monks to carve a marble head on the bell-tower of Santa Maria Maggiore.



Looking onto Piazza della Santissima Annunziata is Palazzo Budini-Gattai, formerly Palazzo Grifoni. The last window at the top on the second floor is always ajar, as if someone from inside can always look out without being seen. Legend has it that several centuries ago a young woman married a Grifoni, with

whom she had fallen madly in love, and, as was the custom, she moved into the palace. But their happiness did not last long, because soon afterwards the young nobleman went off to war and the woman remained at home to wait for him, doing her embroidery while sitting on a stone bench in the room near the window. She spent all her days there until her death. When they came to take away her body and tried to close the window, the objects in the room were sucked up into a whirlwind, the doors started slamming, books flew through the air and paintings crashed to the floor. From then on no one was ever able to shut that window.



There is a magical place just outside the town, on the hills above Grassano, the name is Fonte della Fata Morgana or Fonte delle Fate, that is Morgana's Source or Fairies Source. It was the rich owner Bernardo Vecchietti who wanted the fountain in the grounds of his summer villa. The author is Giambologna, who built it 1574 in full Mannerism style. The complex is now owned by the local administration in Bagno a Ripoli, that restored it in 2003. The legend says that the properties of this source are immortality and youth. There are also stories of apparitions of beautiful women, nymphs and fairies. The place was mentioned by Vasari in his masterpiece "Vite" (Lives), as it can be seen as one of the most original example of garden architecture.

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