



For centuries it was a splendid backdrop to the lives of
great Florentine families

Merchants, princes and poets. A stroll through through the history and curiosities of Palazzo Portinari Salviati

*The encounter between Dante and Beatrice, the secret love of
Frederick IV of Denmark and Maddalena and the lost grotto
dedicated to the sea*

More than seven centuries have passed since the foundation of the Portinari family's houses, which at the end of the thirteenth century overlooked Por San Piero, and today's inauguration of the restored Palazzo Portinari Salviati. Centuries in which the rooms, loggias and chapel of the Florentine building have provided the magnificent setting for stories and great figures, such as the Prince of Denmark and his secret love for a noblewoman from Lucca, and even earlier, at the time of the Portinari, the place where Dante and Beatrice met.

The encounter between Dante and Beatrice - Folco Portinari, Beatrice's father and founder of the Spedale di Santa Maria Nuova, in the heart of a city that was still medieval, owned houses and shops along with his family in a vast area between Via del Corso in Por San Piero and Via dello Studio. It was here that Dante and Beatrice would meet for the first time. According to Boccaccio, Messer Folco celebrated Calendimaggio (May Day) in 1274 by inviting some of his fellow citizens to a banquet, and one of the guests was Dante's father. The poet himself, who was nine years old at the time, recounts the meeting in *La Vita Nova*, giving us the image of a young girl whose "dress, on that day, was of a most noble colour, a subdued and goodly crimson, girdled and adorned in such sort as best suited with her very tender age".

The fifteenth-century palazzo of the Portinari family - It was the heirs of Folco, merchants linked to the Medici fortune, who built the *palazzo*, demolishing part of the earlier houses. At the end of the fifteenth century Florence was one huge building site: palaces with wide staircases and elegant loggias were taking the place of the medieval tower-houses, and the Portinari properties, a stone's throw from the Duomo, were also involved in the transformation of the city. The brothers Pigello, Acerrito and Tommaso, orphaned at a very young age, managed in a few years to accumulate



sufficient wealth to design the 'new house', the *palazzo* that was built between 1470 and 1480 and that included the first courtyard with its magnificent loggia, the ground floor rooms, but most probably also the upper floor.

At the centre of the courtyard towered the statue of Cosimo I, which is still preserved in the building today, while the inscription on the base, which unfortunately no longer exists, hints at Cosimo's regular visits to the *palazzo* as a child.

The home, treasure chest of the Salviati family - Unfortunately, in the early sixteenth century, the fortunes of the Portinari family faded and in 1530 the *palazzo* passed to the Spedale di Santa Maria Nuova. In 1546, it returned to the hands of a great and noble Florentine family, the Salviati, who enlarged it and turned it into a treasure trove. Iacopo Salviati had the busts of twelve Roman emperors made for the courtyard known as the Emperor's Courtyard and commissioned Alessandro Allori, Bronzino's adopted son, to decorate the loggia and the Chapel dedicated to Saint Mary Magdalene.

Among the marvels Allori had designed was a grotto that was mentioned by contemporaries: it is now lost, but was once decorated with maritime motifs and encrusted with sponges, mother-of-pearl, snails and precious corals. The rooms of the building housed a veritable museum, a collection of all the best Florentine schools of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, from Andrea Del Sarto and Donatello to Giambologna and Ammannati.

The prince and the nun - During the seventeenth century, when the Salviati family moved to Rome, the *palazzo* was drained of its life and most of the works of art found their way to the capital; the rooms became empty and silent. For some periods it was rented out, for example to the apostolic nuncio to the Tuscan court, Monsignor Tommaso Ruffo, but it also witnessed a touching love story that was the talk of Florence at the time. Federico Augusto d'Oldenbourg, Crown Prince of Denmark, was twenty-one years old when he came to Florence for the first time in 1692, as a guest of the Salviati family. In Lucca he met a young girl from the noble Trenta family, Maddalena. It was love at first sight, but the romance was interrupted when the prince was called back to Denmark. A year later he married and in 1699 ascended to the throne as Frederick IV. Maddalena, having lost all hope, entered the convent of Santa Maria Maddalena de' Pazzi in Borgo Pinti under the name of Sister Teresa di Gesù. In 1708 Frederick returned to Florence and stayed again in the Palazzo dei Salviati. Cosimo III welcomed him with all honours and mobilised the noblest Florentine families to make his stay pleasant with banquets, jousts and balls. But the king wanted to see Maddalena again and he succeeded, even though he had to ask the archbishop's permission, and he returned twice more to the convent to talk to the Carmelite nun. When he died in 1730, he is said to have had the silver crucifix around his neck that Maddalena had given him years before.



Palazzo
Portinari Salviati

YOUR PLACE IN HISTORY

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