

## Piazza dei Cavalieri

In the Middle Ages, when this was the **Piazza delle Sette Vie** (Square of the Seven Roads), since this was the number of roads that converged here, the square was overlooked by the **Palazzo degli Anziani** (Building of the Elders), and the **Torre Della Muda** (where the eagles were kept during the moulting of their feathers) that today, together with what was once the **Palazzotto di Giustizia** (Justice Building), or of the **Capitano Del Popolo** (People's Captain), forms the **Palazzo dell'Orologio** (The Watch Building). All around there were also numerous houses, tower houses and two churches from the 11th century: San Pietro in Cortev ecchia and San Sebastiano alle Fabbriche Maggiori. In 1558, Cosimo I of the Medici family gave **Giorgio Vasari** the task of remodelling the square to make it the heart of his power and the seat of the **Order of the Knights of Santo Stefano (1562)**, a military-chivalric order devoted to the defence of the Catholic faith called to fight the infidels in the Mediterranean.

The **Scuola Normale Superiore** of Pisa has its main office right in Piazza dei Cavalieri. The school was founded by Napoleonic decree in 1810 as an academic pension for university students and a branch of the *École Normale Supérieure* of Paris. The first seat was the convent of San Silvestro and the term *Normale* refers to the **rules** that were to educate citizens about obedience, laws and the Emperor. Over the course of the centuries, the school has seen various events, was suppressed and opened again and its statute has undergone a number of revisions until 2014, the year that defined the subdivision of the school into three academic structures: *Human Sciences*, *Mathematic and Natural Sciences* and *Institute of Human and Social Sciences*. It is an elite school based on equality, attended by students from all over the world, which can be accessed following an exam. Every year few are admitted but over the centuries important scientists, writers, politicians, economists and men of culture, who have made history in our country, have graduated from this school, such as Tiziano Terzani, Antonio Tabucchi and Nobel Prize winners **Giosuè Carducci**, **Enrico Fermi** and **Carlo Rubbia**.



The **Palazzo dell'Orologio**, one of the buildings overlooking the square, still shows the signs of its medieval structures. Under the arch of Gualandi to the right, we can notice the corner of a Verruca stone tower: it is the tower of Gualandi, known as the Muda tower in the Middle Ages, but made famous by Dante Alighieri in the Divine Comedy as the Torre della Fame (Tower of Hunger). It was the prison that hosted Count Ugolino della Gherardesca, the alleged traitor of his homeland, who died here in 1289 together with his children and grandchildren.



Among the historical buildings of Piazza dei Cavalieri the **church of Santo Stefano dei Cavalieri** stands out. The church was built starting from 1565 on a design by Vasari and took the place of the ancient church of San Sebastiano alle Fabbriche Maggiori (11th century). The façade was finished in the seventeenth century while the lateral bodies were added only in 1934. The bell tower was erected by Giovanni Fancelli in 1572. The single-chamber interior displays numerous **trophies** of the naval battkles of the **Medici fleet**, fragments of boats and **flags** from the **battle of Lepanto**, including the one that was waving from the mast of the ship of Mehmet Ali Pascià. Flags that taken from the infidels in clashes with the Turks. The monochromes on the walls narrate the life of the Saint, while the small Pulpit by Chiarissimo Fancelli (1627) is the one that was placed in the Cathedral to replace the Pulpit by Giovanni Pisano, following the fire of 1595. Among the works of great prestige there is *The Lapidation of Santo Stefano* by Giorgio Vasari of 1571 and the *Nativity of Christ* by Bronzino of 1564 (in the left nave), as well as the military episodes of the Order depicted in the paintings of the wooden ceiling created by Bartolomeo Atticciati, by artists like Cigoli and Jacopo Ligozzi. The *altar* by Foggini frames the *urn* that preserves the relics of Santo Stefano. The reliquary bust of San Lussorio (San Rossore), by **Donatello**, is now in the National Museum of San Matteo..

