

Cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta, piazza del Duomo

Conceived by the genius of **Busketo** (whose remains rest in a Roman sarcophagus, part of the façade) and built starting from 1063, it was dedicated to the Assumption in honour of the victorious battle of Palermo, which took place between 13 and 18 August of that year. Its style, defined as Pisan Romanesque, is unique, and we find examples of it mostly in Tuscany, Sardinia, Corsica, and even in Campania and Puglia. The façade is a masterpiece by of Rainaldo (although many friezes and capitals are attributed to Guglielmo and Biduino), developed on blind arches, decorated with lozenges and inlays, topped by four levels of walkable loggias. Of great value are the bronze portals, made to a design by Raffaello Pagni to replace those destroyed in the fire of 1595, and the Virgin with Child, a work by **Andrea Pisano** (c. 1343), which is located on the cusp of the façade. The church is about 100 meters long and 70 meters wide and is known as the third largest church in Europe from the eleventh century, after St. Peter and St. Paul outside the walls of Rome. The elliptical dome, designed by Busketo and decorated around 1380 by Piccio di Landuccio, is inspired by the great Byzantine domes, primarily that of Santa Sofia (Turkey). The apse is a triumph of colours and play of lines and stylistically dialogues with the nearby Leaning Tower. Of great interest is the bronze door by Bonanno Pisano (1179-1181), also called

gate of San Ranieri, the only survivor of the original parts following the fire of 1595.



Inside: With five naves, divided by monolithic granite columns from the island of Elba. Three arches, two pointed and one round, reveal the beautiful apse mosaic of Christ Pantocrator by Francesco da Pisa, Vincino da Pistoia and above all **Cimabue**. The Moorish taste is evident in the arches of the side naves, so much so that the Cathedral was often compared to the great Mosque of Cordoba. Elegant eighteenth and nineteenth-century paintings (by Bezzuoli, Bilivert, Lomi, Tempesti, etc.) narrate the story of Pisa and, among the side altars, we find works of great importance, such as the Madonna with Child by **Andrea del Sarto** (first half of the 16th century) in the second altar of the right aisle and the beautiful Virgin by Perin del Vaga, in the first altar of the southern transept. The ceiling carved with lacunars and decorated with gold leaves, finished in 1602, is a work by Domenico and Bartolomeo Atticciati and replaces the original one with trusses lost during the fire of 1595.

Galileo Galilei's lamp: 'with the sagacity of his ingenuity he invented that very simple and regulated measure of time by means of the pendulum, not previously perceived by anyone else, taking the opportunity to observe it from the motion of a lamp, when one day he was in the Cathedral of Pisa; and making very exact experiences of it, he ascertained the equality of its vibrations' (Vincenzo Viviani. Historical Account, 1654). At the centre of the nave hangs the bronze chandelier by Vincenzo Possanti, a work that replaced the original lamp (now in Campo Santo) that Galileo Galilei observed in the Cathedral in 1581 (when he was only 17 years old). His reflections led him to formulate the theory known as isochronism of the pendulum, according to which the oscillation time of pendulums of equal length is constant, whatever the amplitude of the oscillation. In reality this theory is valid only if the oscillations are of small amplitude, but it was still the basis for the studies to come.

The Pisan New Year: inside the Cathedral, near the string course above Giovanni Pisano's Pergamum, there is a shelf supported by a ovum: on **25 March**, at 12 noon, it is hit by a ray of sunshine that enters from a small window on the southern transept. This event determines the passage from the old to the new year in Pisan style, i.e. respecting the ancient *ab incarnatione* calendar, which calculates the days of the year starting from the day of the Annunciation of the Virgin and the ancient Equinox. Therefore, Pisa enters the new year 9 months early. This custom, today celebrated with great fervour, is documented at least since the 10th century and was abolished in 1749 by Grand Duke Francesco Stefano di Lorena, as it created many confusions in public documents.

The legends:

- **The devil's nails:** according to a legend, the devil noticed the majestic Cathedral and tried to destroy it, but he did not succeed and all that remains today of that attempt, engraved on a block of bare marble on the northern side of the church (5 arches from the façade towards the transept), are its claws: counting the row of small holes several times, the result obtained is never the same. Another version argues that achieving the same result leads to death.
- **The lizards of the students:** according to a legend, by touching the two bronze lizards, placed between the leaves of the main portal of the façade, on the left, more or less at one meter and twenty in height, the students succeed in passing the exams.
- **The column of women:** again on the façade, on the second level of walkable loggias, on the right, there is a red porphyry column, which when observed gives the guarantee to all women to be protected from the betrayal of their partner for at least 24 hours.