



AS SEEN ON  *The Pinnacle List*

The Ponte Vecchio ("Old Bridge", Italian pronunciation: ['ponte 'vɛkkjo]) is a medieval stone closed-spandrel segmental arch bridge over the Arno River, in Florence, Italy, noted for still having shops built along it, as was once common. Butchers initially occupied the shops; the present tenants are jewelers, art dealers and souvenir sellers. The Ponte Vecchio's two neighbouring bridges are the Ponte Santa Trinita and the Ponte alle Grazie.

History And Construction

The bridge spans the Arno at its narrowest point where it is believed that a bridge was first built in Roman times, when the via Cassia crossed the river at this point. The Roman piers were of stone, the superstructure of wood. The bridge first appears in a document of 996. After being destroyed by a flood in 1117 it was reconstructed in stone but swept away again in 1333 save two of its central piers, as noted by Giovanni Villani in his *Nuova Cronica*. It was rebuilt in 1345. Giorgio Vasari recorded the traditional view of his day that attributed its design to Taddeo Gaddi — besides Giotto one of the few artistic names of the trecento still recalled two hundred years later. Modern historians present Neri di Fioravanti as a possible candidate. Sheltered in a little loggia at the central opening of the bridge is a weathered dedication stone, which once read *Nel trentatré dopo il mille-trecento, il ponte cadde, per diluvio dell' acque: poi dieci anni, come al Comun piacque, rifatto fu con questo adornamento.* The Torre dei Mannelli was built at the southeast corner of the bridge to defend it. It has always hosted shops and merchants who displayed their goods on tables before their premises, after authorization of the Bargello (a sort of a lord mayor, a magistrate and a police authority). The back shops (retrobotteghe) that may be seen from upriver, were added in the seventeenth century.

It is said that the economic concept of bankruptcy originated here: when a money-changer could not pay his debts, the table on which he sold his wares (the "banco") was physically broken ("rotto") by soldiers, and this practice was called "bancorotto" (broken table; possibly it can come from "banca

rotta" which means "broken bank"). Not having a table anymore, the merchant was not able to sell anything.[citation needed]

During World War II, the Ponte Vecchio was not destroyed by Germans during their retreat on the advance of the liberating British 8th Army on August 4, 1944, unlike all other bridges in Florence. This was allegedly, according to many locals and tour guides, because of an express order by Hitler. Access to Ponte Vecchio was, however, obstructed by the destruction of the buildings at both ends, which have since been rebuilt using a combination of original and modern design.