

The Labyrinth of San Martino Cathedral

Anyone standing in front of the splendid marble facade of San Martino Cathedral, in Lucca's historic center, cannot help but notice a unique engraving on a marble slab, at approximately eye-level, on the final pillar bordering the adjacent building.

On this white marble slab there is a genuine circular labyrinth, measuring eighty centimeters in diameter. Next to the labyrinth is an engraving in Latin which, translated into English, reads: *This is the labyrinth built by Daedalus the Cretan, from which no one who entered managed to escape except Theseus, thanks to Ariadne's thread.* This bas-relief, dating back to the 12th century, clearly refers to the fascinating adventure of Theseus, the famous character from Greek mythology.

What happened? Every year Athens had to send young men to Minos, the king of Crete, to be sacrificed to feed the Minotaur, a monster that was half-man, half-bull. King Minos had the brilliant architect Daedalus build a labyrinth to imprison the Minotaur. The young Theseus volunteered to face the monster inside the labyrinth, and as promised, he killed it. To get out of the tangle of dark passageways, the Greek hero used the thread that his lover Ariadne had given him in order to find the exit.

The symbolism of the labyrinth, from which Theseus managed to escape, can be interpreted in various ways, but the most important one is the spiritual path and fight against the material world. In medieval Europe, it indicated salvation. In fact, at the center of the labyrinth is God, while Ariadne's thread is faith, that is to say, the guide that leads man away from temptation and sin.

This extraordinary engraving, visible on the exterior of the church, therefore adds even more particularity and splendor to the immense artistic and cultural heritage of Lucca's cathedral, which is composed of a multitude of other elements that report stories and legends from the history of Lucca and of humanity.

— by Gabriele Muratori and Marianne Rossi



Letter to the Editor

My wife and I along with friends just got back from Italy. We took this photograph in Lucca. We all loved the photo and certainly loved Lucca. I thought I would send it to you in case you might need a photo for the upcoming issue.

— Michael Klein

Thank you, Michael,

*We are always glad to receive contributions from our readers and to learn about new restaurants. **Carbone** is in fact very near the **Grapevine** office in Lucca.*

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