

Ospedali & Pellegrini

Present reminders of Lucca's Past Hospitality



THE SANTA CROCE CELEBRATIONS

This year, like last year, due to Covid restrictions, Lucca's traditional procession for the Volto Santo (Holy Face) will probably not take place. The large wooden crucifix, pictured above, is preserved in the tempietto by Matteo Civitali in the left-hand nave of the Cathedral of San Martino. However, on 13 September, the revered Crucifix adorned by goldsmiths with the jewels that are part of its treasure – the crown, the collar, the medallion, the belt, the shoes, the sceptre and the keys of the town – will once again attract visitors from inside and outside Lucca.

THE HOLY FACE ON THE PILGRIMS' ROUTE

Starting from around the year 1000, the Lucchese territory, crossed by the Via Francigena, became a major European stopover for pilgrimages to Rome, Jerusalem, and Santiago De Compostela, as it had been in Roman times because of its special position at the crossroads of three important roads: the Cassia, the Clodia *secunda* and the Aurelia. Whether they came for religious or commercial reasons, travellers would stop in Lucca to pay homage to the Holy Face. Pilgrims could expect hospitality from monasteries, but at the same time a great number of hospices, *hospitalia pauperum* and *peregrinorum* (hospitals for the poor and pilgrims) were established. They offered free shelter and food, normally for three days. Most of the numerous hospices were opened between the XI-XIV centuries. Some of them were lazarets (quarantine stations), in fact there was one right outside town. Many of them took care of the sick. Almost all of them were suppressed in the year 1776.

THE SAN LUCA BETWEEN PAST & PRESENT

The San Luca hospice, or *Spedale della misericordia di Lucca*, was founded shortly after the year 1260 by the Lucchese merchants. Initially, it took care of the sick: the male ward was in



Piazzale Verdi, between Via San Paolino and Via Vittorio Emanuele, the female ward was in via Galli Tassi. Gradually, this hospice extended its activity to other acts of charity and in the mid XVI century it absorbed and directed all hospices and charity institutions to be found in the Lucca province. A totally different kind of contemporary accommodation for travellers, the San Luca Palace Hotel, in Via S. Paolino, and the new San Luca Hospital in S. Filippo, are through their names present reminders of that ancient institution.

ALTOPASCIO KNIGHTS BETWEEN PAST & PRESENT

Not far from Lucca, in a marshy area east of the city, there was the hospice of SS Jacopo, Egidio and Cristoforo d'Altopascio, one of the most important in Medieval Europe, dating back to at least 1084 and active until 1587. The hospice was run by a religious-military congregation of knights, the *Order of San Jacopo di Altopascio*, also known as *Cavalieri del Tau*, from the 'tau' (a symbol of life or resurrection) on their cloak and coat of arms.



They looked after travellers, the poor, and the sick, and took part in the control and administration of the surrounding territory. Born at the beginning of the XII century, the order soon expanded with branches in several European countries like Spain and England, and France where it survived until the XVII century. In Lucca they had their premises, the *Magione dei Cavalieri dell'Altopascio*, in the small alley called *Vicolo dell'Altopascio*, which connects Piazza del Suffragio with Via Santa Croce and Via Guinigi. In this alley, on the right wall coming from Via S. Croce, you can see the 'tau' symbol at number 2 and at number 6. The headquarters of the order, however, were in Altopascio. Even today, the village develops around the ancient hospice and the Romanesque church of S. Jacopo, which with its tall tower and bell signalled to the pilgrims that a shelter was at close hand. A true army for the defence of the pilgrims along the Via Francigena, the *Cavalieri del Tau* hold a place of honour in the traditional Santa Croce procession on 13 September.

SANTA MARIA FORISPORTAM & THE ORPHANS

The hospice of S. Maria Forisportam, also known as the hospice of S. Caterina, used to be on the premises of the present church, in *Piazza S. Maria Bianca*, also known as *della Colonna mozza*. The hospice was first established in the XI century to give food and shelter to pilgrims. Later, when under the supervision of the San Luca hospice, it started to take care of the foundlings. Around the year 1585, a lady named Isabella Spinetti started to take in male orphans under the age of 15, not just for food and shelter but also to give them an education and teach them a job. At that time, it came to be known as *Spedale degli Orfanelli Bianchi* (hospice of the white orphans). This charity institution lasted until 1808. Nowadays, alongside Piazza Santa Maria Bianca, close to a restaurant, there is the *Vicolo degli Orfanelli* (the orphans alley), another reminder of the history of Lucca.

– by Chiara Calabrese

<< home [Click here to read an article from last month:](#) >>



Photos (clockwise order on each page):

1. Volto Santo, Lucca
2. Tau symbol in Lucca at Vicolo dell'Altopascio 6
3. Altopascio, Church of S. Jacopo
4. Lucca, Vicolo dell'Altopascio 6 with Tau symbol
5. Lucca, Vicolo dell'Altopascio 2 with Tau symbol
6. Lucca, Vicolo degli Orfanelli, street name
7. Vicolo dell'Altopascio seen from Piazza del Suffragio



JILL CASTY GLASSART

Jill Casty has been creating vibrant glass sculptures and wall hangings in Italy, Mexico, and California for many years, sharing her lively sense of colour and originality.

Now Jill's glass art is on display in Lucca at the Grapevine Studio in Via Santa Gemma Galgani 6, at the end of Via Fillungo near Porta dei Borghi and Piazza Santa Maria.

*Please call to arrange a visit:
at +39 333 8617962
or +39 371 5883048*



Tuscan Morning



Pink Sky at Sunset

www.jillcastyglassart.com