

# Pisa (IT), Piazza dei Miracoli [extant] - 1926

## PEOPLE

**Niccolai, Alberto**

## THEMES/GENRES

Benito Mussolini    Catholic Church

*Pisano toto spectante populo, / Benitus Mussolini, / novissimâe Italiâe lictorumque dux, / omnesque sacrorum et urbis magistratus / in insigni Sanctâe Mariâe Maioris templo / egregium Iohannis Pisani perbium, / mirum heic sacrarum artium spectaculum, / a(nte) d(iem) VIII Kal(endas) Iun(ias) MCMXXVI / dicabant. / Ad gratissimâe rei memoriam / Pisanâe Primatialis âediles.*

In the presence of the entire people of Pisa, Benito Mussolini, Duce of modern Italy and of the Fascists, along with all the civil and religious authorities, consecrated the wonderful pulpit of Giovanni Pisano in the illustrious temple of Santa Maria Maggiore—a marvellous display of sacred arts on this very spot—on 25 May 1926. The workers of Pisa's Opera Primaziale [erected this inscription] to commemorate this highly delightful event.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The inscription (1926) once adorned Pisa Cathedral's Opera della Primaziale (Piazza del Duomo 17). It is now stored at the Opera's depot at Via del Campaldo 7. Engraved in white marble and highlighted with black colouring ('rubricated'), the text is framed in a decorative vegetal frieze. At the centre bottom, the Opera Primaziale's coat of arms is featured. The Opera della Primaziale is an institution responsible for the management, preservation, and restoration of the Pisa Cathedral and its associated buildings and artwork in Piazza del Duomo (also known as Piazza dei Miracoli).

Ferdinando Puntoni (1856–1933), member of the Opera della Primaziale, proposed the creation of a commemorative inscription. Alberto Niccolai, president of the Opera della Primaziale, authored the Latin text. The inscription was installed on 28 October 1926, marking the fourth anniversary of the March on Rome. It was placed next to another significant inscription commemorating the arrival of Charles VIII of France in 1495, which signified Pisa's liberation from a century of despised Florentine rule. The Fascist inscription mirrors the Renaissance one in its design, deliberately equating the freedom granted by Charles VIII with Mussolini, as Niccolai articulated in 1926.

The inscription was crafted for the reconstruction and reinstalment of the pulpit of the Cathedral of Pisa, dating to the early fourteenth century, in 1926. Benito Mussolini attended the event, which took place on 25 May 1926 (it is detailed in Susini 2016). The pulpit, crafted by the sculptor Giovanni Pisano (1248–1315), was dismantled in 1599, and its pieces were stored in Pisa's monumental cemetery. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, various Italian intellectuals and artists advocated for its reconstruction. The municipality of Pisa eventually decided to proceed in the early 1920s. As some elements were missing, Benito Mussolini personally donated the four front columns and the staircase enabling the priest to ascend the pulpit to read the Gospel. In his speech, Mussolini called the pulpit's reconstruction a 'miracle of resurrection', adding that 'Fascism is not new to these spectacles: it not only resurrects magnificent monuments of the past, it has resurrected the soul of the nation, projecting it towards the future' (Mussolini 1957: 144).

The inscription commemorates the large gathering in front of Mussolini and the city's main civil and religious leaders. Alongside Mussolini were Cardinal Archbishop of Pisa Pietro Maffi and Giuseppe Fascetti, the head of the Primaziale. Both Pope Pius XI and King Vittorio Emanuele III sent their messages of greeting and support. Cardinal Maffi was known for opposing Fascism, specially its anticlerical stance. During this event, however, Mussolini and Maffi had themselves photographed together in order to demonstrate the rapprochement between Church and State that would culminate in the 1929 Lateran Pacts.

Mussolini is described as the leader of modern Italy (*novissima Italia*, lit. 'most recent Italy') and of the Fascists (*Lictores*). The theme of *Nova Italia*, symbolizing the material and moral renewal of the country through Fascism, is a recurring motif in Fascist propaganda. This renewal was inseparable from Italy's past, which for Fascism served as a model for emulation. While the inscription emulates the neighbouring Renaissance inscription, it also evokes Roman antiquity. The terms *lictors* and *sacrorum et urbis magistratus*, for instance, link twentieth-century Pisa to its Roman past. Pisa has long viewed itself as the successor of imperial *romanità*, especially during the Middle Ages, in both political terms, due to its republican government, and religiously, as suggested by the legend that Saint Peter first landed in Italy at Pisa before heading to Rome. The conclusion of the inscription reflects this connection by using the traditional Roman calendar and by referring to the workers of the Primaziale with the ancient Roman name of *aediles*.

## Bibliography

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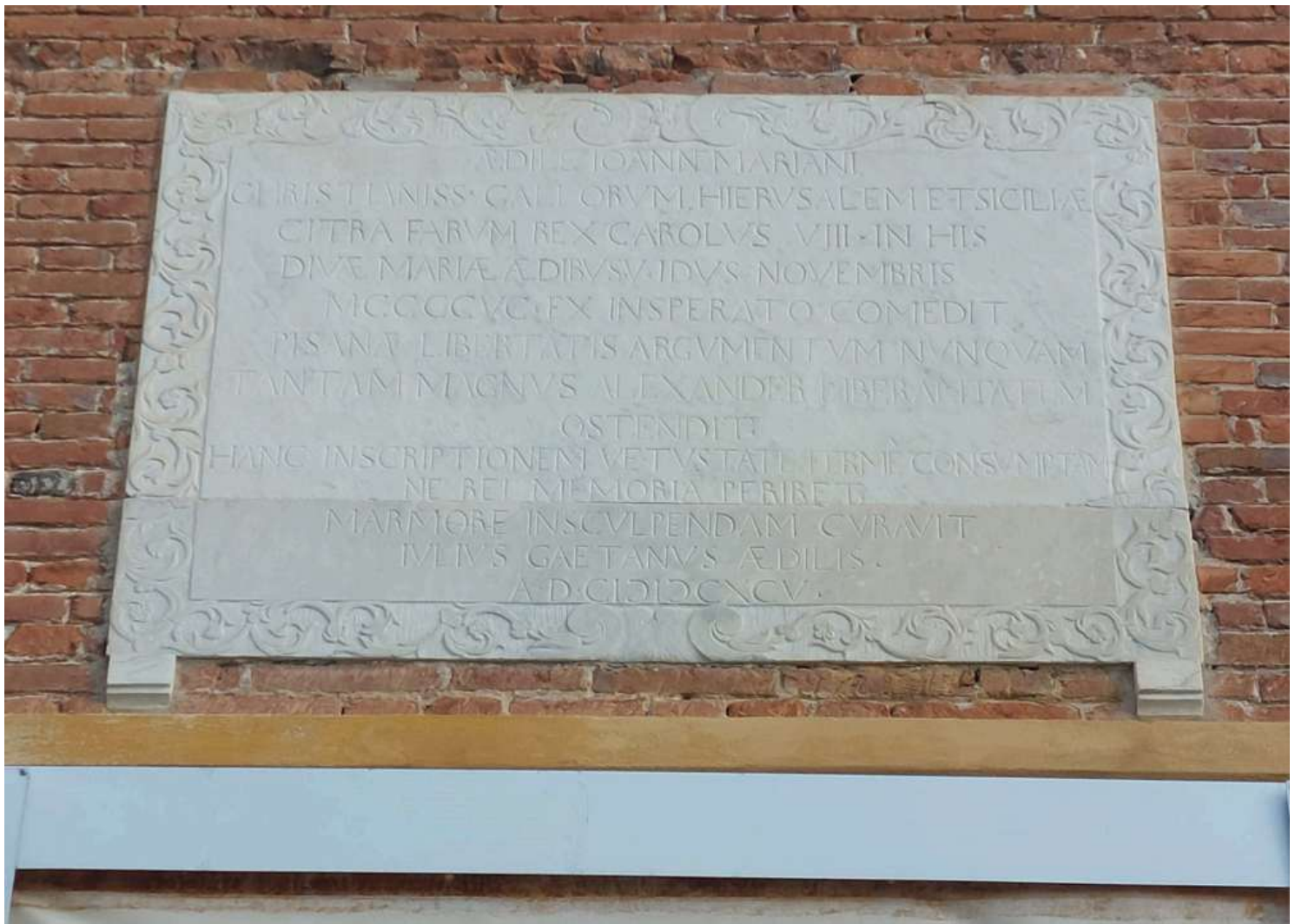
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Inscription at Piazza dei Miracoli. From: Susini 2016, p. 860.



Renaissance inscription commemorating the arrival of Charles VIII (1495). © M. Zeni.