

September 25,26, 2012

## Milan - Last Days

September 25, 26 2012

My last day of travel in “Milano” is a combination of wonder, weariness and end-of-trip reflection. Tomorrow is airport after a long travel day to setup for air, today is Milanese streetcar sightseeing, musing and cafe culture.

Milan train depot is a sight to behold. The scale alone is breathtaking with four track levels, tiled murals and vaulted ceilings perhaps eighty feet high. The bustle and action dwarfs that of O’hare Airport in Chicago. Upon arrival last evening darkness was approaching, no time to gawk, the need for a hotel was pressing.

Travel rule is arrive by afternoon to avoid this urgency, yet the pure scale of Milano assured me of availability. Circling the train station I observed only four-star type hotels, and while able, my roots do not permit me to spend one-hundred fifty dollars for a bed. Turning corner on my fifth block I spot that familiar simple unadorned sign reading “Hotel”, generally indicating a family run “pensione”. Ascending stairs and making a greeting, my host in reception, Joseph, had two caveats, “cassa, no credito”, (meaning cash only) and no breakfast. My mission this evening was to find this little hotel, my space within the heart of the city. The rest was welcome following the previous night at sea walk tour of Naples and day of trains.



September 25,26, 2012

Conspicuously American, the guys in the “Pepe Nero Caffè” next morning did not bother with my efforts at broken Italian, following their apparently standard morning greeting of “Buon Giorno”. The big fellow instead moved immediately to his better-than-broken English/American, responding with “you are welcome” and “bye” upon my departure. A very international town Milan.

This is not the islands but northern Italy, in the center of industry and agricultural plains. Milan, the commercial center of Italy with significant construction, industry and business. Many new style high rise towers are visible on the skyline and transportation projects such as rail and metro are underway in many parts. Milan does not appear to operate on “Italian Time” such as seen in the South. Construction was pounding away early and there was no midday break in shops, museums or development.

The gothic cathedral, the Duomo, in the old city center is described as the fourth largest in Europe. Hundreds of years in the making, no square foot of space, inside or out, was devoid of decoration or motif. The twenty-odd slender spires are topped with full sized sculpture of saints and figures from scripture. The highest spire supports a four point three meter tall bronze “Mary, Virgin Mother” to whom the cathedral is named and dedicated. A twelfth century structure, preceding renaissance architecture and flying buttresses, the interior space encloses massive columns five feet in diameter needed to support the towering roof and spires. The gothic style results in a dark interior.



September 25,26, 2012

Only one stained glass window was an obvious replacement from the nineteenth century, the others are intact from unknown earlier times, the highest undoubtedly from original construction. These works of art are made rounded and floral stone frames within the vast openings, perhaps twenty feet wide by one-hundred tall. The reds and blues, created without synthetic processes, are inspiring. Most of the lower panels visible to the original peasant worshippers of old portray painted figures in biblical scenes, or ecclesiastical power brokers within square lead frames encased by stone patterns. Above these windows in the highest reaches, over one hundred feet high, one cranes the neck to study the patterns of the highest corbels.



The floor of colored stone is uneven due to the varying hardness of the inlaid colored stones. The red stone used in a “Fleur de Lis” pattern is the hardest. The encasing white marble may be a quarter-inch lower from over one thousand years of foot traffic. The dark stone was in-between hardness, creating a wavy surface. All are apparently hard enough to withstand spiky high heels common here.

Surrounding the Duomo is the vast “piazza” and beyond that the structures of commerce and government from medieval and Renaissance times. All are breathtaking in use of variation of stone colors, use of arches and attention to aesthetics.

September 25,26, 2012

Streetcars clatter about with bicycles and walkers, the roads closed to vehicles. One such streetcar I rode some distance to the Museum of Science and Technology, ostensibly to muse the Leonardo Da Vinci exhibits, but also just to travel across town on foot and streetcar toward a worthy destination. (The Picasso exhibition I had seen in San Francisco and Renoir was too far) Large scale models of machines described by that genius along with the accompanying drawings were prominent, also his drawings on anatomy, mathematics and botany.

Truly a fabulous museum, the passage of technology to present time including telecommunications, computing, instrumentation and nano-technology. A showcase museum for hands-on participation for children and young adults. I was in heaven with all the tools and gadgets.

Overcast clouds in the return walk and streetcar ride yielded to thunder clouds upon arrival back at the Duomo. During street food and gazing at the gothic embellishments through binoculars a light rain began, most clearing the piazza of hungry pigeons, vendors and tourists. The light rain gave way to something stronger which provided a travel moment that I have considered and hoped to observe.



September 25,26, 2012

The first gargoyle to pour was a “meniad” holding an amphora over her shoulder. She projected perhaps four feet from the wall, the water pouring from the amphora down at least one hundred feet to the street below, clearing the structure. As the rain intensified other gargoyle began to pour. A lion with pointy ears and anthropomorphic facial features poured the most volume. Later a dragon with wings began to spew wet fire from his mouth. One clearly identifiable human form with pointy ears and ugly face spit his charge of water safely away from the white stone. Unlike anything else on the cathedral, excluding Saint statues, no two gargoyles were alike. Interestingly, some are mythical, such as the dragon, some allegorical like the devil figure and others just inspiring like the maidens with amphora or animal figures. A breathtaking hour to watch.

The thunderstorm passed and my show sadly reduced to a trickle. Dark was closing in and I made way to the grimy subway, looking back for another squall, enthralled by my good luck on closing night.