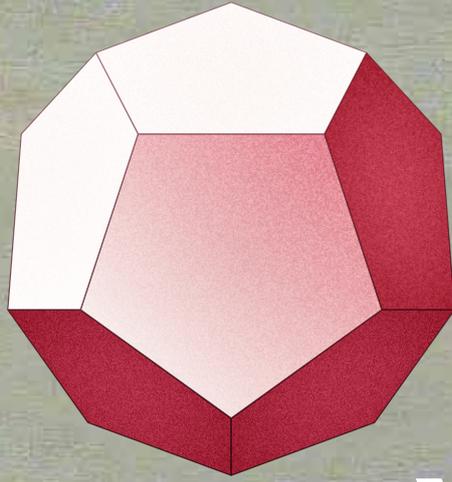


LE



NAR  
DO  
IN TOSCANA

*di Leonardo La Vigna*



# LEONARDO IN TOSCANA

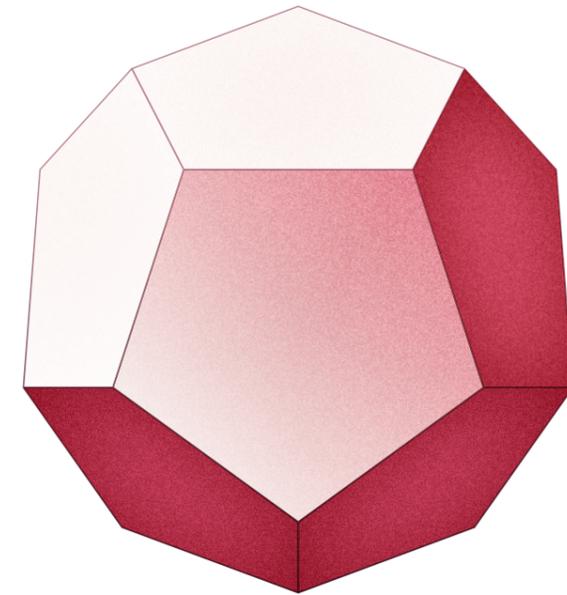
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(The images of the Leonardian codes are drawn  
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30 Leonardo In Vinci



# LEONARDO: DANGER AND SALVATION

by **Tomaso Montanari**



**A** verse by Friedrich Hölderlin which was dear to Martin Heidegger says that “where there is danger, / that which saves also grows”. There could be no better words to bear in mind approaching this year, which commemorates the fact that the most famous artist in Western history, Leonardo da Vinci, died on 2 May 1519. Never before has Leonardo been so dangerous. Yet never before has Leonardo had such power to save us.

On television, Rai has recently presented us with delightful satirical miniseries (*I misteri di Leonardo*) that makes fun of “Leonardomania”. When television is able to satirise something like this, it means that the phenomenon is so widespread that it can be recognised by the majority of viewers. Today, Leonardo da

Vinci is a universal celebrity. But it is in such a way that he would, in all likelihood, have found quite baffling.

A milestone in this regressive development was *The Da Vinci Code*, a bestseller by American author Dan Brown. Presented at first as a novel based on original historical research, it is in fact a clever montage of old urban legends: from Leonardo’s relationship with the Holy Grail (the mythical chalice from which Jesus supposedly drank at the Last Supper) to the alleged relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene. The whole thing, interwoven with the plot of a blockbuster thriller, was extraordinarily successful. It succeeded in displacing the figure of Leonardo from the fields of history and art history to the realm of myth in the imaginations of millions of people.

Today it is impossible to count the number of bizarre attributions to Leonardo the painter: from sophisticated commercial operations involving dubious and often very damaged paintings, which manage to reach prices in the millions, to provincial forgeries that win a few minutes of fame in local newspapers before fading back into obscurity. Another popular trend is the search for the most bizarre and unlikely inscriptions, shapes and figures in the artist’s famous paintings, the search for a literal “da Vinci code”. Generally, the results of these amazing ‘discoveries’ concern Leonardo’s relationships with power (the Templars are among the most prominent themes) and sex (in all possible combinations). Museums featuring reconstructions of Leonardo’s machines, with varying degrees of accuracy, or immer-

sive projections accompanied by surrealist texts, are proliferating. The search for the remains of the Mona Lisa and that of the *Battle of Anghiari* (the great and ill-fated wall painting in Palazzo Vecchio in Florence, which we know to have been lost entirely) are only the best-known episodes in this saga.

In short, in Italian public discourse, Leonardo is becoming surrounded by a morass of *fake news*, which can only be fought with massive doses of historical scepticism, and above all the dissemination of knowledge.

This is exactly what we hope will happen in Tuscany this year through all the events, varied and diverse in scale and scope, that you will find listed below. We hope that you will be able to take

Leonardo back with you: both the historical Leonardo and your very own Leonardo. Get rid of all the marketing, rhetoric and cliché: go to the sources. Vasari’s *Lives*, the entries in the various Treccani dictionaries and all the other reliable resources that can be found for free on the net, for example.

Leonardo wrote that “the test of things should be left to the judgement of experience”: that is, that the only way to truly understand things is through direct contact with them. He also wrote that “anyone who conducts an argument by appealing to authority is not using any ingenuity; they are simply using their memory”: to be ingenious (the word which ‘genius’ comes from) is not a matter of trust, but of the application of critical thinking. This is the key to any true

culture; it is the way to become truly sovereign citizens.

So, while approaching Leonardo today can be dangerous, getting to know Leonardo properly can also save us: immunising ourselves from all the superstitions and fake news that clutter our heads.

We art historians are also partly responsible for this eclipse of the real Leonardo, if only for failing to communicate the joy, intensity and emotion of a genuine encounter with this extraordinary artist and thinker, as well as with his outstanding works which, fortunately, are still preserved in our Tuscany.

So, let us delight in Leonardo, in the real deal.



“

Leonardo was truly wonderful and divine [...]. [...] nature so favoured him that, wherever he turned his thoughts, his mind and his heart, he demonstrated such divine inspiration that no one else was ever equal to him in the perfection, liveliness, vitality, excellence and grace of his works. It is clearly evident that because of Leonardo's understanding of art, he began many projects but never finished any of them, feeling that his hand could not reach artistic perfection in the works he conceived [...]. It is an extraordinary thing how that genius, in his desire to give the highest relief to the works that he made, went so far with dark shadows, in order to find the darkest possible grounds, that he sought for blacks which might make deeper shadows and be darker than other blacks, that by their means he might make his lights the brighter; and in the end this method turned out so dark, that, no light remaining there, his pictures had rather the character of things made to represent an effect of night, than the clear quality of daylight; which all came from seeking to give greater relief, and to achieve the final perfection of art. [...] To the art of painting, he added a kind of shadowing to the method of colouring with oils which has enabled the moderns to endow their figures with great energy and relief.

Giorgio Vasari, *Le Vite*, 1568  
Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* (1568)

”

# ACCORDING TO VASARI

# HERE DOES GENIUS COME FROM?

**The** The scent of spring was in the air when Leonardo was born. Genius was born like a noble purple iris in a Tuscan meadow.

In Vinci, in that village of stone houses, your gaze is lost on the horizon of hills, where hues of green and brown merge together with sinuous elegance. You can make out the straight rows of vines from those where the soft foliage of the olive trees flourishes, the amber-coloured crops where the loose soil shelters new life and the fresh green of the woods, inhabited by wild animals.

Nature, landscape and horizon: a perfect trinity for that talented child who tried to capture the essence of the things that his curious eyes caught hold of in his drawings.

He was seeking the spirit of nature in its multiple expressions – he never got tired of observing it, constantly amazed at its mutability.

*“Natura naturans, the making and the unmaking, the cyclic transfer of matter from the solid, to the liquid, to the atmospheric: the figure is no longer the opposite of nature, but rather the last phase of its continuous evolution”.*

Where would his particular way of seeing the world take him?

Leonardo arrived in the cradle of the Renaissance: Florence.

It was here that he spent his youth, one made up of masonry and merchants, of architectural grace, expressions of the divine, music and the arts. Here he would meet Andrea del Verrocchio (a painter and sculptor who was to become his teacher) and the Medici, the lords of the city.

“Not even with the mastery of his own hands could he have achieved the perfection of art in the things he imagined, of such subtlety and marvellousness were they.”

”

In Florence, Leonardo’s talent found its fullest expression. His many gifts attracted a host of followers and admirers.

It is these gifts that we still recognise today, five hundred years after his death. His brilliance was to radiate out from Vinci, illuminating Florence, Tuscany, Italy, Europe and the whole world. His work encapsulates the essence of genius, the unique, exceptional inventive and interpretative capacity of humankind.

Leonardo was a genius with a multifaceted intellect: a painter, architect, scientist, cartographer and poet who revolutionised and continues to revolutionise the history of humanity. Leonardo, who is impossible to understand fully because he is so immense and varied, does not seem, even now, to be exhausted, perhaps because as he himself used to say:

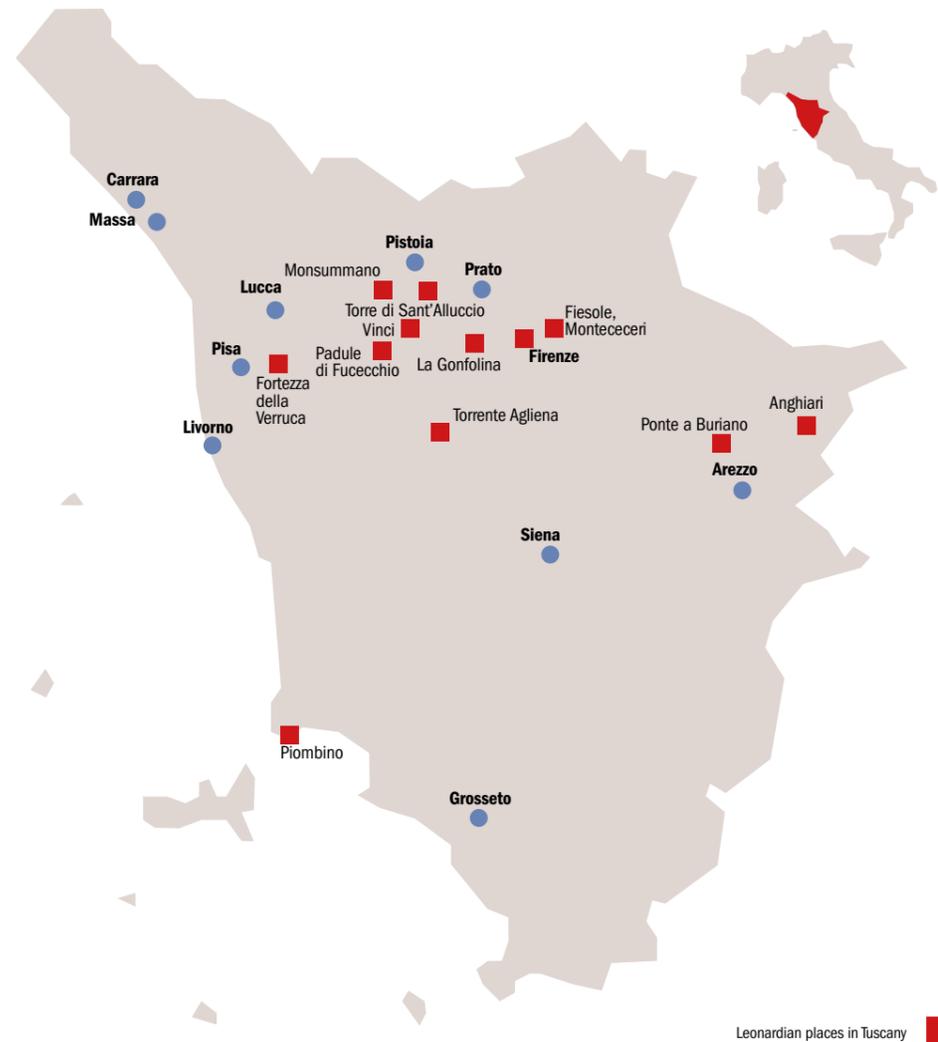
*“his hand could not reach artistic perfection in the works he conceived, since he envisioned such subtle marvellous and difficult problems” (Vasari).*

Leonardo, a genius with many faces: each of his abilities makes up a part of essence, each of his facets comes together to form his structure, each of his talents constitutes the man.

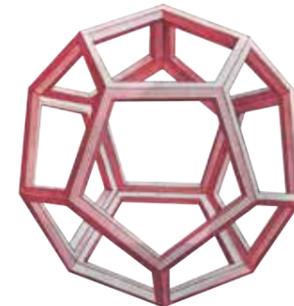
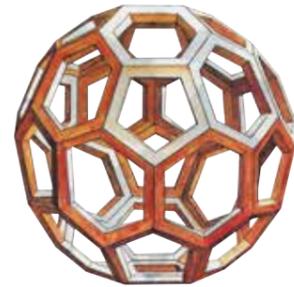
Be inspired by his genius. Now it is your turn to observe things in a whole new way.

Move among the events in Tuscany in search of the Genius.

# LEONARDO IN TOSCANA



For more detailed information on Leonardo's places in Tuscany see  
*Leonardo's Tuscany* website, <https://www.latoscanadileonardo.it/en/>



## LEONARDO

### 1 *First steps* VINCI

**L**eonardo took his first steps in **Anchiano** 1 in his father's house, a cottage surrounded by the beautiful olive groves of **Montalbano**. It is a typical Tuscan country house located near **Vinci** 2, a charming medieval village where, even today, you can take in the art of the Florentine fifteenth century. It is thought that it was this very house that welcomed the birth of the little genius on **15 April 1452**, after the illegitimate union between the notary **Piero da Vinci** and **Caterina** a woman of humble origins. Leonardo's parents never married; later, they each married someone else. It is in this house, which today is considered a site of remembrance and boasts the title of "birthplace", that little Leonardo is said to have taken his first steps in art, learning to write, left-handed and backwards, and to draw. His artistic talents were not underestimated by his father, who had sensed that he would not be able to steer him towards a career as a notary, but who was also familiar with the artistic scene in Florence due to his work. In the years to come, this would lead Leonardo to the workshop of **Verrocchio**, one of the most important master painters in Florence.





3



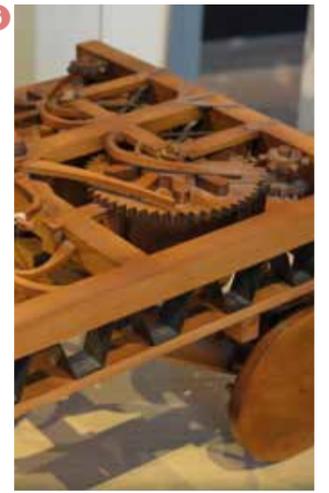
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In **Vinci** you can find many places dedicated to the artist: it is a town that is worth visiting, not only for understanding the eclecticism of this great master, but also to admire the beauty of the Florentine countryside. It was this landscape that nourished Leonardo's soul from childhood onwards, allowing him to observe nature in its most varied manifestations, a natural landscape that has always been a source of studies and inspiration for him. Inside the **Conti Guidi** 3 castle, known in popular tradition as the "castle of the ship" due to its elongated shape and the tower that resembles the outline of a sailing boat, there is the **Museo Leonardiano** 4. Where, since 1952, many of the models and drawings of machines that Leonardo created over the years have been on display: war machines, machines for civil engineering, flying machines, machines for optics and machines for moving in water and on land. The other two sites of the **palazzina Uzielli** 5, where construction machinery, textile machines and anatomical tables are exhibited, and the **Villa Il Ferrale** 6 which features full-scale reproductions of his paintings, including the Last Supper.



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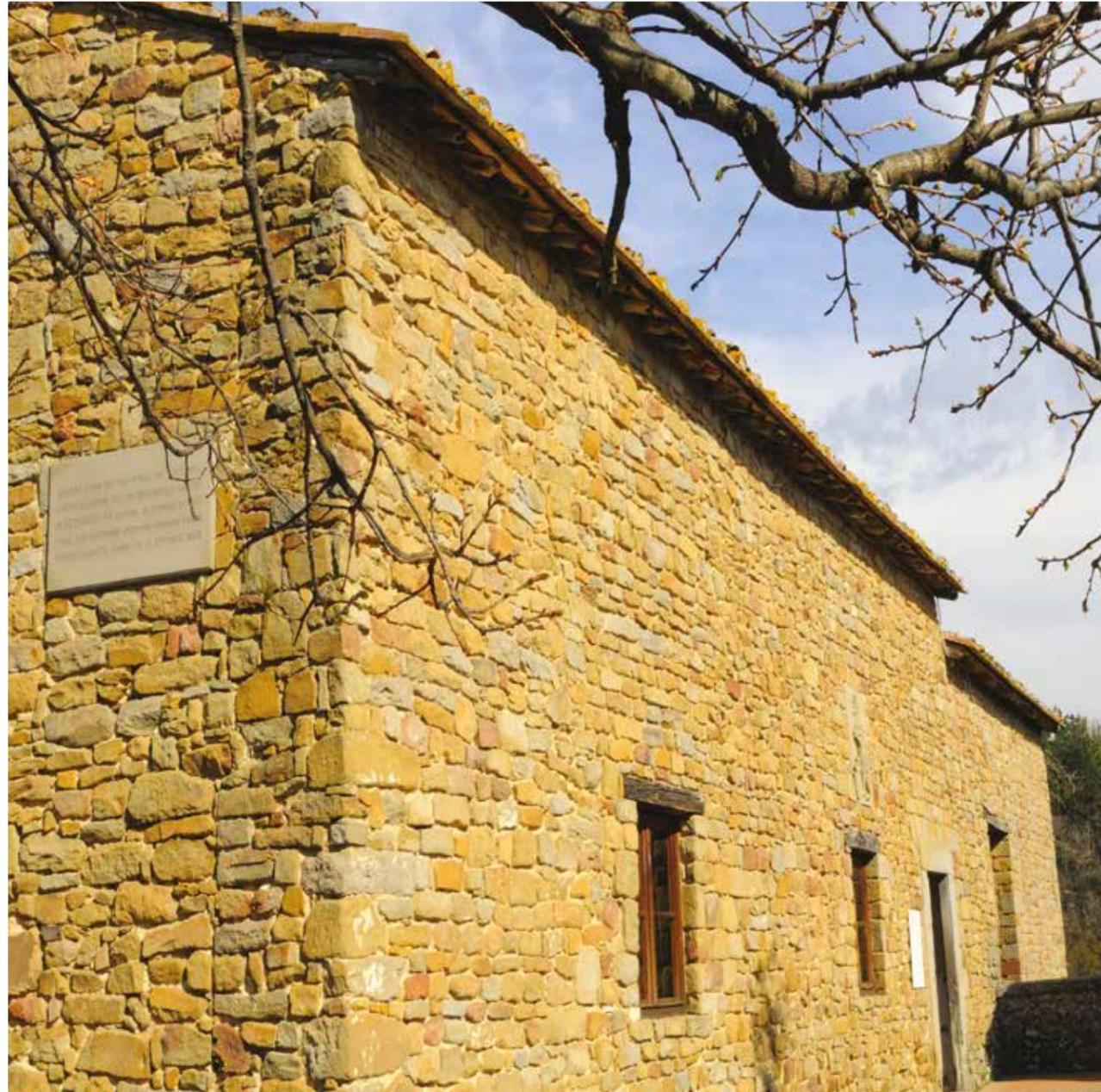




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The **Biblioteca Leonardiana** 7 is another point of interest for those who have decided to delve into the works of the Tuscan genius. It is an important centre for studies and research, where facsimiles of all the codices, drawings and first printed editions of Leonardo's work are kept, as well as a collection of thousands of books, photographs, films and other documentary material.

Finally, to complete the tour, a visit to the **house where Leonardo was born** is a must 8. Thanks to a new museum layout, which makes use of multimedia technology, it is possible to have a truly special encounter with Leonardo and his work.



8



# LEONARDO

## 2 *Life and work*

### FLORENCE



9



10



11

Florence had a deep impact on Leonardo's artistic development because it was in this Tuscan city that he came into contact with one of the most famous art workshops of the 15th century: that of **Andrea del Verrocchio** 9, which was located behind the Duomo. 10.

It was his father who actually guided him in this direction. In fact, Leonardo left Vinci and joined his father **Ser Piero**, who had become a notary to the Florentine Signoria in the Tuscan capital. Living in such an important city allowed the young Da Vinci to broaden his horizons artistically, culturally and politically. Leonardo was thus able to attend Verrocchio's workshop, learn numerous techniques (painting, sculpture and drawing) and apply himself to studies that were to become fundamental to the development of his future projects: carpentry, mechanics, architecture and engineering.

As early as 1473, he was part of the **Compagnia di San Luca**, which brought together the city's painters. Thanks to his father's connections, Leonardo received a number of commissions in the convents and palaces of Florence, but his first public commissions date from 1479, the year in which, thanks to his teacher, he came to the court of **Lorenzo de' Medici** 11.

It was the latter who sent him to Milan as an 'ambassador' and symbol of Florence's artistic and cultural power.

Leonardo returned to Florence at the beginning of the new century and spent his time there until 1508. By this time a famous artist, his mature works influenced the artists of the time and marked the beginning of a new artistic phase in the city.



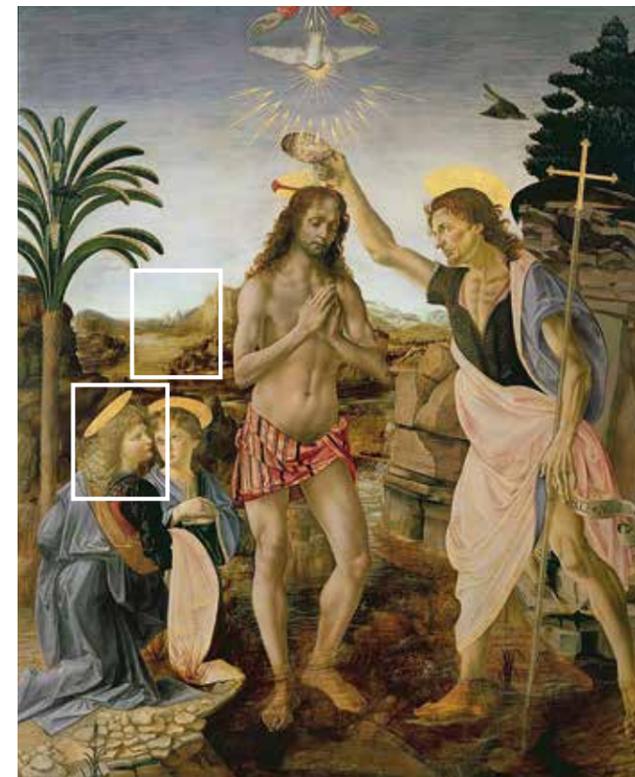
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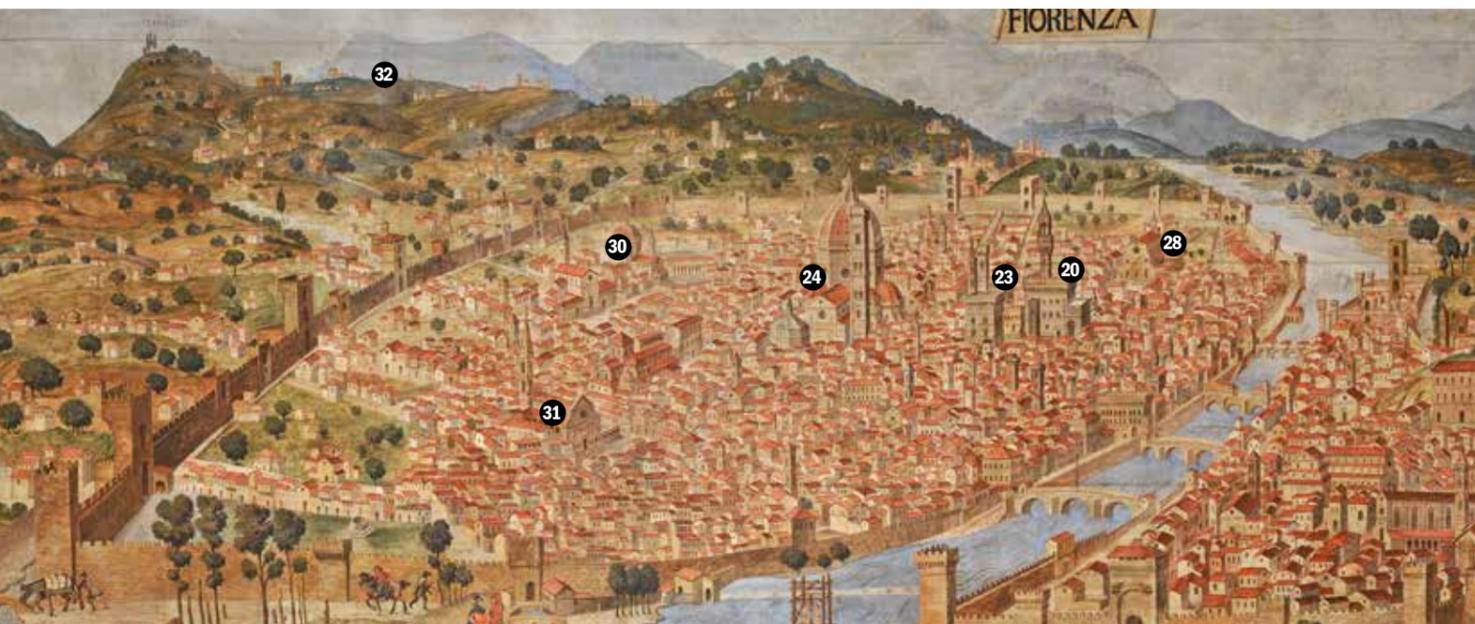
You cannot visit Florence without coming across Leonardo's works of genius: by seeking out Leonardo's masterpieces you can visit the most important places in the city at the same time. Room 35 of the **Uffizi Gallery** 12 is dedicated to Leonardo and contains the **Annunciation** 13, **Adoration of the Magi** 14, the only signed works by Leonardo still present in Tuscany. In addition, **Baptism of Christ** 15, a painting by **Andrea del Verrocchio** contains parts with Leonardo's signature. In fact, **Vasari's** biography of Leonardo mentions that young apprentice had painted an angel 16. Modern critics also attribute other parts to him, in particular the landscape 17 14



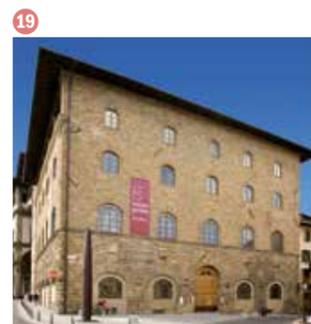
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17



Nineteenth-century copy of "Della Catena" Map of Florence by Francesco Rosselli, 1470 ( detail) Palazzo Vecchio Museum. The most significant places of Leonardo's presence in Florence are indicated.



depicted above the heads of the two angels. Also housed the Uffizi, in the **Department of Prints and Drawings**, are some drawings and sketches including the famous "**Paesaggio del 5 agosto 1473**" (Landscape of 5 August 1473) **18**. This landscape, which depicts a fork in the river Arno, indicated to Verrocchio that the young painter was particularly interested in capturing nature in its many guises. Adjacent to the Uffizi Gallery is the **Museo Galileo-Institute and Museum of the History of Science** **19** whose library contains facsimiles of all of **Leonardo's codices**. Another Leonardo landmark is the **Palazzo della Signoria** or **Palazzo Vecchio** **20**. Here, on a wall of the Salone dei Cinquecento, **21**, Leonardo painted the **Battle of Anghiari** **22**, which, due to an inadequate painting technique, was ruined and was later covered by Giorgio Vasari's frescoes.

On the left side of Palazzo Vecchio, there is



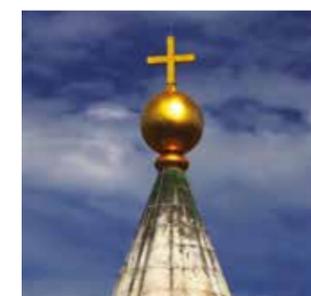
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23



25



26

**Via de' Gondi** **23**, the street where Ser Piero Da Vinci, Leonardo's father, lived when he moved to Florence.

Another essential place to visit is the **Duomo and the Baptistry** **24**: Vasari, in his "**Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori**" (The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors and Architects) tells us that it was Leonardo who proposed a project to raise the whole Baptistry and insert a base consisting of four steps underneath it.

Looking at the dome of the cathedral, you can still admire **Brunelleschi's** **25**, work, which was fundamental to Leonardo's study of architecture and construction machinery.

Not yet 20, Leonardo collaborated with Verrocchio on the copper sphere **26**, which was placed on the dome on 27 May 1471.

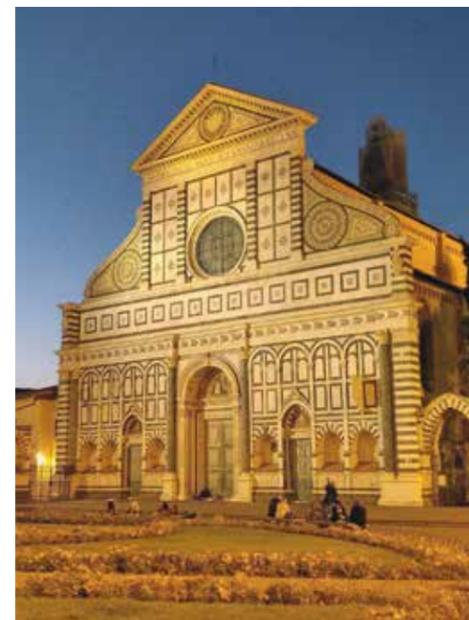
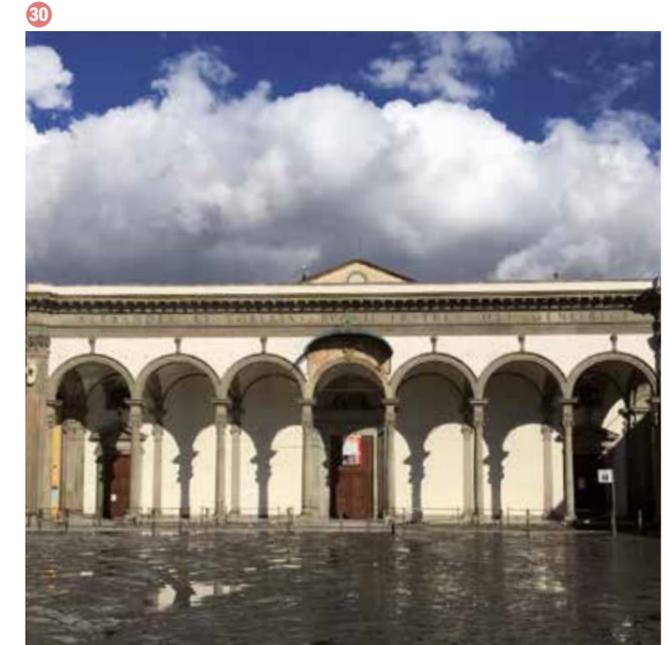
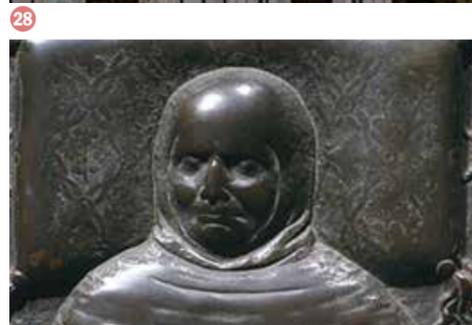
Behind the Duomo, where the workshop of Andrea del Verrocchio was located, is the **Museo dell'Opera del Duomo** where you can



admire the group of bronze statues depicting the **Predica del Battista** <sup>27</sup>, made by the important sculptor **Giovan Francesco Rustici**.

*“He would have nobody near him when he worked but Leonardo da Vinci, who, while he was making the mould, and in fact until the statues were cast, did not leave him, so that many said (but they did not really know), that Leonardo worked at them himself, or at least aided him with his counsel.”*

These words of Vasari testify that the Rustici make use of Leonardo’s help. Collaboration has also been hypothesised in the case of the bronze tomb of the Franciscan general Fra **Francesco Sansone da Brescia** in **Santa Croce** <sup>28</sup>, where a plaque commemorates Leonardo as one of the Italian “Grandi” (Greats). Near the basilica, in Via de’ Benci, is the palace of the family of the same name which **Ginevra** <sup>29</sup>, who was painted by Leon-



ardo, belonged to and where, at the time of Vasari, the unfinished cartoon of the **Adoration of the Magi** was kept. The **Santissima Annunziata** <sup>30</sup> monastery complex is another important place to visit. Vasari recounts that on Leonardo’s return to Florence in 1501, the friars of the Annunziata commissioned him to paint the panel for the high altar of the church, offering him room and board. The painter made a beautiful cartoon depicting the **Madonna with Child and St. Anne**. For two days, the Florentines queued in Leonardo’s room at the Annunziata to see the marvellous work he had created:

*“when it was finished, men and women, young and old, continued for two days to flock for a sight of it to the room where it was, as if to a solemn festival, in order to gaze at the marvels of Leonardo, which caused all those people to be amazed”*

*(Vasari, Life of Leonardo da Vinci).*

Finally, if you visit the museum complex of **Santa Maria Novella** <sup>31</sup>, it is worth remembering that it was in the “Sala del Papa” (Pope’s Hall) of this monastery, specially granted to him by the city government, that Leonardo painted the cartoon of the Battle of Anghiari.

# LEONARDO

## 3 “Will the Great Bird “take its first flight...” MONTE CECERI



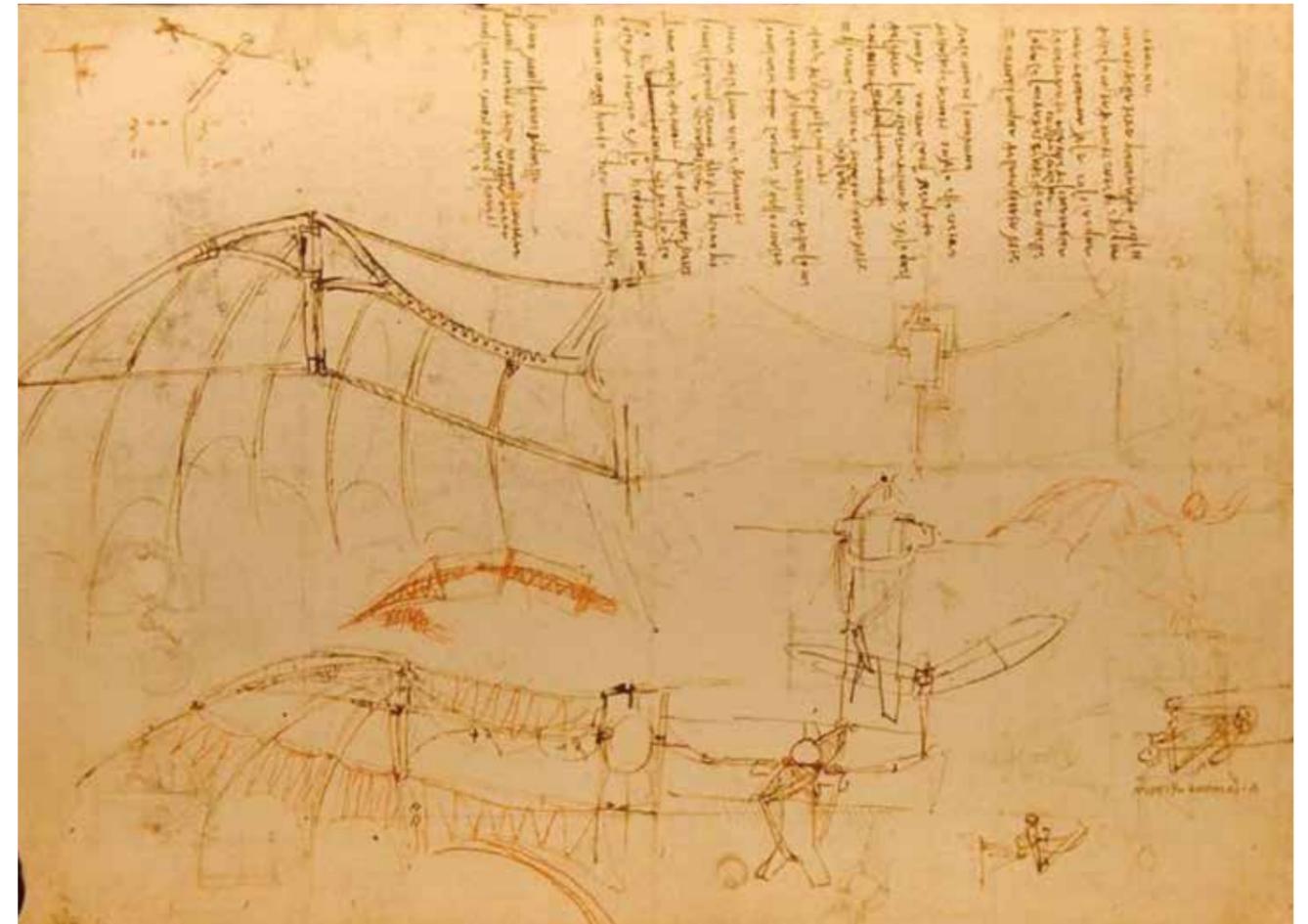
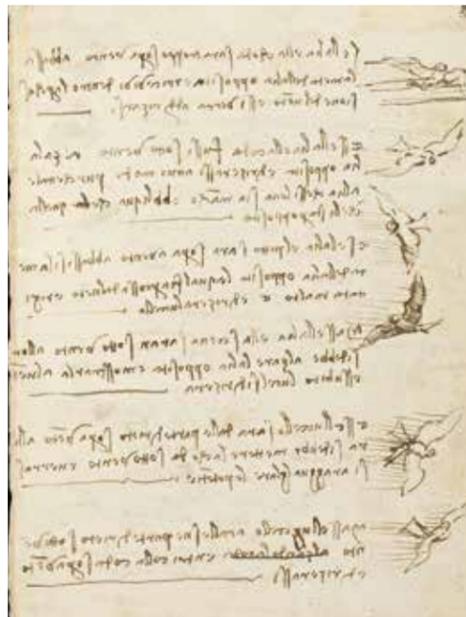
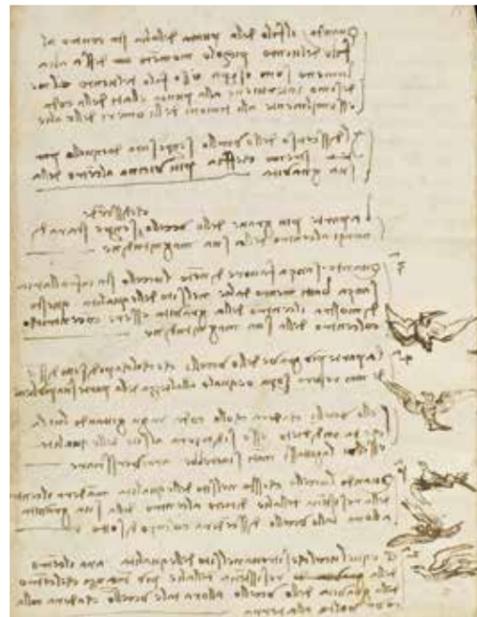
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Near **Fiesole**, close to the oratory of Sant'Apollinare, Leonardo bought two plots of land with a quarry. Also near Fiesole, on the summit of **Monte Ceceri** 32, he conducted his first experiments on human flight using one of his machines. Da Vinci's interest in flight is attested to by his painstakingly accurate studies of birds and his designs for flying machines, collected in the **Codex on the Flight of Birds** 33. His manuscript, which is a



33



34

fundamental work for following the development of his study of the anatomy of birds and air resistance, is kept at the Biblioteca Reale of Turin. Leonardo applied himself to researching this type of machine in a persistent and meticulous manner. Not only did he refine prototypes, but he also experimented in the field. He reached the highest technical level with the “**grande nibbio**” (great kite) 34, his most advanced flying machine, built in 1515. He writes in a handwritten note:

“The Great Bird will take its first flight over the back of the great Monte Ceceri, filling the universe with amazement, filling all records with its fame and bringing eternal glory to the nest where it was born.”

These words are now written on a plaque in the clearing at the top of Monte Ceceri. Legend has it that one of his followers, **Zoroastro da Peretola**, stayed in the air for about a mile and landed at a lower point on the hill, breaking his leg. On the wall along the provincial road that climbs from Florence to Fiesole, near the Il Regresso bend, another plaque commemorates this episode. Monte Ceceri is a park that offers a magnificent view of Florence, panoramic paths and ancient quarries (from which the stones used for the construction of many Florentine monuments were taken).



# LEONARDO

## 4 Castles · Towers · Fortresses · Battles

### PIOMBINO-LA VERRUCA- SANT'ALLUCCIO-MONSUMMANO-ANGHIARI



35



«I have plans for very light, strong and easily portable bridges with which to pursue and, on some occasions, flee the enemy, and others, sturdy and indestructible either by fire or in battle, easy and convenient to lift and place in position. Also means of burning and destroying those of the enemy.»

(Codex Atlanticus)

Leonardo was not only a painter, sculptor and inventor: he was also an architect and engineer, in particular a military engineer. He devoted himself to the design of innovative war machines, fortifications and defensive systems, new weapons and siege machines and put his skills at the service of the most important Italian Signorie, working on defence projects in various Tuscan cities. Among his many designs and projects, those relating to towers, castles and fortresses stand out.

In 1502, he was in **Piombino** as a military engineer for **Cesare Borgia**, and in 1504, for **Jacopo IV Appiani**. During this last assignment, Leonardo da Vinci studied the structure of the **Piombino Fortress 35**: a star-shaped fortification with walls and bastions at the corners enclosing a castle with a central plan. Leonardo envisaged inserting a circular tower following the shape of the plan. The fortress now houses the Castle and Town Museum.



36



37



38

A. Fedi - M. Carboni, **Episode of the Standard**, late 18th century, print on paper, Museo della Battaglia e di Anghiari



38



39



40



41

When in 1503, on the advice of **Niccolò Machiavelli**, the captains of the Florentine army besieging Pisa conquered the **Fortress of Verruca 36**, near **Calci**, Leonardo was to plan its restoration soon afterwards.

He also depicted the **Torre di Sant'Alluccio 37**, in Montalbano on the **Windsor Castle Map, RL 12685**. Today, the tower is located inside the **Barco Reale**. In Leonardo's time it used to dominate the landscape.

Another castle depicted by Leonardo is probably that of **Monsummano Alto 38**. We find it in the famous **Landscape, dated 1473 39**, now kept in the Uffizi Gallery. The castle, drawn in the distance, stands on a hill in the shape of an inverted cone. It is recognisable due to the shape of its walls and towers, but above all because of the position in which it is located in relation to the other landscape elements, which include two steep promontories and a fork in the Arno River, most likely attributable to the **Fucecchio Marshes**.

Finally, after towers and castles, a battle. This was the battle of **Anghiari 40**, where the Florentines and the Milanese clashed in 1440.

In 1503, the Florentine Republic decided to have one of the walls of Palazzo Vecchio, in the Salone dei Cinquecento, frescoed. They commissioned Leonardo to depict this battle, which saw the victory of the Florentines. The work, witnessed today by signed drawings, was never finished due to a problem with the technique used in the painting of the mural. The historical reconstruction of the battle and Leonardo's painting are presented in the **"Museo della Battaglia e di Anghiari" 41** in the 16th century **Palazzo del Marzocco**, the centre of the town.

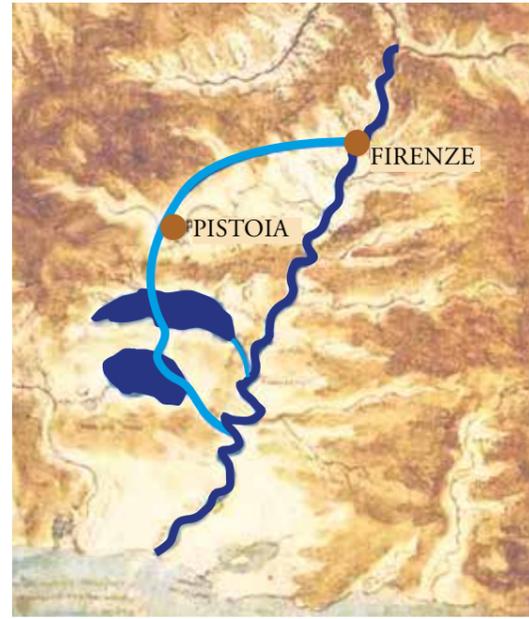


## LEONARDO

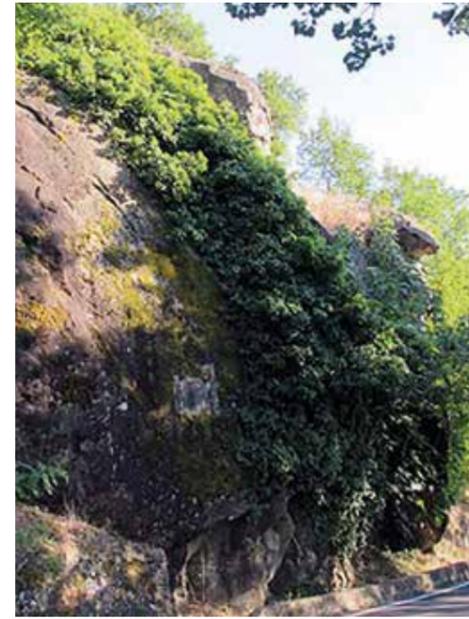
### 5 Water

#### RIVERS - BOULDERS - WEIRS - MILLS - BRIDGES

«... It is never at rest until it unites with its maritime element, where, when not disturbed by the winds, it settles and remains with its surface equidistant from the centre of the world.»



42  
43



44



This is how Leonardo describes water, a natural phenomenon that he investigated and subjected to his artistic gaze. Da Vinci did not only explore the specific features of water as a naturally occurring element, but also its potential in the field of hydraulic engineering.

«He was the first, even though a young man,” writes Vasari “to discuss making the River Arno a canal from Pisa to Florence».

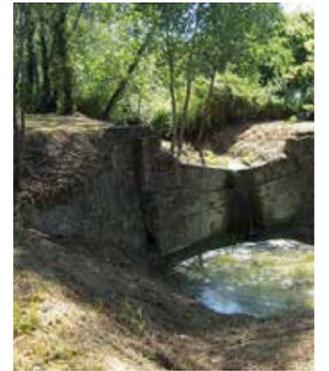
The most significant project Leonardo attempted concerned diverting the river to reorganise the hydrography of Tuscany 42. He looked into two possibilities: to have the Pistoia Canal join with the Arno through the **Fucecchio Marshes** or, further downstream, with the **Bientina Canal**.

The Arno, with its 241 km, now reaches 48 Tuscan municipalities. Leonardo illustrated its entire course with its main tributaries 43. He studied it carefully from an early age, observing it from the **Montalbano** hills and studying the morphological characteristics of the areas that the river crosses.

He understood the difference in layout between the **Upper and Lower Valdarno** territories, divided by the **Gonfolina** bottleneck 44, an obstruction in the course of the Arno near **Lastra a Signa**. The boulder, a remnant of the natural barrier that separated the two areas, is still visible today.

For the realisation of his hydraulic project, he studied all the engineering works which pertained to rivers and water.

Along the **Agliena** 45, stream, look at the weirs: little dams that obstruct the course of the river by holding back material from upstream.



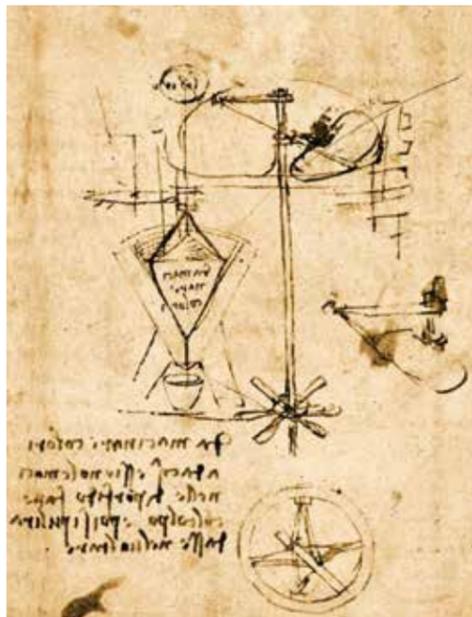
45



46



47



«he locks of rivers that are not of too great width should be made in this way: every third arm is a bunk post, as big as you can make it, the bigger the better; and let their ends be of equal height; on top of which a beam is fastened, very strongly; then take out the long timbers with all their branches, and place them on the beam and fasten them to the beam with the hook of the same branch; and let them be made as thick as they can, with branches in the opposite direction to the water; and then they are loaded with ice and stones; and after the first flood it will stay in place...»

(Codex Leicester, c 27v).



48



The weirs, probably of medieval origin, have recently been restored and can still be seen along the 8 km route of the river.

**Mills** 46 were also of particular interest to Leonardo with regard to the use of water for creating energy. He observed them from an early age. There is still the **Mulino della Doccia** 47, near Vinci, a hydraulic mill that Leonardo drew in the **Codex Atlanticus**. Finally, a curiosity: just west of Arezzo is the **Ponte a Buri** 48, built in the Middle Ages over the river Arno and which, according to some historians, was the inspiration for the bridge in the background of **La Gioconda**.



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