

BOB D'OTTAVI SCHOLARSHIP ASCOLI PICENO 'CITY OF TRAVERTINO'



SUNDAY, 21

After two eventful flights that consisted of 4 screaming kids, many people being sick (including me) and an offer to upgrade to business class for \$755 that I regretfully said no to, I arrived in Roma. The hotel is beautifully constructed from traditional materials and the architectural style is prominent. Just after arriving in Rome I took a walk out to the square Piazza del Repubblica to be mesmerised by its sheer beauty and travertine facades.

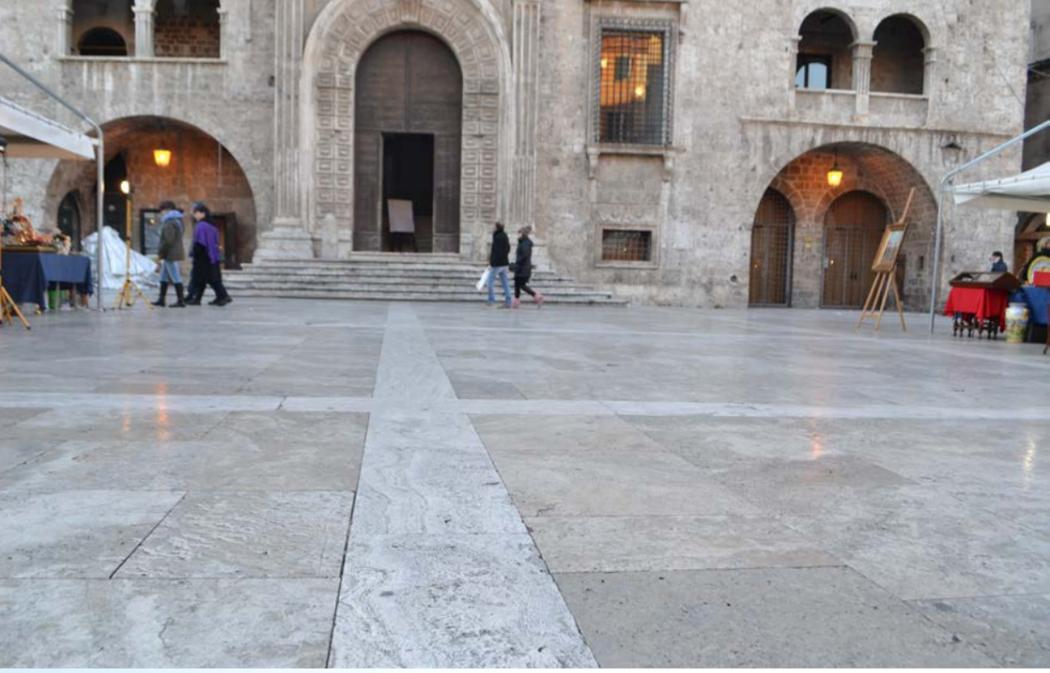
Before leaving Australia George told me that the Italians have biscotti and coffee for breakfast and what did I find myself having on my first morning in Italy... espresso and biscotti (both supplied by the hotel). At 6:30am I departed the hotel, walking back through the Piazza del Repubblica and headed straight for the train station. To my surprise many shop owners were out in the dark sweeping the floor and making things tidy, I was surprised as it's a Sunday morning. I bought a ciabattina rustica which consisted of bocconici, prosciutto, basil, tomato and mayonnaise (there was a fancy description in Italian however I couldn't quite understand it). Being used to the hustle and bustle in Paris I found it was pretty busy however everyone who has served me so far has been very friendly.

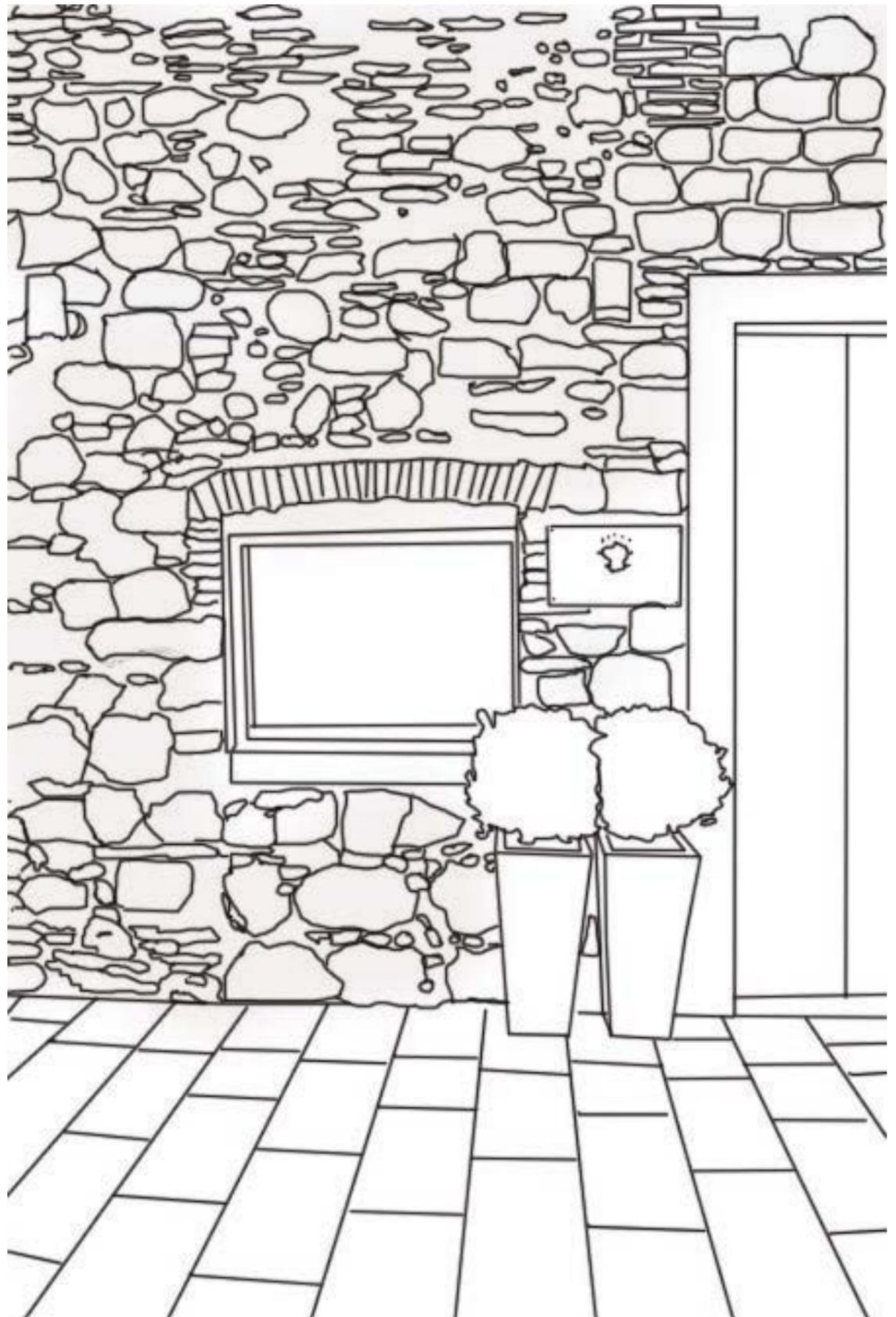
I departed from Rome termini in the direction of Ancona. This train took approximately 4 hours as it stopped many times and sometimes for around 10 minutes. This was a real culture shock as the trains in France stop for 2 minutes and if you're not ready everything happens so quickly and sometimes without you. The second train was from Ancona to Porto D'Ascoli which took roughly 40 minutes. Then I had a third ticket to Ascoli Piceno however when I arrived in San Benedetto the train to Ascoli Piceno was waiting at the station however my ticket was from Porto D'Ascoli. So both trains were waiting at San Benedetto and I was wondering if I should jump off and sprint to the other train with my 20kgs of luggage. Five minutes had gone by and both trains were still stationary and I was tempted to ask the train conductor with my limited Italian and then he jumped back on the train and off we went. Luckily we left before the other train and at the next stop I confidently switched trains as per my ticket.

Along today's journey I also noticed how cheap the pastries are at the paticerias. €1.20 for a 'brioche' with a pistachio custard filling at the train station in Rome! I couldn't believe it.

I then arrived in the beautiful town of Ascoli Piceno. After checking into the hotel I went to an eatery and ordered Olive Ascolane, a dish that was recommended by the hotel in Rome, consisting of local olives stuffed soft savoury meat and deep fried in a breaded crust. This is a speciality of Ascoli Piceno, the region of Le Marche. It was delicious. I also had a pizza which was not cut up, to my surprise and was thin, soft and full of flavour. After I wandered the streets taking photos of every building and monument the town has to offer.







MONDAY, 22

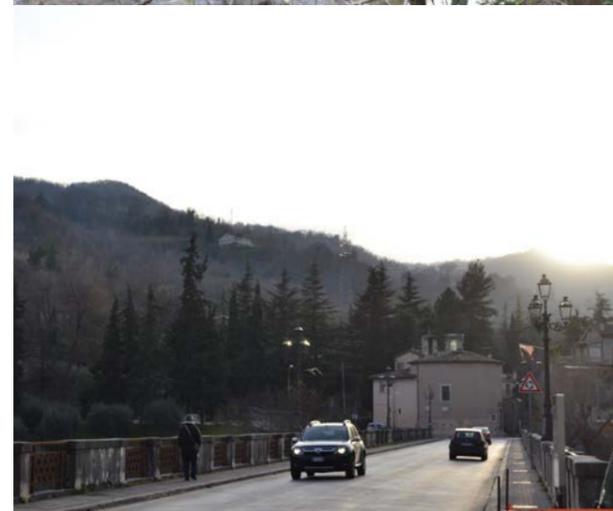
This morning was an early start, waking up at 4am as my body clock hasn't adjusted to the new daylight hours. At 7:30am I went down for breakfast at the hotel. To my surprise a gentleman was offering all different types of coffee such as americano, espresso, cappuccino and others. In the end I had two cappuccinos both had about 3cm of froth accompanied by two whole grain small rolls, cold meats, cheese and fruit. Opposite to what George said it was not a very small or light breakfast like he suggested the Italians have, but it was delicious nonetheless.

At 8:45am I set off to meet Guido, a Student representative from the University who described himself as a 'tutor' but is more like a tour guide. He was accompanied by a girl called Oana, who has finished her degree in Architecture. They gave me a tour of Ascoli, pointing out significant buildings and then we toured around the University. They pointed out the fact that most buildings cannot be visited due to reconstruction after the earthquake in 2016. These buildings included a level of the University, the tallest church in Ascoli, and some points of interest. According to Oana and Guido this is a big problem in Ascoli and is quite devastating as it cannot be stopped.

I was taken around the University and shown where I will meet the professors on Wednesday. Then I met another student representative who carefully went through my itinerary telling me which places were closed due to the earthquake and which places to visit that weren't listed on my itinerary. This was very useful as I hope it improves the quality of my visit in Ascoli.

After discussing the itinerary for an hour I walked back to the town centre and went off to have lunch. I tried a soup of barley and beans with chunks of local cheese. I also ordered a small plate of local meats and cheeses to try. Oana also suggested I try Cremini (a specialty) which tasted like crumbed and deep fried custard. As it is quite difficult to understand what is on the menu and with some waiters having limited English I'm just trying food at random and not necessarily knowing what it is, which is why I cannot state the names of each cheeses and cuts of meat, however they're a specialty of the region and were very good.

This afternoon it was suggested that I take a walk to see the Castellano River. I walked up to Ponte di Porta Cartara and walked along the river which apparently everyone bathes in during the summer. The river is surrounded by hills with a travertine substructure - I later checked this with the tourist information desk. They also pointed out places to visit and gave me a lot of information about buildings in Ascoli.



Doing some research about the history of Ascoli proved helpful to understanding as I quickly realised most of the extensive information is in Italian and will be much easier to understand with some background knowledge. Some of the architecture of Ascoli Piceno can be traced back to the Roman times; however, many of the existing buildings in the old section are of Romanesque (which was influenced by Roman architecture), and the later Gothic, styles dating from the Middle Ages.

Roman architecture was developed from Egyptian and Greek architecture. However, these styles of architecture resulted in buildings that were grand when viewed from the outside but not necessarily so practical because of the trabeated system, i.e. column and lintel construction system. The lintels were very heavy and therefore floor space was lost with the supporting columns. The Romans solved this problem by improving construction techniques and the use of Roman concrete (opus caementicium) from early in the 2nd century BC.

Initially the Romans used tufa, a volcanic stone found in Italy, for construction. In the late 2nd century BC the use of travertine became more common as it was more versatile and visually more pleasing. Marble was not used much as it was considered too grandiose for general construction.

The town of Ascoli Piceno was invaded by the Romans in 89 BC and after the fall of the Roman Empire it was subsequently taken over by the Longobards (who largely destroyed the town) in 578 AD. After this there was an unstable period with the Bishops gradually gaining control.

Ascoli Piceno has 2 main centres which reflect the ancient and modern Ascoli. The area around the Piazza del Popolo was the location of the residence of the "Captains of the People" and was the commercial centre. The area around the Piazza Arringo was the political centre of the town with its Cathedral, Bishops Palace and the location of the old Roman Forum. Today many of Ascoli's museums are located around the Piazza Arringo.

TUESDAY, 23

This morning I set off for Piazza Arringo. As I visited the tourist office yesterday the guide pointed out there were many more places to visit, I returned to Piazza Arringo to try and find the Archaeological Museum.

The museum was fascinating and incredibly beautiful however I struggled to understand as virtually no information was in English.

I knew there were other places of interest in the Piazza however I couldn't see the entrance to them from the square. After the earthquake several maintenance/ restoration jobs are being undertaken and I assume are masking the entrances. Following the map given to us I went around to each point of interest.

Piazza Del Popolo

Piazza Del Popolo was constructed in the first decade of the 1500's and speculated to be designed by Pietro de Corona. The square is predominantly constructed from travertine and hosts some graceful renaissance palaces.

Palace of the People's Captains

Constructed using travertine the palace of the people's captain is comprised of 16th century superstructures however dates back to the 13th century. Under the ownership of the city state government an order by the pope's commissioner was to burn down the palace to drive out rebels who had sought refuge in 1535. After the great fire the palace was partially rebuilt by architect Cola d'Amatrice and master Lazzaro di Francesco. From 1564 to 1902 the palace was neglected until returned to the town council who restored and reopened it to the public.

Café Meletti

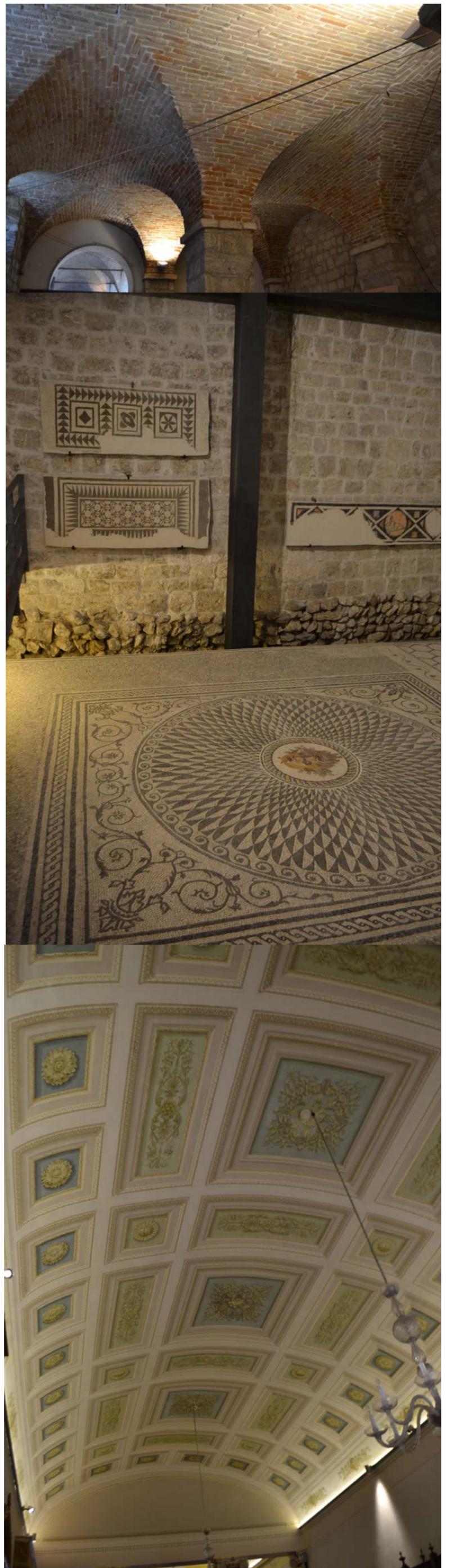
Built by the Province Council from 1882-1884 to be the postal office in the early 1900's it became a fashionable coffee house where homemade anisette liqueur is made. It is also believed that Ernest Hemingway and Jean-Paul Sartre frequented the café.

St Francis' Church

Architect Antonio Viperà created St Francis' Church in honour of St Francis who visited Ascoli in 1215. The construction of the church commenced in 1258 however was only completed in 1549. The church has a Gothic-Roman style with a full-centre arch and supporting columns. The central niche is where a statue of Pope Julius II is located, he served Ascoli as he defended its liberty. Inside the church is a Latin-cross with three naves with pointed arches. The presbytery has a high altar at its centre which is surrounded by seven tribunes, which are situated behind the church's chapels. These include St Francis' Chapel, St Rita's Chapel, the most holy Eucharist with a Gothic Tabernacle created from Travertine stone and a 15th century monument honouring Nicola Saladini on the right. The Chapel of the Holy Heart of Jesus with the urn of Corrado Milani and the Chapel of the Holy Family. In the right nave is the sepulchral Monument of Countess Cavina Saladini showing two figures that represent Religion and Gratitude. The pulpit is also constructed of pure travertine stone which was designed by Architect Antonio Giosfatti, from Venice in 1605.

Ventidio Basso Theatre

The Ventidio Basso Theatre commenced construction in 1840 and was completed in 1846 when the theatre was opened to the public. The façade is Neo-classical constructed from Travertine and features a double-order colonnade which was designed by Gabriele Gabrielli and Marco Massimi.



St Mary Intervineas

St Mary Intervineas was initially constructed in either the 9th or 10th century with restorations undertaken in the 13th century. The early construction meant that the church once stood amongst vineyards, which is why its name is Intervineas. The main façade overlooking Largo del Cremore is simple and displays a pointed arch portal. On another side has five slender one-light windows and by the portal is a sculpture of Alfio Ortensi, a reputable artist who became Director of the Archaeological Museum of Ascoli in 1951 and passed away in 1992.

St Vincent and St Anastasius' Church

The bell tower, nave and apse were constructed in the 9th century and restored in the 11th century and side naves were constructed in the 14th century. The main façade embellishes a grid of 64 travertine relief-frames and within the façade is a portal which is framed by spiral columns, topped up by refined roman-corinthian capitals, supporting concentric archivolting ribs.

Church of Saint Peter the Martyr

Completed in the first half of the 15th century, the main façade is in a plain simple style that conformed to the Romanesque "style" rules of the time when construction commenced. The side portal (the Doric Portal) was added in the 16th Century and was designed by Cola d'Amatrice. The later additions were in the Gothic style of the time. The interior has three polygonal apses and contains the precious reliquary of the Holy Thorn.

The Roman Bridge

The Roman Bridge is located on the Northern side of the old town and spans the river Tronto. It was constructed in the 1st century BC. Built out of travertine it has a single arch of 21 metres and is 25 metres high. This bridge was one of the most daring pieces of engineering work conceived by Roman architects. It is considered to be one of the 4 greatest Roman bridges in Europe.

Public Lavatory (Lavatoio di Porta Cappuccina)

On the northern side of the river Tronto, just near the Roman Bridge, is the public lavatory. Built out of pure travertine it dates from the 16th century. The lavatory is covered under a 5 arch arcade with 4 Doric style columns and a balustrade of travertine. Dating from the 16th century the lavatory was used by the women of Ascoli Piceno and the surrounding countryside to wash their laundry.

St Augustine's Church

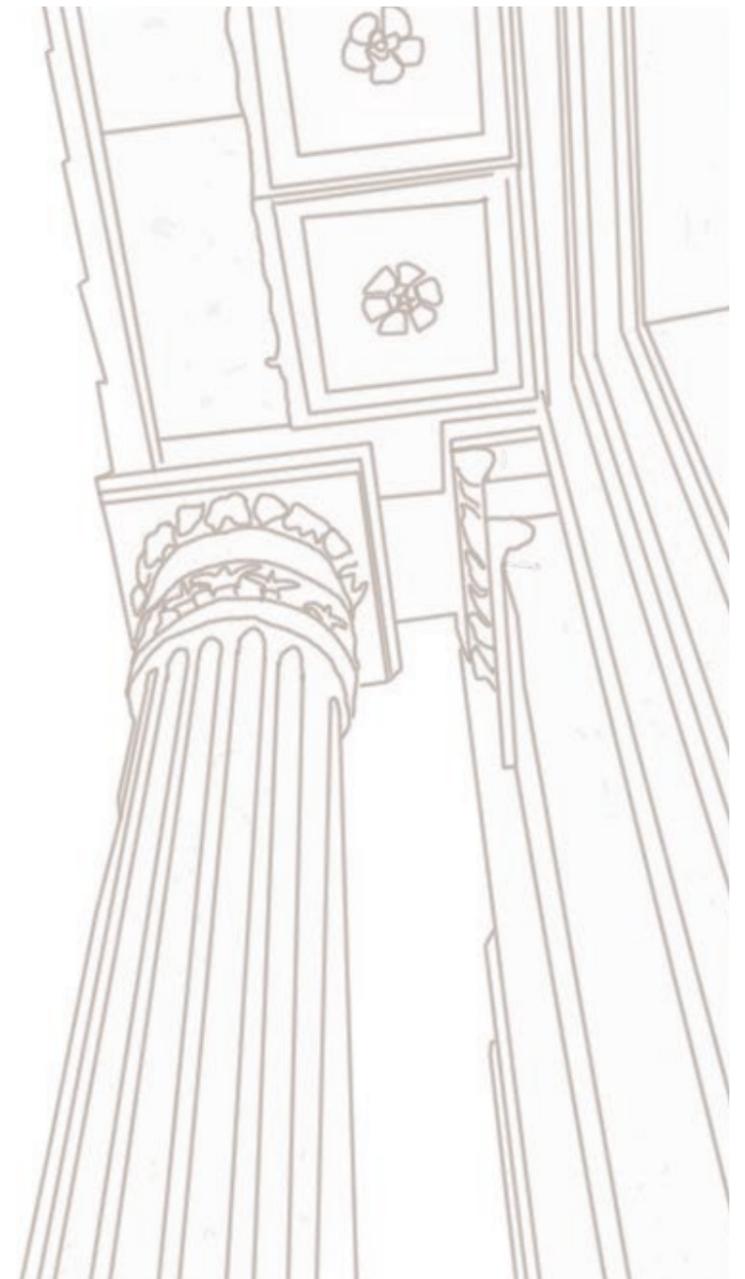
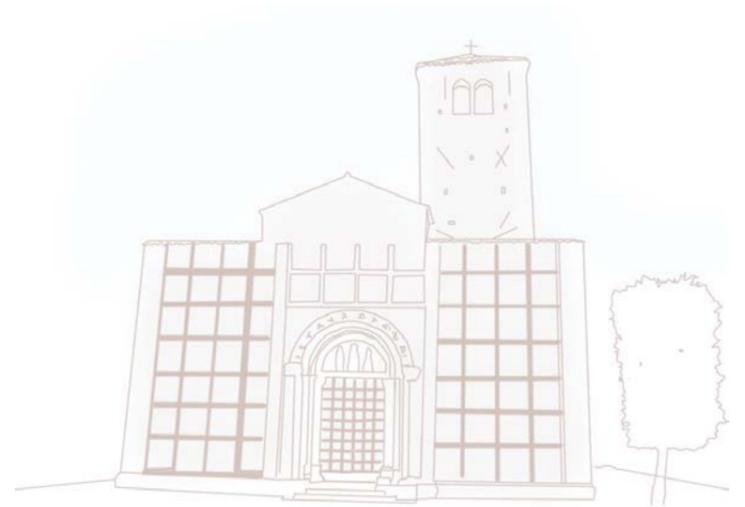
This church was built in the Romanic-Gothic style with construction starting in 1371 and being completed in 1495. The façade is a square shape and is attributed to Cola d'Amatrice. The façade is divided into four pilaster strips with three circular windows in the upper half with an elegant decorated door embellished with artwork of leaves and fruit, the work of 16th century artisans.

Piazza Arringo

The name for this area probable arose from "arringhe" (public speeches). This is the old political centre of Ascoli Piceno. In addition, jousts and tournaments were held here. The square is surrounded by buildings with differing styles of architecture ranging from the 8th to 19th century including: the Baptistery, the Cathedral the Bishops Palace and the Town Hall.

I ran into a man who was trying to teach me about the history and tell me about the places worthwhile seeing after the earthquake (understanding this with my limited knowledge of Italian).

For lunch I looked up nearby restaurants and found this little place which had only 6 tables but soon enough became completely full. As the menu was really basic and all Italian I just ordered 'pasta e funghi porcini' which I understood and sounded delicious. It came out and was full of herbs, white wine, garlic and other aromatic flavours and was simply divine. The menu was hand written and so simple yet the food was complex and wonderfully put together. This wouldn't work for people with allergies however was a brilliant concept as it allows the chef to pull together all ingredients that work well together. Tables around me ordered grilled seafood with a side of salad, pasta with clams, etc etc. For dessert I ordered crema catalana which tasted like a delightful Italian version of creme brulee.

















WEDNESDAY, 24

Waking up slightly later this morning (6:45am) I showered (had hot water this morning) and then set off for breakfast. Nothing had changed and I had the usual assortment of food with a cappuccino. The morning flew past as I caught the train to San Benedetto where I walked along the coast admiring the various sculptures made out of travertine. These large travertine blocks seemed to create a sea wall. There were many different sculptures some from 2001 and others from 2008.

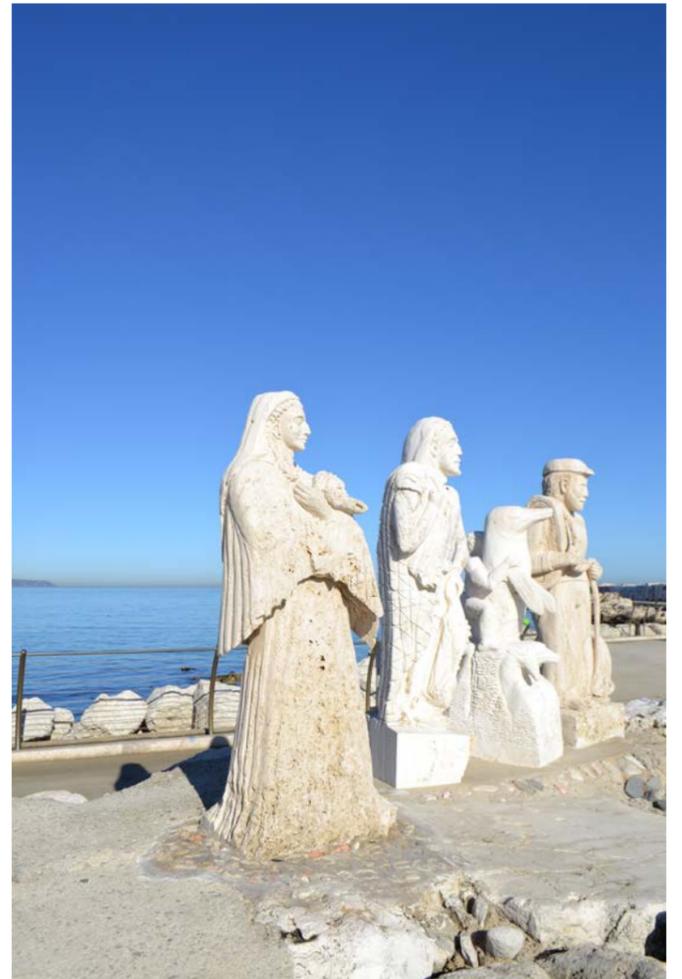
On my tour along the coast I stopped off at a cafe to use the bathroom and instead ending up taste testing some cannoli and another cappuccino. I've been surprised to find so many migrants asking for money in all different places. For example they would wander the streets in ordinary clothes asking for money, wait for you to walk over to them and stand in and around cafés. Otherwise the coffee was very cheap with the cannoli coming to €2.8.

After I continued walking along the coast and then returned to the train station, to go back to Ascoli. On the train I admired the number of houses and wondered what occupation every has as there seems to be a lot of housing for not a lot of business but then I realised there is a fair amount of industry nearby.

For lunch I went to a small restaurant nearby which served free lentils and olive oil with what seemed like savoury deep fried donuts which were delicious. I ordered gnocchi e pomodoro which was light and fluffy. Today I took lunch at the Italian hour of 1:30pm. When speaking to the students of Ascoli they said no one takes it before 1pm.

In the afternoon I went to the Malatesta Fortress which was an exceptional (highly restored) building however not much information in English so it was a nice self guided tour of the architecture and viewing of some medieval costumes. The fortress was built on the order of Galeotto Malatesta in 1349 to defend Ascoli during a war with Fermo. The fortress was further enhanced in 1543 under direction from Pope Paul III. These changes included an octagonal keep erected in the middle of the building and the incorporation of the "Church of St Mary of the Lake" into the fortress. In recent years the fortress was used as a prison until 1984. As is common with most of the buildings in Ascoli Piceno the construction is entirely of travertine.

At 17:00 I met with Elio who spoke a bit about the university and showed me the library in which I may find useful sources about travertine. So far we have not had much luck other than DVDs which I would find hard to translate as it's not a written word. I have authorisation now to return to the library so I may be able to find more information in the following days.





THURSDAY, 25

This morning I woke up, had my usual small Italian breakfast and set off for the Musei della Cartiera Papale. This is located South of the town centre and next to the Ponti di Porta Cartara which crosses the Castellano river. In the reception area I found some useful guides about the Ascoli region in English. We were told that the tour would commence in 10 or so minutes and were invited to visit an aqua museum located on level 2 of the paper mill, which was somewhat basic and intended for children. As we were not expecting a tour guide it was quite nice to have one. However, the guide's English was not very good so it was hard to follow. The guide was continually saying to correct her pronunciation which we did, however we could not help her say phrases and hence we did not accurately understand many of the processes.

In the afternoon I roamed the streets, looking at local shops and supermarkets. It was interesting to see that shops are open from 9-12 and then 3-7 or thereabouts. Later in the evening I noticed there were different flavours of Anisetta Meletti and so I tried one of the flavours. I ordered mandarin flavour and it was served steaming hot. I could barely smell it, the alcohol was so strong and I still don't know why it was as strong as it was. 2.5 hours later and I have managed to finish 3/4 of it. I tried the local pizza shop for a cheap \$2 slice of pizza and it was so good.



FRIDAY, 26

This morning was the coolest morning so far. With my toes starting to feel numb after not moving for a few minutes. I decided to go to Castel Trosino this morning. This was a lot easier in theory than in practice. I looked it up myself on how to catch a bus to the village and thought to double check with the reception. They confirmed that line ten was correct and to check times at the bus stop, which I did. I bought my ticket at the nearby newspaper shop and waited for the bus. As the bus appeared it said 10 and Castel Trosino. I hopped on the bus and after about 5 minutes of up-hill driving the bus stopped and apparently it was time for everyone to get off. This was the first attempt at getting to Castel Trosino. So then, I was very confused and tried to ask a few people including the bus driver how to get there. All I got in reply were many sentences in Italian and the gps saying we were a 50minute walk away. So... being rather close to the train station I walked down to see if I could catch another bus from there to Castel Trosino. No luck. No one spoke English and stated I needed to get a bus not a train. So then I walked back to Piazza Arringo and asked the tourist office. It took three people and 10 minutes of research to find the correct bus, number 10 from the same stop as this morning. I stated I had already tried this route and then said they could not help but to try again. So back I went to the same stop and along came another number 10 bus. I hopped on the bus and asked the driver if it was going to Castel trosino and I got a no in reply. Feeling very confused I went back to the tourist office and they just stated to keep trying every hour until one bus was actually going there. So luckily 3 hours later at 12:06pm I finally got on a bus where the driver said 'si Castel Trosino'. Finally.

Castel Trosino was very beautiful but very quite. Only seeing 2 people and a dog it a short visit as the church was closed and it wasn't possible to walk around due to the earthquake. I met a man from LA and his dog called 'Dope' who was extremely loving and loyal. Luckily a bus was going back to Ascoli not long after so I caught it back down. For lunch I tried some lightly fried fish with a green salad, I saw this at another restaurant and seems to be a popular food to have in Ascoli. It was delectable.

This afternoon I walked to Sant'Emidio alle Grotte. On the northern side of Ascoli Piceno between the River Tronto and the base of the hills lies the Temple of St Emidius and the Caves. This temple was built in the years 1717-1721 in a natural cave which was enhanced at the Holy Heart Hill. The façade is in the Berninian style (named after Gian Lorenzo Bernini – influential in the development of the Baroque style of architecture).

The façade is composed of two superimposed orders, the one underneath being preceded by an elliptical little porch which gently flies up into a dome. Inside, at the back of the alter, a statue of St Emidius is carved into travertine.





SATURDAY, 27

This morning I roamed the streets as it was a Saturday morning and the city was bustling with people. It was as if everyone had just emerged from their houses to chat in the streets and the squares and enjoy the day. This is so different to Australia as we meet at a cafe or such, whereas the Italians meet in public and chat.

I found a small food place, not a restaurant and not a shop but a cafe with a selection of foods that could be reheated and served to you on the spot. They had a deal for 7 Euros which included a bottle of water or wine, bruschetta with cold meats and tomato, a plate of pasta or risotto that you could choose from and a dessert. I couldn't believe this... It was all so fresh as well and there weren't many people in the shop.

After lunch my intention was to catch a train to Monsampolo del Tronto. So I bought a return ticket and hopped off the train at the Monsampolo del Tronto train station. Little did I realise that the short walk that appeared on Google maps was actually an 8 km incline to Monsampolo del Tronto. It didn't help that I confused it with Spinetoli and walked 20 minutes in the wrong direction. Eventually I made it to the top and did a short walk around Monsampolo del Tronto.

I was hoping to see more travertine but realised it was a more modern town with a population of 4,500 and no-one seemed to be out in the afternoon.



SUNDAY, 28

This morning I looked up train times to go to Porto D'Ascoli and Google suggested there was a train at 9:10am. So I rushed through breakfast and left the hotel at 8:50. As I headed for the train station I thought I may not make it in time to buy tickets and get on. So I started to run to be sure I made the train. Completely exhausted I turn up to the train station to find that there were no trains running until 2pm as it is a Sunday. Oh well.

I returned to the town and had a coffee. At this point I have visited many places and all the shops were closed (even though they said they were open later) so I returned to the hotel to do some research on the construction details of travertine. The sources I found at the university library were in Italian and navigating my way through the system was somewhat challenging especially as the librarian spoke limited English.

For lunch I headed to a nearby eatery and had the most delectable large ravioli with a filling of eggplant and beef. Not really knowing what is in each dish I try they have all been very good so far.

At 1:40pm I hurried back to the train station and caught the train to Porto D'Ascoli. There was far less travertine at the port and 95% of the shops were closed as it's low season and a Sunday. It was interesting to see many people walking, roller blading, toddlers cycling without peddles and many many dogs bouncing along too.

I walked along The Boulevard de San Benedetto which is a highly rated tourist attraction near Ascoli Piceno. There were many people also walking along it.



MONDAY, 29

This morning I woke up fairly early as we needed to check out, catch the train to Pescara and drive back to Ascoli. We caught two trains over, with an hour long break and some delay in between trains. We needed to make it to Pescara before 12:30pm as the Italians break for lunch at that time. We arrived at 12:15pm and were shown our car.

The drive back to Ascoli Piceno began and we soon realised that speed limits do not matter in Italy.

We picked up our luggage from the previous hotel and went for lunch in the city centre. I had the most delectable spaghetti with olives from Ascoli, tuna and tomato. It was incredible.

After having returned to Ascoli Piceno we drove up to San Marco to see a religious building, dedicated to St. Mark the Evangelist which was inherited from the Sgariglia family, and is integrated into the cliff face of the Colle San Marco. The hermitage was constructed from blocks of travertine, roughly squared and linked together by lime mortar, in the Romanesque style. The monks enclosed the cavity of the cave creating architecture that sits directly on the cliff face. Its front consists of the juxtaposition of the bell tower and the façade articulated horizontally by a double order of mullioned windows. In an attempt to beat the sunset we walked to see the church. We moved very quickly around as it was getting dark quite quickly and there was no-one around at this point in time. Not knowing anything about the vegetation or the area it was quite daunting but the sight was spectacular.



TUESDAY, 30

This morning I sent off by car to visit Aquasanta Terme, a province in Ascoli Piceno. I was advised that it wasn't as beautiful as the earthquake destroyed some of it and that I shouldn't go because it's not the same, however I still saw all the naturally formed travertine in the cliff faces so it was well worth it.

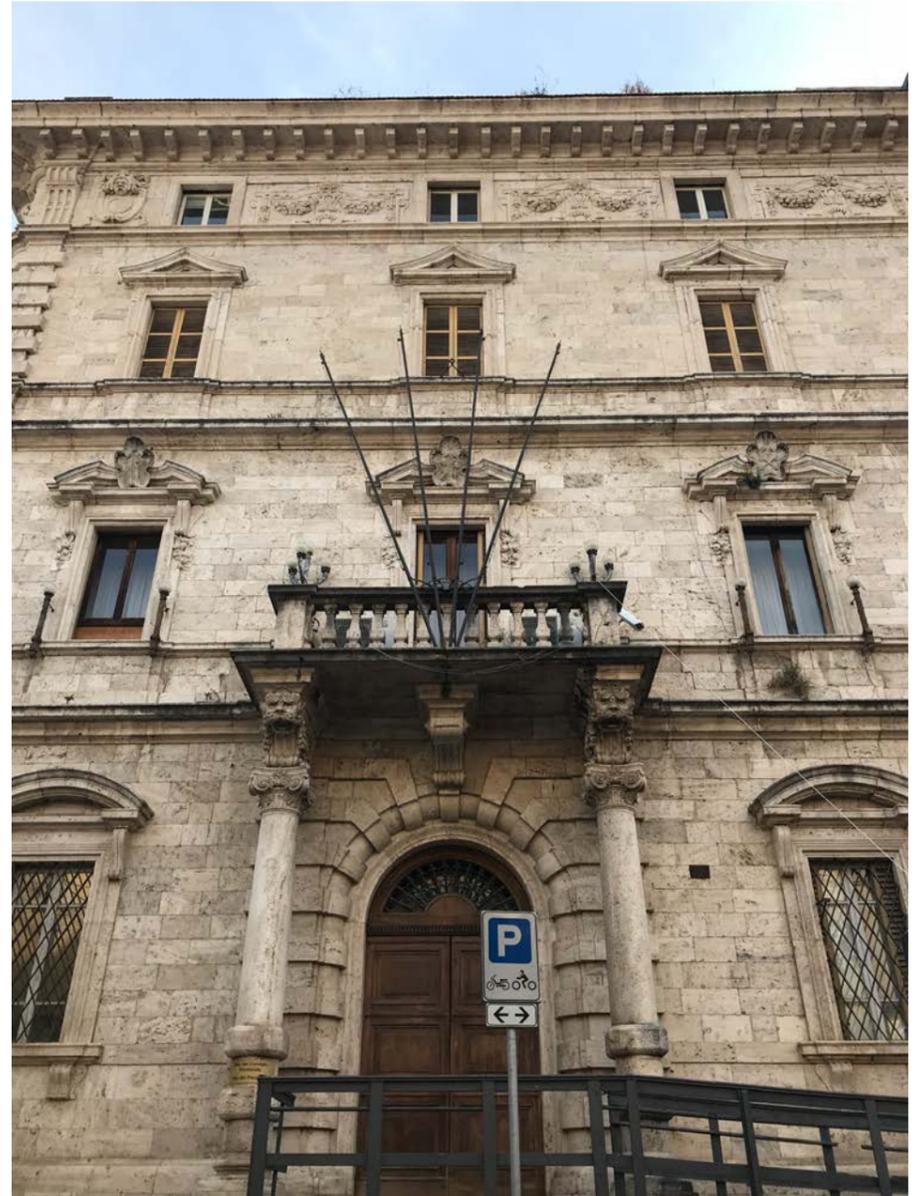
The natural baths and quarries and that were in information guides and pamphlets were all closed or unable to be viewed because of the earthquake and season. The tourist office to my disappointment was closed so I roamed the streets and drove around the mountains admiring the travertine cliff faces.

As it is quite challenging not speaking Italian in a small city, the challenges I faced were never ending. For example for lunch today as soon as I walked in the door I was seated, given bread and prosciutto, olives ascolane, water and poured wine. I felt too embarrassed to refuse it so ended up accepting a 4 course degustation meal that I couldn't comprehend (all in Italian) and paid €25 for it.

In the afternoon I gave a short presentation to the students at Camerino University. I talked a bit out the scholarship, BEST Bricks and Pavers, Bob D'Ottavi and the Architecture School at Adelaide uni. The students seemed very interested.

For the rest of the evening I roamed around the streets of Ascoli as it's my last few days and I wished to take it all in. I then had a cappuccino as it seems to be the thing to do and headed back to my hotel. One of my favourite buildings is the town hall, located in Piazza Aringo and is an amalgamation of the Arengo Palace, constructed in the 12th Century and the city-state Town Hall constructed in the 13th Century. In 1610 the two buildings became one, constructing a façade built of travertine ashlar with five arches and a portal that leads to a courtyard.

Another building that has a beautiful facade is the Prefettura Di Ascoli Piceno (Government building). Formerly called St Philip's Palace, was constructed in the early 18th Century to house the Filippini, a monastic order, and was completed in the late 19th Century under the ownership of the administration of the Province. I am inspired greatly by the travertine and hope to create architecture in Australia with influences and aspects of the Ascoli region.





WEDNESDAY, 31

Waking to the noises of birds, I set off for another wonderful day. This morning I had yoghurt, tea and a chocolate croissant as that was what the hotel was offering. As we hired a car we decided to drive to some nearby towns to explore the Fermo region. Taking routes that weren't the highway we ventured through many towns finally reaching the city centre in Fermo.

We visited the Cisterne Romane, learning about the freshwater reservoir in Fermo, set up at the termini of aqueducts which supplied water to the town.

Walking back through the two we then drove to Servigliano, a Province of Fermo.

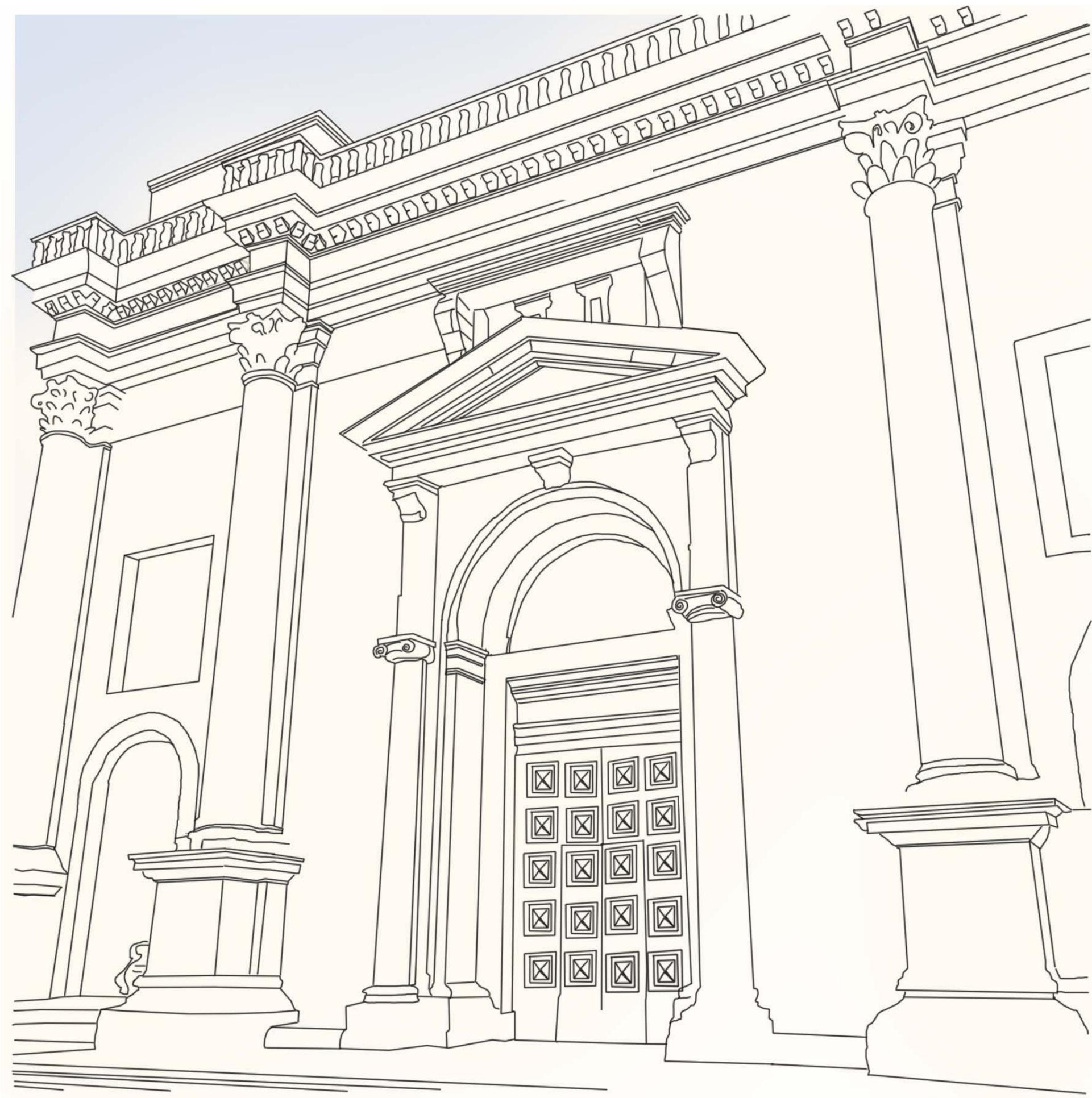
For lunch I stopped at this small shop which had a few seats and given that no English was spoken we managed to receive 2 samples of pizza, a plate of pasta, a ham and bocconcini sandwich, 2 cappuccino and a chocolate biscuit for 7 Euros. I was astounded but the whole trip has been similar to this, cheap but quality food. For dinner we tried a local restaurant which was completely full and we didn't quite understand the menu however we received beautifully cooked pork and a dessert of pannacotta.



THURSDAY, 01

Ascoli > Pescara > Rome





Thank you for this incredible experience.