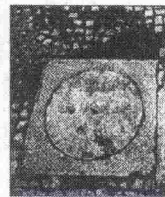
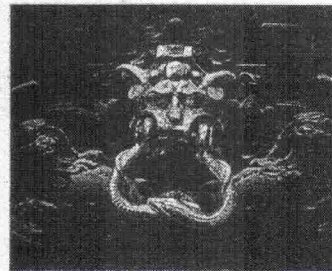
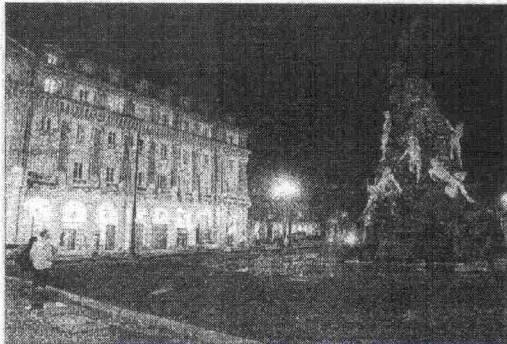


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TORINO



Photos by Evan Siegel, USA TODAY

Dark side: From left to right: Piazza Statuto, the "black heart" of Torino, a gold devil's door knocker on a 17th-century mansion, and the Gates of Hell, manhole covers leading to the city's underground tunnels.

Torino's magic not as simple as black, white

Two sides have history, lore

By Jerry Shriner
USA TODAY

TORINO — If athletes find it easier to summon up performance-inspiring mojo at these Olympic Games, it may be because the city has been known for centuries as a center for magic, both black and white.

From the supposed Gates of Hell in Piazza Statuto to the church where the Holy Shroud is hidden away, Torino offers a contentious spiritual vibe that puts Harding vs. Kerrigan to shame.

"There is a need to believe in magic, even if people don't believe in it," says Pamela Shaw, a freelance guide for the Somewhere tour company.

The firm is one of several in the city that conducts "magic" tours during which treks to major historical and architectural sites, churches and monuments are interwoven with narratives on religious lore and urban myths, and tales of murder and mayhem.

The tours are based upon an assumption, of fuzzy historical origin, that Torino is part of a "white magic" triangle along with Lyon, France and Prague, and a "black magic" triangle, with San Francisco and London. The intersections of those forces are thought to create good and evil sides of the city.

Such talk prompts eye-rolling from some longtime residents, who would like the superstitious past laid to rest.

"The people of Turin are skeptical, indifferent today," says Renzo Rossotti, a novelist and journalist who has written extensively about the region's culture. "Torino is a town of arts and industry, not of dreams and legends."

But Shaw notes that many of the tour customers are residents who moved from southern Italy to work in the factories and looking to explore the city's history.

"It's a beautiful Baroque city and they don't know anything about it. They're always amazed that there are so many devil-like faces looking down on them (from building sconces) when they walk around."

Somewhere's two-hour tours (nightly during the Olympics) begin in darkness at Piazza Statuto on the west side, in an area along the 45th parallel that is said to be a Roman-era burial ground and the site of public hangings and several massacres — "the very heart of 'black' Torino" says Shaw.

In the piazza is a stone monument dedicated to workers killed while building the trellis rail tunnel linking Italy and France,



By Robert Deutsch, USA TODAY

Skating is a magical experience: Piazza Solferino features an ice rink as well as a little history as a center for magic in Torino.

Atop the monument is a crown-wearing figure believed by some to be Lucifer, the rebel angel.

He faces away from the tunnel and points toward two other religious-themed monuments to the east, in the "white" section. And at the base of the tunnel monument is a manhole cover that is "The Gates of Hell" — but which also leads to the city's 15-kilometer network of underground tunnels.

"I don't believe in the 'black' and 'white,'

but I am interested in it," says Shaw, who adds that she has seen evidence of black masses during her 30 years in the city.

The tour continues past a former insane asylum for women that now houses the city's archives, a statue of a priest who comforted condemned prisoners in the 1860s, a former Mason's lodge, reputed alchemists caves, old mansions with devil-mask floor knockers, griffins, gargoyles and grinning faces, and other notorious sites of the area.

Ghosts come into play at the Cemetery of St. Peter in Chains, which is said to be haunted by the wife of a Russian diplomat who died after giving birth.

Hope returns on the "white" side of the city toward the east which is anchored by the Church of the Gran Madre de Dio (Grand Mother of God).

It's fronted by a monument featuring a figure that holds aloft what's interpreted as a cup of Christ's blood, "and the Holy Grail may be beneath the church itself," says

Shaw.

The tour normally concludes, of course, at "the very heart of 'white' Torino," says Shaw, a spot between two equestrian statues in front of the royal palace, where the Holy Shroud used to be on public display in the 1700s.

But during the Games that spot shares space with a new source of magic: It's the site of a platform where the medals will be draped around the necks of the winning athletes.