



THE RIFICOLONA 7 September



"Ona, ona, ona, ma che bella rificolona..." From the seventeenth century to today: four centuries of joyous celebration. On 7 September, in the liturgical calendar the eve of Our Lady's birthday, the City Council organises the *Festa della Rificolona*, an authentic and original Florentine feast which is still deeply felt, popular tradition of ancient folklore.

But how far can we trace back the origins of this feast, featuring the traditional practice, passed down through the generations, of going round the streets carrying lanterns of coloured paper made up in the most varied and bizarre shapes, with a candle inside and hanging from the end of a stick? The feast apparently dates back to the mid seventeenth century, and can be connected with the arrival in the city of throngs of peasants and mountain-dwellers, who would descend on the city from the surrounding countryside and from the most isolated mountainous areas of Casentino and the Montagna Pistoiese to celebrate the feast of Our Lady in the Church of the Santissima Annunziata, still famous throughout

the Catholic world for its ancient, miraculous and much-venerated image of the *Madonna Santa Maria Madre di grazie*. These parties would leave their homes well ahead of time, and set off on their hazardous journey by the light of lanterns of varied shapes attached to the end of sticks, which the Florentines called "rificolone". With the passage of time, similar lanterns, inspired by those of the peasants, came to be constructed in Florence itself in preparation for the nocturnal vigil of 7 September, and even now these "rificolone" are still to be seen carried around the streets by children on the occasion of the feast. This is yet another of the vital traditions which contributes to boost the love of foreign visitors for the city, a love which they bear away in their hearts when they leave, fostering a sweet nostalgia for their return.