



OUR LADY OF BISBINO

This point of interest is found in Cernobbio - [Path 2](#) - Stage 2

DESCRIPTION

(*Silvia Fasana*)

In the streets of Rovenna, and in Cernobbio, too, it is common to find aediculae bearing the effigy of Our Lady of Bisbino, much venerated by locals in the shrine dedicated to her at the top of the mountain. The origin of this shrine is unclear. Tradition has it that, until the fourteenth century, this mountain was pointed, and shepherds, after flattening its top, used the rock to create a square and build a chapel dedicated to Our Lady, also functioning as a shelter from bears and bad weather. The first document attesting the presence of a church on the top of the mountain is a bill of sale dated 26 July 1368. However, the place is well known only from 1630 onwards: in that year the plague struck this territory heavily, too. On May 20, the community of Rovenna, led by the parish priest, went in procession to Our Lady of Bisbino, vowing, should they be preserved from the contagion, to repeat the pilgrimage to the city every first Wednesday of the month for a whole year. Sagno did the same, as did the bishop of Como, Lazzaro Carafino. The above communities were spared the epidemic, and the popularity of the church grew considerably, attracting increasing numbers of pilgrims.

Among the many devotional representations to be found in the chapels present in the area, Our lady of Bisbino is not always represented in the same way. It is sometimes depicted standing, with the Child in her arms, as in the large marble statue on the main altar, already present at the time of the bishop of Como Feliciano Ninguarda (1592) and returned to its original location only in 1933. Don Callisto Grandi writes about this statue in his 1898 pamphlet *La Beata Vergine del Rosario ed il suo Santuario (The Blessed Virgin of Bisbino and her shrine)*: “it is deemed to have been brought up here, where there is no road at all, with great labour, on the strength of that faith which can move mountains, either in war-time, or in times of dispute or of heresy, to avoid being it stolen or desecrated. [...] Some say that the block of white marble was miraculously found on the mountain itself, then transformed into a statue by an expert sculptor further to the prayers of good shepherds who were on the Bisbino with their flock for the summer pasture; according to legend, the sculptor, prosecuted by the justice of men, was wandering across these mountains to escape the severe punishment he deserved for committing serious crimes. Once up here he then repented, sanctified himself, and was pardoned of his sins. We are more inclined to believe that our beautiful statue is the work of some of the talented sculptors who worked in the construction of the Cathedral of Como at the beginning of the fifteenth century, where many expert plasterers and stuccoers from Rovenna were active, too”.

The other depiction of Our Lady sees her seated with the Child on her left knee, as in the small wooden simulacrum now housed in the space behind the altar, already located in the Shrine in the second half of the eighteenth century. This statue was worshiped on the main altar as a miraculous image throughout the nineteenth century and until 1933, becoming the symbol of the Shrine itself. As described by Don Grandi: “Everything suggests that this statue was created on the Bisbino by a shepherd [...], a rough work carried out while guarding the flock, and an old tradition strengthens this assumption”. According to popular belief, this simulacrum came in fact from the underlying pasture called *Boeucc*. The representation in this statue is the most common to be found in the numerous ex-voto preserved in the shrine, precious evidence of widespread popular devotion. Stories where the ordinary and the extraordinary intertwine, illustrating the profound gratitude to Our Lady of Bisbino, who always stands beside men of yesterday and today in times of danger and strain.