



## THE WALLS OF CANTÙ\*

\* buildings the most part of which have been lost

**You can find this point of interest in Cantù - Path 2 - Stage 1**

### DESCRIPTION

A perimeter wall system had been gradually put into place around the “*castrum*” on the hill of San Paolo as far back as the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, probably also exploiting the natural barriers adjacent to the hill. In the subsequent centuries this system was redefined and expanded in relation to the increase in the population of the village due to the general economic boost that had peaked in the tenth century.

A document dated 1086 mentions a Porta Ruscana (Ruscana Gate) in the area of the Monastery of S. Maria (St. Mary). In 1222 the archbishop Enrico da Settala, banished from the Commune of Milan by the popular faction that was dominant at the time, found a safe-haven with his followers in Cantù, which must have offered a valid barrier of defense: in 1225 this led the noblemen of Milan, who had managed to defeat the faction, to grant the people of Cantù recognition as citizens of Milan. Other documents from 1253-1256 would also lead to believe that some sort of boundary walling existed in the area of Pianella.

When, in 1324, the two brothers Gaspare and Giovannolo Grassi proclaimed the independence of Cantù from Milan - as reported by Ludovico Muratori in the *Annales Mediolanenses* - they took care of the rebuilding of a mile-long section of the perimeter, providing it with «*very large walls*» and «*thirty-five towers*» to defend the village of *Canturio* from the nearby and powerful Milan. As Graziano Alfredo Vergani points out, it is likely that the work ordered by the Grassi brothers was limited to the mending and fixing of fortifications built in the previous centuries, giving shape to and defining a single settlement with Santa Maria and San Michele, two other areas that were inhabited in high medieval times.

The town walls, with the many towers and gates (at least five of which of medieval origin) which characterized them, must have represented for many centuries one of the main features of Cantù, which was often referred to as “*the town of the hundred towers*”. This urban structure is clear when looking at a plan of the village of Cantù and Galliano dating back to the second half of the sixteenth century, preserved in the Diocesan Archive of Milan.

In the early nineteenth century the old fortified system was still visible (albeit with the changes that occurred over the centuries); in 1835 the provost Carlo Annoni published a map of the walled town engraved by the Bramati brothers based on a drawing by Carlo Montanara, as a companion to his book *Monumenti e fatti politici e religiosi del borgo di Canturio e sua pieve (Monuments and political and religious facts of the village of Canturio and its parish)*, where the exact locations of the gates and walls at the beginning of the nineteenth century are shown.

Most of the destruction of the wall system goes back to the second half of the nineteenth century, during the first urban planning interventions put into place after the unification of Italy: this caused the town to lose an immeasurable wealth of material sources, history, traditions, and collective identity.