



THE CASTLE / PALAZZO PIETRASANTA (PIETRASANTA PALACE)

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

INFORMATION

Location: the ancient fortress of Cantù, later transformed into the Pietrasanta Palace, stood on an elevated position on the hill of San Paolo, next to the church of S. Paolo (St. Paul).

Access: due to its current state, the palace has been declared unfit for use, and therefore it is not open to visitors. However, in order to have an idea of the grandeur of the complex, it is possible to enter into the lower courtyard, accessible from the foot of via Carlo Annoni in the direction of Piazza Garibaldi.

Services: bus stops for urban and suburban routes in Piazza Parini; automated teller machines in Piazza Garibaldi and via Corbetta; Chemist's in via Ariberto da Intimiano and via Matteotti.

Leisure and Food: bars, cafes and restaurants in the area; municipal gardens in via Dante (Parco Argenti) and via Roma (Parco Martiri delle Foibe).

DESCRIPTION

In the middle of the 10th century, after the invasion of the Hungarians, towns and villages of northern Italy were forced to equip themselves with fortifications: Cantù was no exception. There is evidence that a "castrum", i.e. a fortified structure, was already present on the hill of San Paolo at the beginning of the 12th century (1101). Located at the top of a morainic relief, in a strategic position controlling the territory and the communication routes between Milan, Como and upper Brianza, this "castrum" was particularly important during the long fight that in the 12th-14th centuries saw the Communes of Como and Milan, and later their noble families, on opposite sides. From 14th and 15th century notarial documents it emerges that the fortress, in its lower part, was also used as a prison.

When in 1475 Cantù was given in fief to Francesco Pietrasanta by Galeazzo Maria Sforza, the castle became the family's stronghold. Following the damage caused to the fortress in 1527 by Gian Giacomo De Medici, known as the Medeghino, the Pietrasantas rebuilt a palace on the same site, incorporating the remains of the previous construction, and made alterations to it several times to make it a sumptuous urban villa, as the original defensive function had been lost. The very simple front façade, which overlooks the present square, Piazza Garibaldi, shows an interesting portal with an ashlar decoration. Inside, the main hall is particularly worthy of note, with its neoclassical style decoration attributed to Giocondo Albertolli, and a *Country dance scene* at the centre of the ceiling ascribed to Andrea Appiani and - more likely, perhaps - to his school. Both works are deemed to date back to the very beginning of the nineteenth century. Between September and November 1784 the composer Domenico Cimarosa stayed at this palace as a guest of the Pietrasanta family. During this period he had a musical friendship with Cantù's Antonia Mazzucchelli (known as the *Mazzucchella*) – a relationship perhaps not limited to music, of a kind he probably entertained with the noblewoman Margherita Argenti, too.

The villa was transferred from the Pietrasantas to the Salterio family, who purchased not only the castle but the adjacent buildings, too: one of the parts at the back was transformed into a spinning mill in 1837, while the lower part at one time hosted a historic restaurant named after Garibaldi. After being inherited by the Airaghi family, and later acquired by the Municipality, the complex is presently awaiting restoration and cannot be visited.

The imposing walls which surround the entire complex were a home to precious hanging gardens, once places of delight, and now, they too, awaiting recovery.