



CANTÙ – PATH 2 – THE WALK OF THE WALLS

STAGE 1 – From the churchyard of St.Paul’s Basilica to Argenti public park

INFORMATION

Point of departure Cantù, churchyard of St.Paul’s Basilica

Point of arrival Cantù, Argenti public garden (Parco Argenti)

Path type urban

Environment urban area

Total length approx. 1 Km

Travel time on foot approx. 20 minutes (excluding visits)

Difficulty tourist

Rise -

Maximum height 369 m

Paving asphalt, porphyry cubes and tiles, cobbled stone, gravel

Public transport to the point of departure: bus ASF in Piazza Parini

Public transport from the point of arrival bus ASF in via Volta

Parking at the point of departure free parking close by the carabinieri in via Murazzo

Points of interest the castle/Pietrasanta Palace; Basilica of St. Paul; the walls of Cantù*; Ferraia, or St.Paul’s Gate; provost house of S. Paul; the «platea magna»; la Giubiana; gate of Campo Rotondo*

* building lost, completely or in part

DESCRIPTION

The path dedicated to the discovery of medieval Cantù begins at the “heart” of the old borough, on the top of the morainic hill of Saint Paul, a “present” left by the glaciers when they retreated after the Würmian phase of the Quaternary age. Since the beginning of the XII century, a fortified structure, a “*castrum*”, is documented in this location, around which the village developed. When in 1475 Cantù was given as a feud to Francesco Pietrasanta, the fortress became the stronghold of the family; heavily damaged in 1527 by Gian Giacomo Medici, called “the Medeghino”, it was reconstructed by the Pietrasantas in the form of a palace, including the remains of the earlier construction, thus losing its original defensive function. The complex is awaiting restoration and visits are not currently allowed. On the side of the palace stands **St.Paul’s Basilica** with its unusual bell tower; the church was probably erected in the IX century, but was subsequently modified more than once, in particular after the second half of the XVI century, when St. Charles Borromeo promoted its renovation to allow for the transfer of the Collegiate from S. Vincenzo OF Galliano (1582).

From the churchyard (“*pasquèe*”), paved in river pebbles (locally called “*rizzada*”), you can enjoy a wonderful view over the city below, with Monte Rosa in the distant background.

As you exit the churchyard, on your right is the oratory of the Holy Virgin, or *Madonnina di San Paolo* (St.Paul’s Little Madonna), built between the end of the XV and the beginning of the XVI centuries, enclosing an earlier image of the Breast-feeding Madonna painted on a stretch of the **walls*** that encircled the village. The oratory is placed close to the entrance of *casa Scotti*, ex *palazzo Archinto*, in whose garden is the so-called **Porta Ferraia or di San Paolo**, the only remaining gate in the eastern perimeter of the walls of the village, that unfortunately cannot be visited, since it stands in a private property.

Take the descent on your left (in cobbled stone, with a stone paved band, on the right), dedicated to don

Carlo Annoni, historian and provost of Cantù from 1830 to 1853, who published in 1835 the essay *Monumenti e fatti politici e religiosi del borgo di Canturio e sua pieve*, [Monuments and political and religious events of the borough and parish of Cantù]. On the right side of the street, you will immediately find the stern palace of the **Casa Prepositurale di S. Paolo** [Provost House of St. Paul], with its entrance at street number 3; the last restoration works, which ended in 2014, revealed – at the corner between via Annoni and via Cimarosa – the lower part of a medieval tower, that confirms the antiquity of the building. After these works, a museum has been opened in the Provost House, where precious remains of two thousand years of history of the Church in Cantù are on display; the Parish Archive is preserved here as well.

Keep on via Annoni for about 130 meters until you reach Piazza Garibaldi, the current main square of Cantù, that, however, does not probably correspond to the «**Platea magna**» of the medieval village. At that time, in fact, the square looked completely different, since its place was partially occupied by the great church of S. Cristoforo, now lost, and by other buildings.

It is also possible to descend from the hill of St. Paul by a scenic staircase built at the time of Cardinal Borromeo, consisting of 62 low steps in cobbled stone, that leads to the entrance of the Pietrasanta palace.

At the end of via Annoni, turn immediately to your left, taking via Ariberto da Intimiano, staying on the left side, where there is a narrow pedestrian lane without a pavement. At street number 1 a poultry shop, placed in a building that once was part of the former Pietrasanta complex, displays some ancient views of Cantù, as well as a copy of a city map, dating back to 1570, and preserved in the Archive of the Diocese of Milan. This side of the street hosts a series of ancient palaces, such as the Casa degli Alciati, including interesting courtyards and traces of medieval architecture, that however cannot be visited since they are private property.

The ancient **Porta di Campo Rotondo*** [Campo Rotondo gate] was placed on this street, possibly corresponding to access to the opposite street numbers 5b and 10; therefore it opened on the eastern side of the circle of walls, in the *contrada* of the same name, and led to the *Strada de'Chiosi*, that, dividing in two a few meters later, reached Galliano heading north-east, and Vighizzolo heading east.

Keep on until street number 7, where, on the corner, a stone cross of the Humiliates is walled up, probably linked to the nearby *Domus Nova* of Saint George, which stood more or less where Piazza degli Alpini now is. On your right take the asphalted Via Fiammenghini, once called “Strada Nuova” [new street] that bordered the city walls at the foot of the St. Paul’s hill; on the left, on the hill, you can see the various buildings of the great complex once owned by the Pietrasantas, and, further on, those previously owned by the Archintos (in whose garden is the Ferraia or St. Paul’s Gate).

After bypassing the modern buildings of the children’s school “San Paolo” (street number 12) and of the parish oratory “San Giovanni Bosco” (street number 14) keep straight on for about 300 meters then turn left, and after a great iron gate, enter the public park Argenti (opening times: 7:30-20:30 from November 1st to May 31st; 7.30-22.30 from June 1st to October 31st). The park was created in the XIX century, and is located on the hill of Saint Paul, between the current Via Dante and Via Fiammenghini; it was donated to the Commune of Cantù by the Litta Modignani Argenti family around 1850, in exchange for the permit to divide up the family’s villa for residential use. In the Park, in 2014-2015 the group QualcosaBolleInPentola, in co-operation with the Minoprio Foundation, created a path with small notice boards providing botanical information as well as cooking recipes prepared with the native herbs of the territory, for the educational project “Storia dell’uomo, storie di cibo. *Ul mangiaa di noster vecc*” [Man’s history, food histories. Our grandfathers’ way of eating], that was chosen for the contest named “The schools of Lombardy for the Expo in Milan, 2015”.

As one can discern from Carlo Montanara’s map of Cantù, published in 1835 by don Carlo Annoni, the historical walls of *Canturium*, and the related embankment, entered onto the terrain of the park. According to this map, the circle of walls did not run along the current Via Innocente Molteni, but instead in an intermediate position between this street and the current villa Argenti. Inside the park, a few stretches of these walls are visible. Popular lore states that some underground tunnels existed to enable an escape from the village, especially in the case of a siege. From the entrance to the park, follow the gravel alley on the right, pass after some eighty meters, a small temple, representing a cave of tuffo stone, accessible through three steps. Keep on, leaving on your left a grassy rise with ilex-oak trees, and exit the park from the other entrance, that opens onto via Dante 18, just aside the lovely porter’s lodge, the current seat of

the local section of the Italian Alpine Club. On a side of the gate is an ancient mill stone, once used to grind wheat and cereals; in front of it, you find a SOS point for emergency calls.