



BAPTISTERY OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST AND PRAETORIUM*

* building totally or partially in ruins

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

INFORMATION

Location: the old Baptistery of St. John the Baptist, next to the Praetorium, stood where the “Caffè del Pess” cafeteria is now.

DESCRIPTION

(Silvia Fasana)

The Baptistery of Menaggio, probably of palaeo-Christian origin, had a single nave square plan, with the frescoed semicircular apse facing eastwards towards the lake; it was flanked by a belfry on the west side. According to a hypothesis suggested by ancient documents, originally the Baptistery served as parish church; it was only later that this role was to be carried out by the old Collegiate Church of St. Stephen.

A sign of this building's relevance is that, according to the Acts of the various Pastoral Visits and the local archpriest notes, it appears that many important religious functions, such as the baptismal font ceremony, celebrated on Maundy Thursday at least until the 17th century, when the Parish clergy received the holy oils and water, were still being held in the Baptistery. Moreover, according to a note made by Archpriest Bertarelli in 1638, the Menaggio community had the obligation to have a Mass celebrated in St. John every Friday to remember the old authorization to exercise a fishing right on the lake. The Baptistery continued to be used for celebrations at least until the middle of the 18th century, notwithstanding the increasingly deteriorated conditions of the building; at the end of the century it was deconsecrated and the ownership transferred to the Municipality, which leased it to the Revenue Office as a warehouse for salt and tobacco. *«In the same period, the neighbouring area, where the ancient Praetorium, now in ruins, once stood, was purchased by the Messa family, which built a house attached to the wall of the old Baptistery. In 1849 the Municipality resolved to sell the religious building (which was being used as a warehouse) minus the belfry and the clock – which remained under Municipal ownership – to the Erba brothers. A few years later the new owners purchased the adjacent Messa mansion and incorporated the two bordering buildings in a single unit, which still stands in Piazza Garibaldi today».* The belfry, which for centuries had marked the life of the community, was later demolished to recover material for the construction in 1860 of the Parish church bell tower. The only surviving memory of the Baptistery is the plaque walled in the Corona Hotel, with the inscription *«Contrada di S. Giovanni».*

(Information drawn from *Novecento anni da Mengaldo (1095-1995)*, Parrocchia di Santo Stefano, Menaggio 1995)