



BASILICA OF S. VINCENZO (ST. VINCENT) OF GALLIANO

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

INFORMATION

Location: the Basilica of S. Vincenzo (St. Vincent), together with the nearby baptistery of S. Giovanni, is built on a grass turf at the top of a moraine hill, on the west side of the historical centre of Cantù, within a fenced area in via San Vincenzo 7.

Access: from the front door.

Paving: the space in front of the Basilica is grassy; sheets of stone show the original perimeter of the church as wanted by the Archbishop Ariberto da Intimiano (XI century). The interior is paved with bricks; the stairs that lead to the apse and to the crypt are built in stone.

Architectural barriers: the fenced area is accessed by four stone steps. To enter the Basilica, pass a low stone threshold. Two flights of stairs, one on the left side and the other on the right, descend in the crypt with eight steps. To ascend to the presbytery you need to rise a central flight of stairs in nine steps.

Services: parking available; bus stops; the Cantù hospital is situated in the neighbourhood, in via Domea 4.

Leisure and Food: a small stone fountain in front of the Basilica. Bars, restaurants and shops are available nearby.

Other information: for opening times, call 031.701393 (Parish of S. Paolo – Secretary) or 031.717446 and 031.717491 (Municipality of Cantù).

A bronze model of the Basilica and of the baptistery, built by Claudio Caimi, was placed in July 2007 near the entrance of the Basilica. The model was donated by the Cantù Lyons Club, in order to enable visually impaired guests to appreciate the architectural details of the complex.

Relates monuments: baptistery of S. Giovanni.

DESCRIPTION

(Silvia Fasana)

Archaeological remains suggest that on the hill of Galliano a small early christian church already existed in the 5th century, used as site of burial. This is confirmed by the presence of many tombstones. This church was probably built on the remains of a former pagan place, of which some traces still exist. In the VIII century, in the Carolingian age, the church became a parish, and it is very likely that, on that occasion, it was enlarged to cope with the needs of a growing community. The most important initiative, however, is due to Ariberto da Intimiano (967-1045) who was nominated custodian of the church before being appointed as archbishop of Milan. Having discovered the bones of priests Adeodato, Ecclesio, of the deacon Savino and of Manifredo, revered as saints, Ariberto promoted a great work of renovation and decoration of the building; the fresco decoration of the apse and of the walls of the main nave were also completed in this period. Once the works were completed, on July 2, 1007, Ariberto consecrated the Basilica and dedicated it to San Vincenzo (Saint Vincent) of Saragozza. In 1582 San Carlo Borromeo transferred the vicarage to the church of S. Paolo, and S. Vincenzo progressively decayed; in 1798 it was desecrated, sold to private citizens and used as a farmhouse.

Only at the beginning of the last century, due to the renewed interest for the historical and artistic legacy, the Basilica of Galliano was included in the official list of the National Monuments; in May 1909, the last private owner sold the building to the Municipality of Cantù. The Basilica was restored during a long period of time; in 1934 it was reconsecrated by cardinal Schuster and in May 1986, after another cycle of

restoration works, re-opened again as a site of worship.

The plain facade anticipates the internal partition in three naves; the right nave was lost in the 19th century; the right flank of the central nave is now closed by a large glass window. Other parts of the original building that have been lost are the bell tower and a large porch; the original perimeter of the Basilica is shown today by a sheet of stones.

The headstone of dedication of the church by Ariberto da Intimiano, dated in 1007, as well as the tombstone of Adeodato, have been placed on the wall of the left nave, in the interior.

The presbytery, which is placed above the ground floor because of the presence of the crypt, is enriched by the magnificent 9th century decoration, which has been defined by the arts historians Marco Rossi and Manuela Beretta «*a point of pictorial excellence at European level, of extraordinary formal quality*». The unknown author was able to merge together the Byzantine culture and the Western late ancient style. In the centre of the apse, at the top, stands the mighty image of *Cristo Pantocratore (Christ Pantocrator)*, in imperial dresses; he holds in his left hand a book where the sign said «PASTOR OVIUM [BO]NUS (the good sheep shepherd)», while the right hand is elevated in sign of triumph. At his sides are depicted the prophets *Geremia and Ezechiele* in adoration, while on the back are the archangels *Michele (Michael)* and probably *Gabriele (Gabriel)* (reconstruction). Behind the archangels, both on the left and right sides, groups of figures with halos, crowns and palms can be glimpsed. In the lower hemicycle, episodes of the *Martirio di San Vincenzo (Saint Vincent's martyrdom)* are painted, that terminate at the south window of the apse; the remaining part of the hemicycle is occupied by two monumental figures, separated by a niche obtained from a plugged double lancet window. On the left of the niche is *Sant'Adeodato* who, looking at Christ in his majesty, presents him *Ariberto da Intimiano*, on the right, painted in vicarial robes, holding in his hand the model of the church.

The wall that leads to the presbytery with the triumphal arch shows a complex iconography, that seems to introduce the revelation of the glory of *Cristo Pantocratore (Christ Pantocrator)* in the apse. In the frame the decoration contains marine animals, crabs, turtles and glass cups, possibly recalling the waters placed by God in the Genesis above the stars, while at the top of the frieze two dolphins appear, ancient symbols of the Resurrection. The painted columns on the abutments of the arch are decorated by alternate bands of colour red and blue, while the intrados shows iridescent half-circles, enriched by different birds (swans, herons and cranes), as well as – at the centre – a pelican, which is a symbol of Christ.

On the parapet closing on the right side the presbitery, over the right access to the crypt, stands a *Vergine in trono con il Bambino* (Enthroned Virgin with her Child); besides is depicted a series of saints, among which *San Michele (Saint Michael)*, *San Pietro (Saint Peter)*, *San Paolo (Saint Paul)*.

A deacon with a stole and a hand-peace on his left arm is traditionally recognised to be San Vincenzo, the bishop is believed to be Sant'Ambrogio, and the priest Sant'Adeodato; these frescoes are considered, according to recent studies, as having been painted in the last quarter of the 13th century.

Ariberto da Intimiano had the crypt constructed in the 11th century to host the relics of Adeodato, Ecclesio, Manifredo e Savino, that he had discovered. It stands on four columns overhanged by re-used capitals dating back to the 8th-9th centuries, holding up cross-vaults. Along the walls are placed the pillars that support the arches, alternated with small single lancet windows. The pillars are decorated with three saints, painted in the last quarter of the 13th century. But the most popular fresco is the one depicting ***Our Lady of the Milk***, dating back to the second half of the 14th century. Below this image there was a spring of water – which in later times was canalised towards a well – that was considered miraculous, and able to stimulate the production of milk. It is very likely that the popular devotion for this image of the breastfeeding Madonna succeeded in preserving Galliano as a place of worship also in the period of its abandonment. Today flowers and lights are still left in front of the fresco, to signal that the devotion of the image is still alive.

The pictorial decoration of the nave, ordered as well by Ariberto, was completed by different schools of artists, and develops biblical subjects, or lives of saints. The frescoes, unfortunately, suffered significant damages in the ages of decay of the Basilica and are not always readable. On the north wall (on the left) of the central nave three cycles of paintings can be read on three levels, dedicated respectively to the stories of the *Genesis*, *Giuditta (Judith)* and *Santa Margherita (Saint Margaret) di Antiochia*, the patron of women in labor. The two saints are considered the female models of the Ancient and New Testament; the corresponding male models are painted on the wall in front: on the south wall, also on three levels, the stories of *Sansone (Samson)* and of *San Cristoforo (Saint Christopher)*; this last saint is also shown as a

monumental figure at the centre of the wall.

The counter-facade is enriched by part of a fresco showing a *Saint bishop with two martyrs*, ripped from the crypt, and dating at the third decade of the 14th century; aside, another fresco shows *Santa Maria Maddalena (Saint Maria Magdalena), Santa Veronica (Saint Veronica), a saint martyr of royal ancestry and San Giovanni Evangelista (Saint John the Evangelist) (?)*; also this fresco is part of a greater painting of the same age.