



STAGE 1 - FROM PIAZZA PARACCHINI TO THE CHURCH OF S. MARIA IN MARTINICO

DESCRIPTION

(Silvia Fasana)

The itinerary starts from Piazza Paracchini in Dongo, a square overlooking the Regina State Road and the lake, and a stylish meeting point of this lakeside town; it is dedicated to Giulio Paracchini, the partisan commander killed during a round-up of the Black Brigades in April 1945. At the centre of the square, which is paved in porphyry cubes, stands the War Memorial of the Fallen of the 1st World War, placed on a low porphyry cube base, and enclosed by an approx. 80 cm high wrought iron fence. The monument is a marble column surmounted by a bronze eagle, and rests on a pedestal at the top of three steps which are connected to the base by four chutes. As documented by the Theresian Cadastre records, a building used as Governor's Palace stood in this area until 1815, when it was demolished. Nowadays the square is overlooked by the austere neoclassical façade of **Palazzo Manzi**, previously known as Palazzo Polti Petazzi, built in the early part of the 19th century, probably according to a plan drawn by Carlo Polti (who collaborated with Simone Cantoni), but traditionally attributed to architect Pietro Gilardoni. The façade is preceded by a wide sidewalk paved with porphyry cubes. In 1937 the last descendant of the family, Donna Giuseppina Manzi, donated the palace to the Municipality, and is now its prestigious town hall: the entrance is surmounted by the municipal coat of arms, consisting of a shield with three red crosses (two at the top and one at the bottom) against a white background, which represent the Three Parishes of Dongo, Gravedona and Sorico. The first floor of Palazzo Manzi still preserves some of its original rooms, such as the Sala d'Oro (*Golden Hall*), the historical Manzi Library, and the small chapel dedicated to the Immaculate Conception. The ground floor is the home of the **Museo della Fine della Guerra (End of the War Museum)**, a "multimedia" museum inaugurated in April 2014 after radical refurbishment, hosting photographic and documentary evidence on this "page" of Italian history which was written right here, on Lake Como.

In order to keep track of the central role that the territories around Lake Como had in the events which led to the end of World War II, in 2014 the Provincial Council of Como, through the "End of the War" project, funded by the Regional Council of Lombardy, prepared four signposted themed routes: "A – Paths to freedom towards Switzerland"; "B – Partisan routes between the two lakes"; "C - Partisan routes across the upper lake region"; "D – Mussolini's last hours." A large panel with the description of the project has been placed in the Palace's inner courtyard. Other two panels have been placed along Palazzo Manzi's façade: on the right of the main door you will find panel number 13 of route C ("Dongo, Manzi Palace: April 26, 1945, the liberation of Dongo"), and, on the left, panel number 6 of route D ("Dongo. Mussolini's arrest"). Another panel – n. 10 of route D ("**The railing on the lake. The execution of the "hierarchs" of the Italian Social Republic**") – has been placed on the lake promenade opposite Piazza Paracchini, and indicates the exact place where the RSI leaders captured with Mussolini between Musso and Dongo were shot on April 28, 1945: by looking carefully at the lakeside railing you will still be able to see the marks of the bullets fired by the partisans.

Once you have left Palazzo Manzi, turn right and continue along the porphyry paved sidewalk which borders the square; at the end of the building, after about 15 metres, turn immediately to your right: a short detour of about 100 metres in via Gio Batta Scalini - a typical porphyry paved alley narrowly running in-between old houses - will allow you to admire to your right two portals surmounted by crests carved in high relief in Musso marble. The first, at number 6, is quite probably the Rumi family crest, and depicts a plant with a lion on top; while the second, above number 14, represents a crowned figure with a sceptre. After walking back along via Scalini, turn right and take via Mercato: please pay attention to the large circular street furniture item (a planter-bench), about one and a half metres wide and 70 cm high, located right in the middle of the street entrance. A marble coat of arms of the Malacrida family, who also owned the castle on Sasso Musso before the Medeghino, is walled in the building at number 5, on the left side of the street, above what probably had once been its entrance portal.

After about 30 metres from the beginning of the street you reach a vaulted passage; on the wall of the building to your left you will see a wall painting made in 1984, depicting the *Madonna and Child*, and, on the background, a lake

landscape with the typical boats of Lake Como, called "*Lucie*". After another 30 metres you will reach Piazza Giulio Rubini, a square dedicated an important Dongo villager (1844-1917), director of the Falck steelworks, and many times Minister of the Treasury and Public Works of the Kingdom of Italy at the beginning of 'the 20th century. In 1920 a bronze bust portraying Rubini, supported by a marble column decorated by a bronze festoon, was placed in the middle of the square, cobbled in its central section. The column stands on top of four stone steps, the last two of which are much larger than the others, surrounded by an approx. 40 cm high wrought iron enclosure supported by small stone pillars. While crossing the square on the porphyry sidewalk which runs along the façade of Palazzo Rubini (now occupied by private homes and businesses), keep to your left and mind the four planters which lean against the façade; on the south side of the square you can see an interesting pale cream coloured plastered building with wooden decorations, reminiscent of a half-timbered house. Having reached the end of Piazza Rubini take via Francesca Scanagatta for about fifteen meters and then turn right in via Romitaggio, the entrance of which is characterized by an arch carrying the name of the street. Climb seven large steps, each having a tread of approx. one metre (there is an iron handrail on the left), and turn right into via Torrazza, the name of which was already mentioned in a deed of 1481. Follow the slightly uphill narrow street which soon becomes asphalted and walk between the old houses of the ancient hamlet of Martinico. Our advice is to keep the centre of the street. As you continue, you will see to your left, at number 25, a shop sign which, albeit faded due to the action of time, is still readable and says «*Nuovo prestino (New Baker's)*». After about 160 metres from the beginning of the road, continue, while holding the left, along via Lamberzoni, a name that evokes the bloody feud between this Guelph family and the Ghibelline Stampa family from Gravedona, Ghibelline, part of the 14th century bleak scenario of powerful families fighting each other. After another 120 metres you will reach, on the left, the apse of the Romanesque church of **S. Maria in Martinico**. Leave then via Lamberzoni and climb the 9 + 3 stone steps, separated by a small landing (there is an iron handrail on the right, supported at the beginning and end by two beautiful approx. 1.20 metres high stone pillars with a cross-shaped apex) which lead to the cobbled churchyard where the church stands, in a raised position with respect to the street, protected on the right by an iron railing with flower holders. At the base of the stairway there is a small cast iron fountain. You then reach the beautiful side entrance near the apse, characterized by a rounded arch marked by alternating black and white stones, enriched by interesting anthropomorphic masks on the shelves of the architrave. The church of S. Maria in Martinico probably dates back to the early part of the 12th century, but was drastically altered in the 17th century; at the beginning of the 20th century a radical restoration took place which led to the elimination of the Baroque additions and the rebuilding of the apse. Access to the church is now from the second side portal, which is approx. ten metres after the first. After visiting the church (the fragments of 14th, 15th, and 17th century frescoes, and those painted by the Fiamminghino, are worthy of note), exit once again from the side door, turn left (please mind the small step after about 2 metres) and reach the part of the square in front of the simple gabled façade. On the left side of the high wall opposite the façade you will see the memorial stone which is a memento of the presence in this area of the old cemetery, documented since 1412 and used until 1910.