



## COMO – PATH 7 – THE PLINIAN COMO WALK «TANTIS COMPTA MUNERIBUS»

### STAGE 2 – FROM THE SOUTHERN WALLS TO THE SUBURBAN VILLA

#### INFORMATION

**Point of departure:** Como, tower of San Vitale (Viale Cesare Battisti)

**Point of arrival:** Como, area of the suburban villa of Via Zezio / Via Grossi

**Path type:** urban

**Environment:** urban

**Total length:** approx. 2,9 Km

**Travel time on foot:** approx. 45 minutes (excluding visiting times)

**Difficulty:** tourist

**Rise:** 40 m.

**Maximum height:** 240 m

**Paving:** asphalt, porphyry tiles, porphyry cubes, stone tiles, stone slabs, cobblestones, cement, dirt road

**Public transport to reach the departure point:** ASF bus in the surrounding area; train

Trenord Como Borghi station in Piazzale Gerbetto

**Public transport to reach the arrival point:** ASF bus in the surrounding area; train

Trenord Como Borghi station in Piazzale

**Parking at the departure point:** car park in Viale Lecco / via Dante: public car park in via Auguadri; parking in Viale Lecco

**Points of interest** Roman Baths\*, Eastern Walls\*, The Two Plinys, Amphitheatre\*, The Decumanus Maximus, The Area of the Forum\*, Archaeological Museum “Paolo Giovio”, Suburban Villa\*

\* structures partially or completely disappeared

#### DESCRIPTION

When you reach the fourteenth-century pentagonal tower of San Vitale, turn left and cross the arch inserted into the walls and opened in 1929 for the passage of the tram; after about ten meters cross a second arch and exit onto via Nazario Sauro. Turn left on the porphyry pavement of the street and follow it, skirting at first a green area with benches adjacent to the eastern side of the medieval city walls. After about 260 meters, turn right and cross Via Sauro at the pedestrian crossing; pass beyond the level crossing of the Trenord Railways and cross the tracks (section asphalted). Turn right and, after about 5 meters, cross Viale Lecco, also on the pedestrian crossing; turn left and continue for another 30 meters until you reach the Passaggio Beata Giovannina Franchi (1807-1872), foundress of the Nursing Sisters of Our Lady of Sorrows. Turn right again and walk along the pedestrian walkway crossing the basement of the Valduce car park with a concrete bottom and slightly uphill; this path gives visual access “from above” to the remains of walls of a thermal complex of the second half of the first century – end of the third century AD.

Returning back to Viale Lecco, turn left, retrace your steps and cross again the Viale, the level crossing on the railway and Via Sauro, in correspondence with the end of the sidewalk. Turn right in Via Perti, cross it, continue on the porphyry sidewalk of Via Virginio Bertinelli and pass in front of the parking area in front of the eastern entrance of the Como City Hall. After 80 meters, turn left into Via Indipendenza, which was the eastern end of the *Decumanus Maximus* of the Roman city traversing it from east to west. Keeping to the right, follow it for 30 meters until you turn right into Via Vincenzo Bellini, paved in the centre with porphyry tiles and on the sides with stone slabs with various obstacles (parking spaces for two-wheeled vehicles, poles with chains). The eastern walls of the Roman city, with their defence towers, ran along the axis roughly coinciding with the current Via Bellini; traces of a few sections, today no longer visible, have emerged, in line with the building at number 10 of Via Bellini and of number 16 of the adjacent Via Porta. Walk along Via Bellini for 150 meters, at the end turn left into Via Maestri Comacini (pay attention to the iron posts that block vehicular traffic, at the fountain), paved with porphyry tiles, flanking the right side of the Cathedral for

80 meters. On this side of the Cathedral, just above a walled epigraph commemorating Pliny the Younger and another dedicated by a probable freedman of the family, is a statue of the poet Caecilius, a friend of Catullus who, in a famous *carmen* (no. 35, vv. 1-6) invites him to leave his beloved *Novum Comum*, its walls and the shores of the Lario («*Lariumque litus*») and to join him in Verona, where they could discuss common poetic projects. Exit at Piazza Duomo, where - on the façade of the Cathedral, on either side of its main entrance - you can admire two Renaissance marble *aediculas* (aedicule) carrying the marble statues of the Plinys, the work of the brothers Tommaso and Giacomo Rodari, famous sculptors from Ticino who lived at the turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: on the right is Pliny the Elder and on the left Pliny the Younger.

After having "greeted" these two illustrious former residents of Como, go to the northern end of the square, and turn left into Via Francesco Ballarini, paved with stone tiles; at the end of the block, after about 130 meters, turn right into Via Pietro Boldoni, and immediately reach Piazza Pietro Amato Perretta, which overlooks the imposing building formerly occupied by the Bank of Italy, built in the fifties of the last century on the area of the demolished medieval district of Cortesella that stood here. Of Roman origin, since the Middle Ages the Cortesella district was one of the most important economic centres of the ancient city (also due to its proximity to the port); it was literally gutted in the last century according to the City Plan of the year 1937, with the intention of making the city centre "wholesome"; all its inhabitants were transferred to the outskirts of the city.

On the basis of some findings, archaeologists have hypothesized that the Roman amphitheatre stood in this area, occupying the southern half of the block between Piazza Perretta, Via Cinque Giornate and Via Vitani.

At the beginning of Piazza Perretta, turn left onto Via Francesco Muralto, paved with stone slabs. In the second decade of this century, at the corner of Via Muralto, Via Boldoni and Piazza Perretta, under the floor, another masonry stall came to light, connected to a pillar in *ghiandone* (a kind of granite) that marked out the north side of an underground corridor.

After about 60 meters, turn right into the narrow Via Vitani, paved with cobblestones and two central stone-paved guides. In 1990, seven radial walls connected to *ghiandone* granite pillars were uncovered in the building at Via Vitani 13, preserved to a height of 3.5 meters and set on a slab of stones and mortar resting on alder wood pilings. Walk along Via Vitani for 120 meters until you reach Via Cinque Giornate, paved with porphyry tiles. Turn left, and after about ten meters, turn right into Via Primo Tatti, paved in the same way. After about 80 meters, past the church of the Gesù, you reach Piazza Pier Cesare Bordoli; from here, take Via Lambertenghi on the right, follow it for about 100 meters, then turn left into Via Armando Diaz. Continue along the street: after 80 meters you will cross Via Indipendenza, aligned, as we have already seen, to the *Decumanus Maximus* of the Roman city.

Also, along this axis there were important public places, including perhaps the *Forum* itself, and private homes belonging to high-ranking personalities. One of these houses has been identified in the former complex of San Colombano in *Balneo*, between Via Diaz 60-62 and Via Indipendenza, where excavations have brought to light seven rooms of an ancient *domus* built between the first century BC and the first century AD. This *domus* remained in use in later times: in the second century AD, a splendid polychrome mosaic was created in one of its rooms laid on top of a previous roman concrete (*cocciopesto*) flooring.

The nearby area of the former Cressoni Theatre (via Diaz 77-89 - corner with via Indipendenza) has also provided some rich discoveries, with architectural and epigraphic elements that suggest the presence of important public structures overlooking the ancient *Decumanus*. This is the place where in 2018 the so-called "treasure of Como" was found, consisting of a thousand gold coins accumulated and carefully hidden in the fifth century AD, in the turbulent period of the collapse of the Roman Empire.

Turn into Via Indipendenza and follow it for 250 meters until you cross Via Bernardino Luini, then turn right and after another 30 meters, on your left, enter Piazza San Fedele, paved with cobblestones, with granite slabs that mark the roadways and pave the arcades. Several clues lead us to think that the ancient *Forum* was located in the current Piazza San Fedele: the discovery of numerous architectural fragments and epigraphs (even inside the Basilica of S. Fedele itself there are recognizable reused Roman elements), as well as the central role assumed by the square in the centuries following the fall of the Roman Empire as the seat of the first Como cathedral dedicated to Sant'Eufemia, and the presence of the grain market, whose position is marked by the rectangular area in granite slabs that stand out against the cobblestone pavement.

Looking at the façade of the Basilica (watch out for the 6 low iron poles without chain that delimit the churchyard of the Basilica), take the cobbled passage immediately adjacent to its right corner; turning left, cross the small Children's Play Area redeveloped in recent times (2023) with the installation of new play structures and anti-trauma (safety) flooring. In its central area, part of the cobblestones have been removed to create a driveway in washed gravel that can be easily walked on by mothers with strollers and by people with mobility difficulties.

The Play Area is open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. from October to March, and until 9 p.m. from April to September; when it is closed, it is advisable to exit Piazza San Fedele on the left side (looking at the façade of the Basilica), taking Via Pantera, paved in porphyry tiles, then to turn right and take Via Indipendenza again for a further 70 meters up to the intersection with Via Vittorio Emanuele II, paved with porphyry slabs. Turn right and after about 100 meters you will reach the exit of the Play Area, in front of the entrance to Via Perti.

On the corner of Via Perti and Via Vittorio Emanuele II, on the southern stone wall of the Town Hall, the ancient Palazzo Cernezzi, look up for a high relief in precious Apuan *cipollino* marble. It is the work of Francesco Somaini, dated 1991 and placed by the students of the Liceo Classico "Alessandro Volta" to commemorate the 2050th anniversary of the foundation of the city by Julius Caesar (59 BC). It is engraved with the passage where the geographer

Strabo recounts its events (*Geography*, V, 1, 6). Also in Via Perti, in 1962, upon the demolition of the building known as "Manica Lunga", behind Palazzo Cernezzi, a second tower came to light, quite similar to the one found in the basement of Via Carducci 9.

Continue along Via Vittorio Emanuele II; at house number 115, on the property bordering the Museum to the north, in 2021 new excavations led to the discovery of a section of the walls and of the base of a square tower, similar to the one in Via Perti. After 150 meters you will reach the entrance to the "Paolo Giovio" Archaeological Museum, currently (2024) closed for restoration works. Its collections are divided between the complex of Palazzo Giovio, Palazzo Lucini, whose garden hangs on a stretch of the Roman walls of Como, and the nearby Palazzo Olginati, connected by two passages suspended on Via Balestra. On the first floor of Palazzo Olginati, four exhibition rooms are dedicated to Roman finds from private collections, while on the ground floor there are various memorial, architectural, and statuary works attributable to Roman Como, some of which are also linked to the times of the Plinys; further exhibits were recovered from residential and everyday contexts, and from burials.

From the Museum, the last stretch of the route takes us to the first slopes of Mount Brunate, a place that even at the time of the Plinys must have been very pleasant. Take via Serafino Balestra, between Palazzo Giovio and Palazzo Olginati, paved with porphyry; after 100 meters on the left watch out for a block with two planters and two seats. Walk all the way down Via Balestra until you come out of the walled city, turning right, and passing under the arch inserted into the medieval walls in 1929 for the passage of the tram at the pentagonal tower of San Vitale; there is a wide porphyry strip parallel to Viale Cesare Battisti. Bend to the left, circling the tower; then cross Via Sauro on the pedestrian crossing and, turning left again, after about ten meters, first go over the level crossing of the Trenord Railways and the tracks (asphalted section) and then, after another ten meters, onto to Viale Lecco. Turning right, continue for ten meters on the porphyry sidewalk of the avenue, then turn left into via Tommaso Grossi. Follow the road slightly uphill, passing on the left-hand asphalted pavement. After 100 meters cross Via Dante on the pedestrian crossing and, turning on the right, cross over via Grossi on the stripes and continue on the pavement on the other side, always asphalted except for the last few meters. Continue along the road, past the Guanellian complexes of the House of Divine Providence, the Sanctuary of the Sacred Heart and of the Casa Santa Marcellina; cross it after 340 meters at the intersection with Via Zezio cross over to the pavement on the left side; Turning left, after about 30 meters, cross Via Zezio at the pedestrian crossing, which is placed in front of the main entrance of the "Gianni Rodari" Kindergarten. Turn right and continue on the porphyry pavement until it joins the pavement of the last stretch of Via Tommaso Grossi (pay attention to the eight low steps that accompany the fillet curve). Continue for 50 meters, until you come to a short, asphalted street. announced by a sign prohibiting access to non-residents.

Turn left into this street and after 20 meters, on the left, you will find the rear access to the school where you can see the remains of a suburban villa from the first century AD. The villa was spread over three levels, with the furthest one downhill intended for production activities, that unfortunately was almost completely destroyed during the construction of the kindergarten; on the other hand, it was possible to preserve the portion found further uphill, long believed to be the portico of the villa and, according to more recent research, identified as part of a spectacular nymphaeum. The nymphaeum, which formed the end of the villa's garden, had a basin paved with stone slabs, flanked by channels for the passage of water.