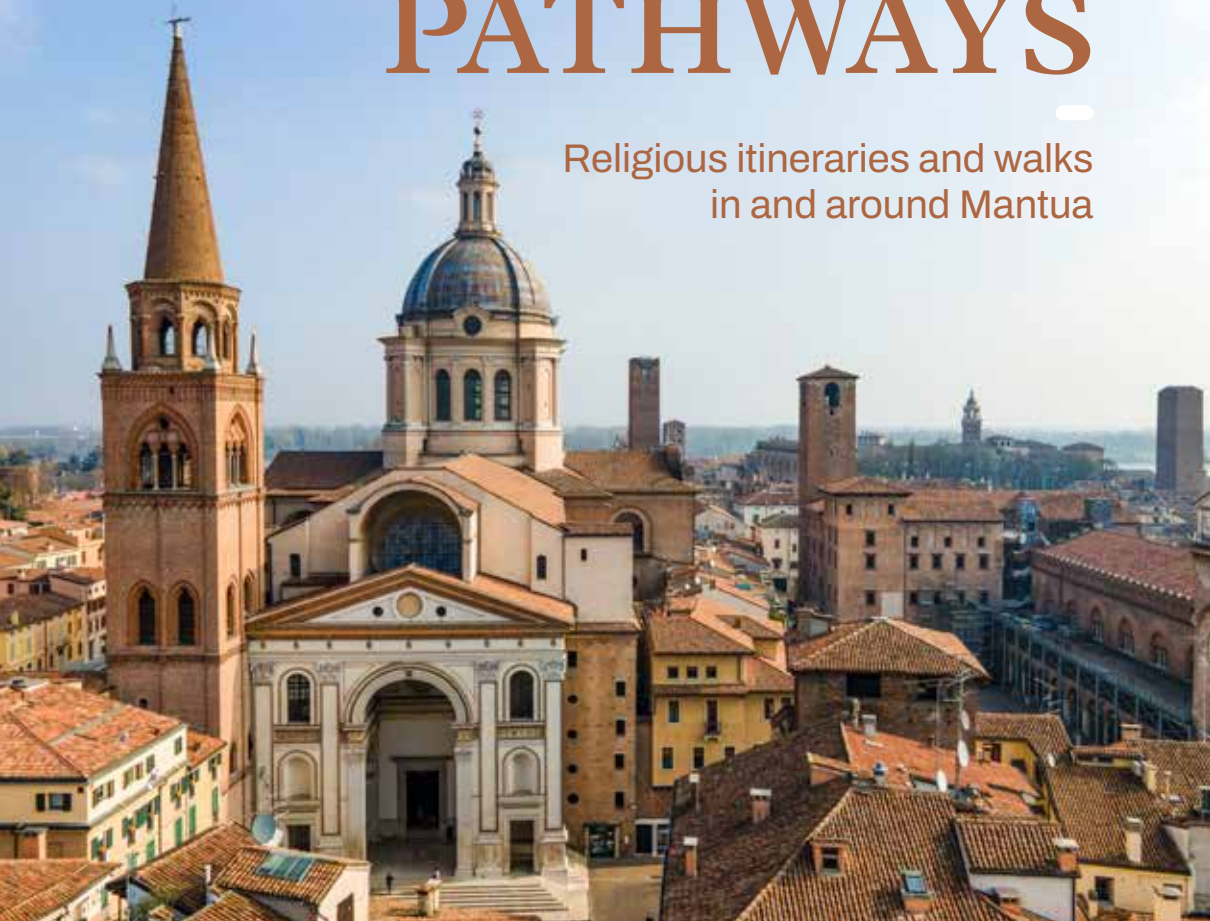


# SACRED PATHWAYS

Religious itineraries and walks  
in and around Mantua

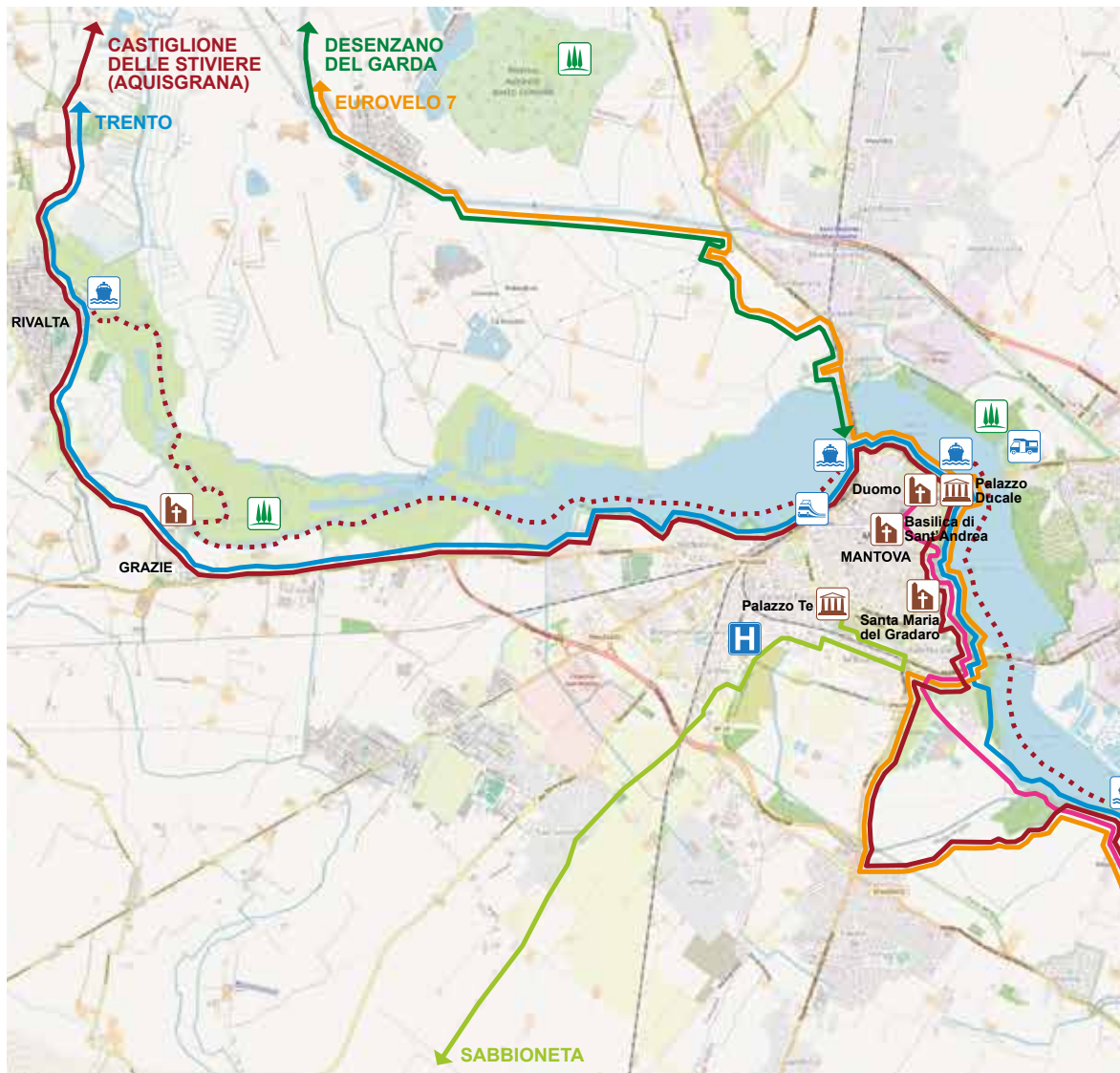






Architectural and artistic heritage of religious interest such as churches, cathedrals, convents, basilicas, oratories, and sacristies are an important part of Mantua's urban fabric. They are places where art, history, faith and devotion intertwine. Their presence makes Mantua - declared a joint UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2008 with neighbouring Sabbioneta - a Renaissance capital and a destination for tourists, visitors and pilgrims. Several slow-tourism routes circle and criss-cross the city. Some are ancient, others are more recent and others still are in development. However, they all retrace early medieval routes that once connected central and northern Europe with Rome.

The religious excitement around the 2025 Jubilee is our opportunity to rediscover this immense heritage, opening the artistic and devotional heart of the city to visitors: the Basilica di Sant'Andrea, the Diocese of Mantua's jubilee church and sanctuary of the Preziosissimo Sangue di Cristo (Most Precious Blood of Christ), one of Christianity's most important relics.



**CASTIGLIONE  
DELLE STIVIERE  
(AQUISGRANA)**

**TRENTO**

**DESENZANO  
DEL GARDA**

**EUROVELO 7**

RIVALTA

GRAZIE

Duomo

Palazzo  
Ducale

Basilica di  
Sant'Andrea

MANTOVA

Palazzo Te

Santa Maria  
del Gradaro

**SABBIONETA**

# Religious itineraries and walks in and around Mantua



 Via Matildica del Volto Santo

 Via Carolingia

 Alternative water route

 Via Romea Imperiale

 Cammino di Fede e Solidarietà

 Eurovelo 7 - Sun Route

 Mantova-Sabbioneta Cycle Route

## Key



Railway



River dock



Camper parking area



Hospital



Religious building



Museum



Natural beauty

## Legend

-  Cycle Route
-  Shuttle Bus
-  Train station
-  Tourist boats
-  Parking
-  Infopoint



# City itineraries and walks

## Route 1

### From Santuario delle Grazie to Basilica di Sant'Andrea

- 1 Santuario della Beata Vergine Maria delle Grazie**  
Piazzale Santuario 4, Grazie di Curtatone
- 2 Chiesa di Santa Maria degli Angeli**  
Piazza Borgo Angeli 7, Mantua
- 3 San Francesco Chiesa Conventuale dei Frati Minori**  
Piazza San Francesco d'Assisi 5, Mantua
- 4 Chiesa della Madonna del Terremoto**  
Piazza Canossa, Mantua
- 5 Basilica Concattedrale di Sant'Andrea Apostolo**  
Piazza Andrea Mantegna, Mantua
- 6 Duomo di San Pietro**  
Piazza Sordello, Mantua
- 7 Basilica di Santa Barbara**  
Piazza Santa Barbara 4, Mantua

## Route 2

### From Santa Maria del Gradaro to Basilica di Sant'Andrea

- 8 Chiesa di Santa Maria del Gradaro**  
Via Gradaro 42, Mantua
- 9 Colonna di San Longino - collocazione originaria**  
Via Greison, Mantua
- 10 Chiesa di Santa Apollonia**  
via Benzoni 16, Mantua

#### 11 Chiesa di San Martino

Via Pomponazzo 24, Mantua

#### 12 Chiesa di Santa Maria della Carità

Via Corridoni 33, Mantua

#### 13 Rotonda di San Lorenzo

Piazza Erbe, Mantua

#### 14 Colonna di San Longino

Palazzo Ducale, Piazza Sordello, Mantua

## Route 3

### Beata Osanna Andreasi

#### 15 Casa della beata Osanna Andreasi

Via Frattini 9, Mantua

#### 16 Campanile di San Domenico

Corner of Via Matteotti and Via Pescheria, Mantua

#### 17 Palazzo Ducale

Piazza Sordello, Mantua

#### 18 Museo Diocesano Francesco Gonzaga

Piazza Virgigliana 55, Mantua

## Route 1

### From Santuario delle Grazie to Basilica di Sant'Andrea

# Santuario della Beata Vergine Maria delle Grazie

*Piazzale Santuario, 4 - Grazie di Curtatone*

The 'Sanctuary of the Blessed Virgin of the Graces' is the main Marian shrine in the diocese. It was founded by fourth captain of Mantua Francesco I Gonzaga after the plague raged through the city. He decided to erect a more worthy shrine to the Virgin Mary than the small, pre-existing aedicula built around a miraculous icon of her.

The project was entrusted in 1399 to Bartolino da Novara, former architect of the Castello di San Giorgio in Mantua. The building was consecrated in 1406.

Built in the Lombard Gothic style, the church has just one hall and polygonal apse. Its large nave has three square bays covered by a groin vault.

Soon after entering the church, you are met by the surprising sight of a stuffed crocodile hanging from the ceiling: a symbol of the evil subjugated by the Church and the Virgin Mary.

Along the walls, a 16th-century wooden structure forms niches housing life-sized statues made of multiple materials. They recount unfortunate predicaments miraculously escaped through the intercession of the Virgin of the Graces.

The niches that now stand empty once contained statues of soldiers in armour: these were dismantled and removed in the 1930s when the important

historical value of the armour was recognised. The armour has been reassembled and is now on display at the Museo Diocesano Francesco Gonzaga.

One of the most interesting of the chapels is the first on the right. Designed by Giulio Romano, it houses the funerary monument of Baldassarre Castiglione, famous author of the philosophical dialogue 'The Book of the Courtier'. Atop the sarcophagus sits an eight-step pyramid dominated by the Resurrected Christ.

The passage to the sacristy at the end of the church on the right is particularly interesting, displaying a number of fascinating votive offerings. In the middle of the small but charming cloister attached to the church you will find a well with the following Latin palindrome inscribed on the lintel: TIBI SITIS SITIS IBIT or 'the thirst is yours, the thirst will go'.

On August 15, the feast day of the Assumption of Mary, the ancient Ferie delle Grazie takes place in the square in front of the sanctuary. Since 1973, this event has included a competition for Madonnari, street artists who depict the Virgin Mary on the ground using coloured chalks.



Fig. 1

Interior of the Santuario della Beata Vergine Maria delle Grazie

# Chiesa di Santa Maria degli Angeli

*Piazza Borgo Angeli, 7 - Mantua*

Santa Maria degli Angeli was built on a stretch of raised land beside the water. It is home to a Dominican monastery founded in 1429 by Gianfrancesco Gonzaga, Lord of Mantua. Built around this church, the group of houses on the shore of Lago Superiore still retain many characteristics of the ancient fishing village.

The ancient terracotta paving in the churchyard and square and the sharply arched entrances harmonize well with the Gothic-Lombard façade of the church, whose steep outline is accentuated with three pinnacles. The door is framed by floral motifs with terracotta pinnacles.

The interior has three bays with keystones featuring a daisy (the heraldic flower of the Gonzaga), two angels and the mystical Lamb.

The jewel of the church is the Madonna degli Angeli panel, which blends elements of the old Gothic style with the new Renaissance spirit brought to Mantua by Andrea Mantegna. In this 15th-century piece attributed to Niccolò da Verona, the figure of the Virgin, praying in the orant position, is imposing. She is surrounded by a host of musical angels within an architectural structure that already shows evidence of the teachings of perspective painting.

The stained glass windows, which filter out light and modulate it with their vivid colours, fit perfectly within Gothic churches and contribute largely to creating their sacred atmosphere.



Fig. 2  
Chiesa di Santa Maria degli Angeli

# San Francesco

## Chiesa conventuale dei Frati Minori

*Piazza San Francesco d'Assisi, 5 - Mantua*

Tradition has it that Saint Francis himself opened the first church of the Order here. Documents attest to the presence of the friars as early as 1232, even though construction work on the present church did not begin until 1304. From that point onwards, partly to protect the Gonzaga family who built their first mausoleum there, investment in the church was continuous.

Suppressed at the end of the 18th century, after being plundered and used as an armoury, the church was almost entirely destroyed by bombs during WW2. It was then rebuilt, its Gothic forms replicated as far as possible.

Entering the church through its monumental door, you find yourself in a harmonious space divided into three naves with terracotta columns and ogival arches.

A plaque on your right commemorates the building's consecration in 1459 in the presence of Pope Pius II. The most important chapel is certainly the last on the right. Dedicated to Saint Louis of Toulouse, it was commissioned by the Gonzagas as the family mausoleum. Saved from destruction during the war, it contains frescoes of great artistic importance, dating back to the second half of the 14th century.



Fig. 3

San Francesco Chiesa conventuale dei Frati Minori



Fig. 4

San Francesco, Chapel

# Chiesa della Madonna del Terremoto

*Piazza Canossa - Mantua*

In Piazza Matilde di Canossa stands a small church dedicated to the Madonna del Terremoto ('Madonna of the earthquake'). It was erected on the site of a house whose façade bore a fresco of the Virgin Mary. Here, Mantuans invoked the Virgin for protection during the earthquake that struck the city and the north of the province on 6 July 1693. The current building probably dates back to 1759 and was built to replace the old wooden structure.

On the day of the earthquake, tailor Pietro Stefani rushed into the street and saw that tremors had already caused chimneys and stones to fall. To his surprise, he saw that fallen plaster had revealed a beautiful painting of the Virgin Mary on the wall of his house.

He called out to the terrified people on the street to shelter under that sacred image, where they began reciting prayers. The earthquake ended without causing a single death. The image depicts the Madonna and Child, Saint Joseph and Saint Roch, and currently serves as the altarpiece in the small 18th-century church.

On the façade, beneath a stucco bas-relief depicting the bowels of the earth beneath a small town, we find an ancient inscription: A SOLO EXCITAVIT PIETAS ANN. MDCCLIX or 'Devotion raised it from the ground in 1759'.

Consisting of a small nave and a presbytery closed off

with a gate, the Baroque interior includes a profusion of stucco: in the ornamentation, in the statues of the virtues and in the frames for two paintings, now kept at the Museo Diocesano Francesco Gonzaga. The paintings are by Giuseppe Bazzani and represent the Adoration of the Shepherds and Piety.



Fig. 5  
Chiesa della Madonna del Terremoto

# Basilica concattedrale di Sant'Andrea Apostolo

*Piazza Andrea Mantegna - Mantua*

Built by Leon Battista Alberti, the Renaissance façade of this basilica reprises and superimposes—with the simplicity of great projects—the two quintessential symbols of Greek and Roman architecture: the temple and the triumphal arch.

Beneath the tympanum, the architrave and the four pilasters, the ancient-style arch leads to the entrance to the building, a triumphal site of Christian sacrifice.

The Basilica houses the Blood of Christ relic, traditionally believed to have been brought to Mantua by Longinus, the Roman soldier who pierced Jesus' side at the foot of the cross. Repentant, he gathered the soil soaked with the Most Precious Blood and kept it with him until his arrival in Mantua, where he was martyred. He was buried in the place where he himself had hidden the relic.

In the year 804, the relic was discovered by the intercession of Saint Andrew, whence the name of the church.

In 1470, Marquis Ludovico Gonzaga entrusted Leon Battista Alberti with designing a new church in order to have a large space where many people can see the Blood of Christ.

The interior takes the form of a Latin cross and is strikingly vast and exuberant in its neoclassical decoration (1785-1791) of the walls, the semispherical vault in the apse, on the pendentives and inside the great cupola. Completed in 1765, the cupola was designed by the architect Filippo Juvarra. On the

inside, Anselmi painted 'La Gloria del Paradiso' ('The Glory of Paradise') (1782). Connected to the side of the large barrel-vaulted nave are three large chapels and three small chapels with small cupolas.

The marble prie-dieu positioned in the middle of the cross vault, beneath the cupola and above the altar with the Sacri Vasi (Sacred Vessels) in the crypt below, dates back to the early 19th century.

The Cappella di San Longino, the last chapel on the right, is dedicated to Longinus. Inside are two large frescos which combine the story of Longinus and the second inventio (discovery): The Crucifixion, with Longino on his knees in the act of collecting the Blood of Christ, and the scene of the second inventio on the opposite wall. The frescoes were painted by Giulio Romano with the help of Rinaldo Mantovano. The first chapel on the left is particularly interesting: dedicated to John the Baptist, it is a funerary chapel commissioned by Andrea Mantegna. The tombstone, the bronze bust of the artist, and the underlying celebratory inscription commemorate this.

Today, the painting of the Holy Family and the Family of the Baptist located on the altar is almost unanimously attributed to Mantegna himself.

The transepts contain some outstanding funerary monuments, including those of Petrozzani and Cantelma. The crypt, designed by Viani in the 17th century, contains the Sacred Vessels engraved by the goldsmith Giovanni Bellezza in 1874. They replaced the 16th century vessels stolen in April 1848 by soldiers of the Austrian army. Visitors can join guided tours of the crypt and of the cupola, where they will be rewarded with captivating panoramic views of the building and the city.

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Fig. 6

*Basilica di Sant'Andrea*



# Duomo di San Pietro

*Piazza Sordello - Mantua*

Serving as the mother church of the Diocese, the building is both physically and historically connected to a series of ecclesiastical buildings that make up the insula sacra (holy island), part of the urban fabric and always at the heart of Christian life in Mantua.

The most recent part of the entire complex is the façade. Bishop Antonio Guidi di Bagno commissioned the Roman architect Nicholas Baschiera to build it, with work taking place between 1756 and 1761.

It is crowned by statues of saints and beatified figures from the Mantuan religious tradition. From left: Speciosa, Luigi Gonzaga, Pope Celestine I, Peter, Paul, Anselm, Giovanni Bono and Osanna of Mantua.

The right-hand side of the cathedral is all that remains of the ancient Gothic structure, dating back to the late 14th century and designed by the two Venetian brothers Dalle Masegne.

The Romanesque bell tower houses the replica of a bust of a married Roman woman (2nd century AD) in a niche. The original is kept at the Museo Diocesano Francesco Gonzaga.

The interior was fully renovated, with works beginning in 1545, by distinguished architect Giulio Romano, a favourite pupil of Raphael. It contains five naves, each with a different roof: barrel vaulted, coffered and lacunar.

Since the side chapels are connected by a filtering corridor, the Duomo can be considered to possess seven naves.

Between the first and the second chapel on the right lies an imposing early Christian sarcophagus with an ancient image of the Nativity on the gable end.

The second chapel is dedicated to a local eminent figure: Saint Aloysius de Gonzaga, depicted in the altarpiece in the act of renouncing material goods for spiritual ones.

After the third altar, you will find the entrance to the baptistery, built inside the bell tower and decorated with late medieval frescoes.

The transepts, dome and apse are adorned with a sumptuous cycle of frescoes dating back to the 16th and 17th centuries. The fresco in the cupola depicts the Eternal Father among the nine angelic choirs.

Beneath the altar table lies the incorrupt body Saint Anselmo of Lucca (circa 1035–1086). He was Bishop of Lucca and adviser to Matilda of Canossa, as well as an active supporter of the popes in the so-called Investiture Controversy.

From the left transept, you can access the Cappella del Santissimo Sacramento (Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament). The octagonal chapel is fruit of a long period of construction and decoration works. Adorning the altar you will find a painting called 'Vocazione degli apostoli Pietro e Andrea' ('Vocation of the Apostles Peter and Andrew'), a copy by Giulio Romano of the original by Fermo Ghisoni.

Returning toward the entrance, note the passage leading to the Santuario dell'Incoronata, erected by Luca Fancelli in the Renaissance style.

The image venerated here is traditionally believed to date back to Saint Anselm, making it the oldest in the Diocese. The adjacent monumental sacristy is remarkable: adorned with a vault in the style of Mantegna, it contains the caskets with the bodies of Cardinal Ercole Gonzaga and his brother Ferrante.

Fig. 8

*Interior of Duomo di San Pietro*



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Fig. 7  
Duomo di San Pietro



# Basilica di Santa Barbara

*Piazza Santa Barbara 4 - Mantua*

In an unusual square inside the courtyard buildings, between the Prato di Castello and the Cortile della Mostra, Duke Guglielmo Gonzaga entrusted architect Giovanni Battista Bertani with the construction of the palace church. While the main structure was completed in 1572, the bell tower was finished in 1565. In the same year, Pope Pius IV issued a bull establishing a canonical college to be presided over by an abbot directly subordinate to the Holy see. Among various other privileges, the Basilica was granted a liturgy of its own.

The musical jewel in the church's crown is most certainly its organ: built by Graziadio Antegnati, it is one of the very rare examples of 16th-century organs in Italy. The internal space is permeated by light from the two pavilion roof lanterns emerging from the vaults of the nave.

The presbytery is elevated and crowns the apse, which supports part of the choir stalls, originally from the destroyed Chiesa di San Domenico.

The altarpiece of the high altar is the work of Veronese painter Domenico Brusasorci (1564) and depicts the martyrdom of Saint Barbara.

The altarpieces of the two large side altars are by Lorenzo Costa il Giovane, based on ideas by Bertani: the 'Battesimo di Costantino' ('Baptism of Constantine') on the right, and the 'Martirio di Sant'Adriano' ('Martyrdom of Saint Adrian') on the left. The figures painted on both sides of the organ doors (Saint Barbara and Saint Peter on one side, the Annunciation on the other) are attributed to Fermo Ghisoni. Other paintings by painters

of the Giulio Romano school adorn the small altars: On the right 'La consegna delle chiavi a San Pietro' by Luigi Costa ('The Handing of the Keys to Saint Peter') by Luigi Costa, and 'Santa Margherita' ('Saint Margaret') by Giambattista Giacarelli; on the left, 'Il Battesimo di Cristo' ('The Baptism of Christ') by Teodoro Ghisi and 'La Maddalena' ('The Magdalene') by Andreaesino.

This is a church built for Duke Gonzaga that is rich in heritage (just consider the tapestries woven to cartoons by Raphael, left by Cardinal Ercole to Guglielmo and donated by him to his Basilica), where the Divine Office assume solemnity and richness through precise and articulated organisation. A church 'that plays', thanks not only to the musical chapel it was swiftly furnished with, but through the different spaces from which music can emanate. A church unlike all the others: Guglielmo's design draws on the idea of honouring God and at the same time showing him to be a 'true lord' of his time. This is reflected in the achievements of those who work at Santa Barbara, in its construction and in its religious and artistic life.



Fig. 9

Interior of Basilica di Santa Barbara



Fig. 10  
Basilica di Santa Barbara

## Route 2

### From Maria Del Gradaro to Basilica di Sant'Andrea

## Chiesa di Santa Maria del Gradaro

*Via Gradaro 42 - Mantua*

The church is located where Saint Longinus—the soldier who pierced Christ's side and gathered the blood-soaked soil from the foot of the Cross, bringing it to Mantua—is traditionally believed to have been martyred. The name Gradaro seems to derive from *cretarium*, the clay of the shore of Lago Inferiore, behind the church. According to reliable records, it was built in 1256 by the Canonici Regolari di San Marco, a Mantuan order founded a few decades earlier. It then passed to the Olivetans and the Celestines. Suppressed in 1772 and degraded to a military warehouse, it was reinstated in 1952 and restored to its primitive appearance, with its characteristic forms of the transition between the Romanesque and Gothic styles. The three naves were originally divided in two by a wall (of which the frescoed bases remain), built to divide the space used by the laity from that of the monks. The side aisles retain some of the 16th-century interventions by the Olivetans: in the lunettes, remarkable frescoes depicting the Easter story, from the Last Supper to the Resurrection. You will find other frescoes in the chapel at the end of the left aisle: A beautiful Eternal Father and traces of valuable Byzantine frescoes that become more consistent in the central apse and in the two enchanting paintings of the Madonna and Child, to the right of the same apse.



Fig. 11  
Chiesa di Santa Maria del Gradaro



Fig. 12  
Interior of Chiesa di Santa Maria del Gradaro

# Colonna di San Longino

*Palazzo Ducale, Piazza Sordello - Mantua*

Now located in the middle of the Cortile di Santa Croce in Mantua's Palazzo Ducale, this column is associated with the devotional tradition dedicated to Longinus, the Roman soldier believed to have brought the Blood of Christ relic to Mantua. The column comes from a location near Santa Maria Del Gradaro. According to tradition, it marked the place Longino was martyred in 37 AD, at the point where Via Cappadocia meets Via Colonna, in the Contrada delle Nave district. It was placed there by Pope Pius II Piccolomini during his stay in Mantua in 1459-60. On an unknown date (probably between 1860 and 1870) the column, with its pedestal and a commemorative plaque, was moved to the courtyard of the Palazzo dell'Accademia. It was listed as one of the items that, on April 6, 1915, were handed over to Cesare Marocchi, representative of the Regio Ispettor Guglielmo Pacchioni. These items were transferred, with the rest of the civic collections, to Palazzo Ducale, in the courtyard in front of the former Chiesa di Santa Croce.

About 4 m high, the column consists of a stem in red Verona marble 40 cm in diameter and 280 cm high, with a base and capital stylistically traceable to the 15th century. The column rests on a marble base, probably recovered from a Roman-era structure, and is topped with a small marble base with an iron cross. The pedestal is an ancient Roman-era millstone. The choice of the millstone may have been entirely random. However, a little theological analysis might suggest a deeper meaning relating to the concept of a 'mystical press': the body of Christ 'squeezed' on the Cross, his blood the fruit of salvation for men. Thinking along these lines, it is at least evocative to



**Fig. 13**

Colonna di San Longino  
Cortile di Santa Croce, Palazzo Ducale di Mantova

note that a memorial to Mantua's Most Precious Blood is sitting on top of a press.  
A project is currently under way to relocate the column to its original location.



Fig. 14

Map by Gabriele Bertazzolo (1628) showing the location of the column placed by Pope Pius II on the site of Saint Longinus' martyrdom between the Chiesa di Santa Maria del Gradaro and Via Cappadocia.



Fig. 15

Watercolour drawing from 1854 by Alessandro Malacarne, conserved in the Museo di Palazzo Ducale, depicting a view of the Colonna di San Longino between Vicolo Cappadocia and Vicolo Colonna.

# Chiesa di Santa Apollonia

*Via G. Benzoni 16 - Mantua*

In the late Middle Ages a church dedicated to Santa Maria in Betlem was located here. We do not know when it was rededicated to Saint Apollonia, martyred in 249 in Alexandria, Egypt, in such a manner that she became known as the patroness of those suffering from toothache. The present church was reconstructed in 1781 as part of the Austrians' drive for artistic renewal. The project was entrusted to architect Paolo Pozzo, master of the transition to neoclassicism.

The interior was inspired by the Basilica Palatina di Santa Barbara, combining a longitudinal plan with a central one. It houses a considerable number of remarkable paintings, mostly from suppressed churches, including 'Madonna col Bambino tra le sante Marta e Maria' by Gian Francesco Tura (early 16th century), 'Madonna della Ghiara' by Francesco Borgani (early 17th century), and 'Santa Teresa e San Giovanni della Croce' by Giuseppe Bazzani (respectively 'Madonna and Child between the Saints Martha and Mary of Bethany', 'Madonna of the Ghiara', 'Saint Teresa and Saint John of the Cross'). The apse contains a masterpiece of early neoclassicism: a painting by Giuseppe Bottani dedicated in 1779 to the later suppressed parish of San Zenone, depicting the Holy Family with the Saints Zeno and Stephen.



Fig. 16

Exterior of Chiesa di Santa Apollonia



Fig. 17

Interior of Chiesa di Santa Apollonia

# Chiesa di San Martino

*Corner of Via Pomponazzo and Via Corridoni - Mantua*

The filial church of San Martino is located at the corner of Via Pomponazzo and Via Corridoni. The church was built in medieval times and underwent continual restructuring work over the subsequent centuries. Tradition has it that it was founded in the year 827, but the first definite dating is 1127. The current architectural and decorative structure can be traced back to a design by Frans Geffels, the Flemish prefect of ducal works from 1663, and between 1680 and 1693. The interior stucco ornaments were executed by Giacomo Aliprandi and designed by Giovanni Battista Barberini d'Intelvi.

The tall, vertical façade features a giant order. The motif of the two side niches, containing statues of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, repeats in the centre, where a large niche houses a high-relief carving of Saint Martin on horseback giving a portion of his cloak to a poor man (1697).

The altarpiece of the first altar depicts the Annunciation, painted by Giovanni Canti. From Parma, the artist was active in Mantua at the beginning of the 18th century. Somewhat academic in its execution, the altarpiece painting on the next altar is attributed to Geffels. Signed and dated 1662, the work is known as the 'Pala dell'Altare della Dottrina Cristiana' ('Altarpiece of the Altar of Christian Doctrine'). On the right-hand wall, before the presbytery, is a painting of Saint Magdalene (1590-1600) by Teodoro Ghisi.

The altarpiece depicting Saint Martin sharing his cloak with the poor man is the work of Ippolito Costa. Dating

back to the mid-16th century, it is executed in the style of Giulio Romano.

The link forged by the church over the centuries with the community of emigrants from Val Rendena, who came to Mantua for work, is interesting. The third altar on the right-hand wall was commissioned by this mountain community and recently restored by the Municipality of Pinzolo.



Fig. 18  
Chiesa di San Martino

# Chiesa di Santa Maria della Carità

*Via Corridoni 33 - Mantua*

Rebuilt in 1613 and embellished with stucco and paintings in the following century, the medieval bell tower attests to this church's ancient origins. A short churchyard protects the entrance. It is raised above street level and crowded with tombstones, including the tondo relief of a 15th-century Piety. On a house on the opposite side of the road, you will find another relief, 18th-century this time, depicting the Annunciation: an excellent example of the many devotional images placed on town houses. The interior is notable for the cycle of eleven paintings by Giuseppe Bazzani. Painted before 1750 for the church where he was baptised in 1690, these are some of the painter's best works.

In the vault are three tempera paintings depicting the theological virtues. On the walls, you will see shaped canvases representing: the Good Shepherd, Jesus and the Samaritan; the prophet Elijah, Abraham and Melchizedech; Jesus at the Pool of Bethesda; the expulsion of Esau; the judgement of Solomon; and the sacrifice of Isaac.

On the counterfaçade are two other paintings, of the Bazzanian school: 'Jesus among the doctors of the Temple')and 'Jesus drives the merchants from the Temple'.

On the left in the apse, we see 'Archangel Michael and Saints Cosma and Damiano' by Giovan Francesco Caroto, who portrayed Marquis Francesco II Gonzaga as the Saint on the left.

Immediately on the left as you enter is an ancient chapel conserving the Crucifix said to have been brought by Saint Charles Borromeo through the streets of Milan during the plague.



Fig. 19

Santa Maria della Carità



Fig. 20

Interior of Santa Maria della Carità

# Rotonda di San Lorenzo

*Piazza Erbe - Mantua*

The construction of the Rotonda di San Lorenzo dates back to 1083 and the reign of Matilda of Canossa. Duke Guglielmo Gonzaga ordered its closure in 1579. It was later deconsecrated and then incorporated into civil buildings built against the Torre dell'Orologio (Clock Tower). The demolition of these buildings at the beginning of the 20th century revealed the ancient walls, and the Rotonda was reopened in 1926 after almost four centuries.

The church has a central system consisting of a central nave with a cupola, surrounded by a smaller nave on the ground floor and a gallery on the upper level, the matroneum. This can be accessed via two staircases carved into the masonry.

On the internal walls of the nave, you will see some late-11th century frescoes depicting episodes from the Gospel and the hagiography of Saint Lawrence.

The central plan of the building has inspired much debate among historians. One probable explanation suggests it to be a kind of tribute to the ultimate rotunda: The Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.

Such a choice would have made sense if the rotunda were connected to the nearby crypt of the Basilica di Sant'Andrea, which contains the relic of the Blood of Christ and therefore a piece of Calvary, which is located close to the Holy Sepulchre.



Fig. 21  
Piazza Erbe



Fig. 22  
Interior of Rotonda di San Lorenzo, © Regione Lombardia, Foto di Renato Cerisola, campagna fotografica cofinanziata dal MiC, Legge 77/2006



## Route 3

### Blessed Osanna of Mantua

## The saint “next door”

The city preserves memories and traces of a Dominican tertiary, Osanna Andreasi (1449-1505), beatified by Pope Leo X in 1515. She was an adviser to the Gonzaga family, a mystic and court seer. She chose to remain lay and live in her home, where she received nobles and common people, to whom she offered spiritual and material help.

The signs of devotion, veneration and affection for Osanna, both inside and outside the city, her charitable work, her intense mystical experiences, her ability to prophesise, to advise, to intercede, to live within the relational fabric of the city and to convey requests for renewal and reform for greater adherence to the Gospel comprise a true spiritual treasure.

## Short biography

Osanna was born in Carbonarola, Lower Mantua, on 17 January 1449 to the nobles Nicola Andreasi and Agnese Mazzoni. Desiring from a young age to join the Dominican Order, she rejected marriage and wore the habit of a Dominican tertiary from the age of 15 to her death in Mantua on 18 June, 1505. She was often called upon to perform roles of supreme responsibility, such as governing the Marquisate of Mantua in the absence of Francesco II Gonzaga. Osanna was able to put the latter's gratitude to excellent use, providing continual support to the poor and needy of the city, or

even to family members of Francesco himself, such as Elisabetta, wife of the Duke of Urbino, whom she comforted during a very difficult period of exile.

Her life story, passed down by her contemporaries, the Dominican Francesco Silvestri da Ferrara and the Olivetan Dom Jerome (Girolamo da Monte Oliveto), reveals how miraculously Osanna managed the apparent conflict between a contemplative and active life: the burden of those great souls whose inner vocation would drive them to solitude but are kept in the world by their compassion for others in need. Osanna therefore fulfilled duties that her rank would have spared her with a spirit of apostolic fervour, comforted by the supernatural gifts God had granted her: the mystical marriage, the crown of thorns, the stigmata (visible but only as simple marks with no broken tissue), and finally the piercing of the heart which became her iconographic emblem.

By a papal brief on 8 January, 1515, Pope Leo X granted the city of Mantua the right to celebrate Mass and Divine Office in honour of the Blessed Osanna of Mantua.

By a papal bull of 26 November 1694, Pope Innocent XII later confirmed her cultus, which was extended on 18 January 1695 to the whole Order. Her body is kept and venerated in the Duomo di Mantua (Mantua Cathedral), and her feast day is on 18 June, the day of her birth in heaven. Her cause of canonisation was taken up in 2022 and is being processed by the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints.

# Casa della beata Osanna Andreasi

*Via Frattini 9 - Mantua*

In its current condition, the house where Osanna, a lay Dominican, lived and died (1449-1505) dates back to the second half of the 15th century. In 1475 it certainly belonged to the noble Andreasi family. Despite various mishaps, the house remained within the family, including branches secondary to that of Osanna, until 1780. It then passed to the Magnaguti family as part of a marriage dowry. Count Alessandro, the last of his line, had it restored in 1924. He then offered it to the Venetian Suore domenicane della Beata Imelda (Dominican Sisters of the Blessed Imelda) in 1926, inviting them to come to Mantua to safeguard the house and keep Osanna's memory alive. When this project failed in 1934, Count Alessandro hosted three lay tertiaries of the Dominican Fraternity of Mantua in the house. They lived there until 1958, when it was permitted for the whole Lay Dominican Fraternity to gather periodically in the house.

Count Alexander died in 1966 and left the piano nobile to the Dominican Province as the perpetual seat of the Mantuan Fraternity.

In 1991, the same Province bought the remaining part of the house from the Parish, making it a single property dedicated to Dominican and cultural initiatives.

Respected over the centuries through the veneration of the Blessed Osanna, the building, in its near-original structural state, remains a typical and rare example of a 15th-century Mantuan dwelling.

Certain elements reveal the style of the Florentine architect Luca Fancelli (1430-1495) who worked in Mantua in the second half of the century. For example, the four windows of the upper floor: distinctly

rectangular in shape, framed in terracotta, not leaning on belt sills and spaced according to a pattern of 1-2-1. On the mezzanine are four windows, similar in layout to those on the upper floor, but smaller, with splayed openings and simpler terracotta frames.

Particularly splendid are the hortus conclusus (enclosed garden) and the giardino dei semplici (herb garden). They are divided into two parts by an orthogonal loggia with three arches—two of which retain their 15th-century frescoes—whose front columns, in pink Veronese marble, are refined by a capital that bears the Andreasi coat of arms: A swan and a star.



**Fig. 24**

View of the garden of the Casa della Beata Osanna Andreasi

# Campanile di San Domenico

*Corner of Via Matteotti and Via Pescheria - Mantua*

The bell tower is what remains of the Chiesa di San Domenico and the grand monastery complex of the Dominican fathers. The Blessed Osanna of Mantua was buried in the building at the beginning of the 16th century. In 1814, her incorrupt body was transferred—after a short period in San Vincenzo—to the Duomo.

After the first structure was completed in the mid-13th century, a larger one was rebuilt and consecrated in 1484. In 1782, during the Austrian era, like many others the building was used as a billet for soldiers. It was then suppressed in 1798, and used as a military warehouse, barn and barracks. In 1925 the building was demolished to make way for urban redevelopment.

The bell tower is the only part that remains intact. Over time, a diaspora of the monuments and the works of art conserved inside them took place: The tombstone of Giovanni dalle Bande Nere, transferred to the Chiesa di San Maurizio; the 1690 wooden choir relocated in 1800 to the Basilica di Santa Barbara and the Chiesa di Bondeno; and the mausoleum of Pietro Strozzi rehoused in the Basilica di Sant'Andrea.



Fig. 25

Campanile di San Domenico

# Duomo di San Pietro

*Piazza Sordello - Mantua*

After her death in 1505, Osanna Andreasi was beatified at the insistent request of her friend Marchioness Isabella d'Este by Pope Leo X Medici, who confirmed her cultus on 8 January, 1515.

The incorrupt body of the Blessed Osanna of Mantua currently rests in the left transept of the Cattedrale di San Pietro Apostolo (Mantua Cathedral), in the second altar on the left, dedicated to Saint Dominic.

The casket is lined in silver embossed with four ovals, each illustrating highlights from Osanna's life, and connected by plant designs.



**Fig. 26**

Bernardino Malpizzi (1553–1623)

Madonna col Bambino, santi e beati domenicani,  
oil on canvas, left transept of the Duomo di San Pietro

# Museo Diocesano Francesco Gonzaga

*Piazza Virgiliana 55 - Mantua*

The Diocesan Museum of Mantua conserves two interesting paintings of the Blessed Osanna.

The first is a piece by Ippolito Andreasi (Mantua, circa 1548–Mantua, 1608) and collaborators, depicting the Madonna presenting the Child to the Blessed Osanna Andreasi. The painting dates back to the last decade of the 16th century.

The scene seems to unfold outside of space and time, with the figures, including the kneeling Osanna, resting on clouds. The Virgin's head is in the centre, lit by a large circular halo surrounded by angels and cherubs.

This altarpiece comes from the parish church of Scorzarolo, near to which a branch of the Andreasi family owned a large amount of land.

Its formal elegance is accentuated in the graceful movements of the angels and above all in Mary's face, which evokes the highly refined faces painted by Parmigianino.

La seconda opera è a firma di Orsola Maddalena Caccia. The second piece by Orsola Maddalena Caccia (Moncalvo, 1596–1676) is titled and depicts the 'Matrimonio mistico della beata Osanna Andreasi' ('Mystical Marriage of the Blessed Osanna of Mantua').

The composition is based on concentric rings that emanate from a pool of golden light radiated by the dove of the Holy Spirit. In the upper semicircle, groups of angels offer flowers, dance among the clouds, play and sing. This creates an inverted triangle defined by four pairs of putti in the two upper corners and along the

sides, emphasising the focal point of the composition. An angel points to a cartouche with the inscription Iesu Maria ('Jesus Mary'), commemorating the ecstasy during which Osanna learned to read and write. Another holds two crowns, one of thorns and one of flowers, representing Osanna's mystical marriage. One remarkable characteristic of the painting is the abundance of flowers falling from the sky, depicted with the utmost care and botanical expertise.



Fig. 27 Orsola Maddalena Caccia (1596 – 1676), *Matrimonio mistico della Beata Osanna Andreasi*, oil on canvas

# Palazzo Ducale

Piazza Sordello - Mantua

The Complesso Museale di Palazzo Ducale houses various portraits of Osanna. These include one attributed to Lorenzo Costa in the Fondazione Freddi collection, another by Orioli, an altarpiece from San Domenico and a work by Francesco Bonsignori (Verona circa 1460–Caldiero 1519). This latter piece is unusual in the vast iconography of Osanna, representing her appearance to Dominican nuns ('Apparizione di Osanna Andreasi a monache domenicane').

She is being venerated by three Dominican nuns and two women in secular dress. Of the latter pair, the one in the foreground is identifiable as Isabella d'Este. The study for this portrait is kept in the British Museum. Since Isabella and her companion are wearing widows' clothes, the altarpiece can be dated even more precisely to after March 29, 1519, the day on which Isabella's husband, Francesco Gonzaga, died, only a short time before Bonsignori's own death. The first to make note of the painting was Giovanni Cadioli (1763), who saw it in the Chiesa di San Vincenzo in Mantua. The work was transferred when the church was closed following the Teresian suppressions. After passing through various hands in 1852, Count Carlo D'Arco donated it to the Museo Civico.

One of the two nuns on the right likely represents Ippolita Gonzaga, daughter of Isabella. The iconography of the painting alludes to some key passages in Osanna's spiritual story. The figures above allude to her mystical experiences: An angel who guided her at five years of age in a vision of

Paradise, and her vision of Christ crowned with thorns bearing the cross. When she was seven years old, she consecrated her virginity to Christ (represented by the lily), and immediately afterwards received the Ardent Heart as a gift from Christ. It is said that some saw holiness radiating from her head and that she was tormented by demons, represented here by a goat with devilish traits, crushed beneath her feet.



Fig. 28

Francesco Bonsignori (1460 ca. – 1519), *Apparizione della beata Osanna Andreasi a monache domenicane*, oil on canvas, Palazzo Ducale

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