IN VIRGIL'S FOOTSTEPS

A Virgil trail in and around Mantua

MANTOVA CITTÀ D'ARTE E DI CULTURA

Texts by Chiara Pisani, Elga Gazzoli and Veronica Ghizzi

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PRIMUS EGO IN PATRIA MECUM, MODO UITA SUPERSIT
AONIO REDIENS DEDUCAM UERTICE MUSAS;
PRIMUS IDUMAEAS REFERAM TIBI, MANTUA, PALMAS
ET UIRIDI IN CAMPO TEMPLUM DE MARMORE PONAM
PROPTER AQUAM, TARDIS INGENS UBI FLEXIBUS ERRAT
MINCIUS ET TENERA PRAEXIT HARUNDINE RIPAS.

Virg. Georgics, Book III, verses 10–15

If life lasts, I'll be the first to return to my country,
bringing the Muses with me from the Aonian peak: I'll be the first, Mantua,
to bring you Idumaean palms,
and I'll set up a temple of marble by the water, on that green plain, where
great Mincius wanders in slow curves, and clothes his banks with tender
reeds.

Publio Virgilio Marone

(Andes 70 a.C. – Brindisi 19 a.C.)

Considered the greatest of the Latin poets, Virgil was born near Mantua on 15 October, 70 BC. His exact birthplace was the village of Andes, identified with the village of Pietole since the 12th century, as referenced by Dante in the Divine Comedy ('Purgatorio' 18, 83). The son of minor landowners, he studied in Cremona before moving to Milan and then Rome to complete his training in rhetoric. He then went to Naples where he learned the rules of Epicurean philosophy. A key moment in his life was the confiscation of his father's land, an event that influenced his composition of the Eclogues (42–39 BC). Its immediate success gave him access to the circle of Maecenas. It was Maecenas who invited him to compose the Georgics (38–29 BC), his most ideological and political work. It was also through Maecenas that Virgil met Emperor Augustus and helped (perhaps under duress) disseminate his political ideology, becoming the greatest poet of Rome and the Empire. He devoted the final years of his life to writing the Aeneid (29–19 BC). To perfect the epic poem, he undertook a journey to Greece which fatally impacted his health. He died in Brindisi on 21 September 19 BC. His remains were taken to Naples where they were placed in a tomb, which is still visible today, on the Posillipo Hill. During the Middle Ages, the urn containing his ashes was unfortunately lost. This famous epitaph was written on his tomb: Mantua me genuit, Calabri rapuere, tenet nunc Partinope; cecini pascua, rura, duces or 'Mantua gave me life, Calabria [Puglia] took it away; Parthenope [Naples] holds me now; I sang of pastures [the Eclogues], farms [the Georgics] and commanders [the Aeneid'. A refined and cultured poet, he preferred to use common, simple and balanced language. As is clear from the particular importance attributed to him in Dante's Divine Comedy, his works were hugely successful in the Middle Ages when they were reread through a Christian lens. (PC)

Palazzo del Podestà

Also called Palazzo Broletto, the imposing medieval structure was partially rebuilt, as an inscription notes, around 1227. The work was commissioned by Laudarengo Martinengo of Brescia, who had been appointed Mayor of Mantua.

Together with the civic tower, the palazzo was intended to host the city's most important public activities. The tower overlooking Via Giustiziati was also built in the early decades of the 13th century. It served as a prison and was equipped with a large bell to call the citizens together. At the base of the tower is the so-called 'Portico dei Lattonai', which leads to the inner courtyard. The complex underwent several renovations and architectural changes, partly due to numerous fires over the centuries.

Around 1462, at the behest of Ludovico II Gonzaga, the piazza and the Palazzi Comunali were redesigned under the advice of Leon Battista Alberti and the direction of Tuscan *'magistri'*: Luca da Settignano (better known as Luca Fancelli) and Giovanni Antonio d'Arezzo. This intervention added the porticoes, and battlements, and the tower on the corner of Piazza Erbe.

The Palazzo del Podestà was crowned with blind battlements, a recurring element in Fancelli's decorative structures, which helped tie together the different buildings that make up the Palazzi Comunali.

A prominent feature of the building, on the side facing Piazza Broletto, is the aedicula containing a high relief of Virgilio in cattedra (fig. 1). The poet wears his doctoral cap and rests his arms on a lectern engraved with the inscription:

VIRGILIUS MANTUANUS POETARUM
CLARISSIMUS.

On the base, where his feet rest, is the epitaph from the poet's tomb in Naples:

MANTVA ME GENVIT: CALABRI RAPVERE:
TENET NVNC PARTINOPE: CECINI PASCVA
RVRA DVCES.

'Mantua gave me life, Calabria took it away, Naples keeps me now; I sang of pastures, farms and

Fig. 1
Virgilio in cattedra, white marble. 1227, Palazzo del Podestà, Piazza Broletto façade .

commanders'
Under the monument, a plaque bears the following inscription:

MILLENIS LAPSIS ANNIS DOMINIQVE DVCENTIS
BISQVE DECEM IVNCTIS SEPTEMQVE
SEQVENTIBVS ILLOS VIR CONSTANS
ANIMO FORTIS SAPIENSQVE BENIGNVS
LAVDARENGVS HONESTIS MORIBVS VNDIQVE
PLENVS HANC FIERI LEGITOR FECIT QVAM
CONSPICIS AEDEM TVNC ADERANT SECVM
CIVILI IVRE PERITI BRIXIA QVEM GENVIT
BONACVRSIVS ALTER EORVM IACOBVS ALTER
ERAT BONONIA QVEM TVLIT ALTA

'One thousand two hundred years after the year of the Lord, plus twice ten and seven more, the loyal, strong-hearted, wise and good Laudarengo, full of honest customs, O reader, had the palace you see before you built. With him were the civil law advisers Bonaccorsio, born in Brescia, and Iacopo, a son of Alta Bologna.'

Most scholars agree that the white marble sculpture was added to the palazzo façade, built around 1227, as an integral element of the building, the administrative heart of the city in the communal era.

This high relief, which Mantuans affectionately call 'the old lady' because of the poet's clothing and cap, is a public demonstration of Mantuans' choice of Virgil as the real protector of their city. This is also evidenced by the emblematic use of Virgil's image on coins minted by the commune, in its standard and in the stamp used on the magistrature registers: all spaces normally occupied in other cities by the figure of the patron saint. (PC).

Fig. 2
Rinaldo Mantovano (?), *Virgilio con la syrinx*, detached fresco, 1540, Museo Virgilio, Palazzo del Podestà.

Museo Virgilio

The museum consists of eight rooms that provide access to the recently restored areas of the Palazzo del Podestà, Arengario and Masseria in the beating heart of the city. There are three main sections dedicated to the works of Virgil—The Eclogues, The Georgics and the Aeneid – where multimedia and multisensory installations immerse the audience directly in these works, recreating the themes and sensations evoked by Virgil's verses. Displayed alongside the installations are the most important artefacts from Mantua's Collezioni Civiche (Civic Collections) that relate to the great poet and the Palazzo del Podestà. (GV)

Communal shields bearing Virgil's image

When the Empire officially recognised the Commune of Mantua, after the death of Matilda of Canossa in 1115, the city's coat of arms was established as a simple shield with a red cross on a white field.
Due to the deep bond between the city and the Mantuan poet—reflected in the very early use of Virgil's face on its coinage, almost as if he were the city's protective deity—a bust of Virgil wearing a laurel wreath was soon added to the upper-right compartment (upper left from the viewer's perspective) of the coat of arms.

These spaces corresponded to the current Broletto, Erbe, Mantegna, and Marconi squares and Via Calvi as far as its intersection with Via Orefici.
Originally there were six of these 'signs': Three consisting only of the inscription 'Confines platearum', and three others that also included the coat of arms. These are still visible today:

- Via Calvi, corner with Via Orefici: Communal coat of arms of the city of Mantua with the Gonzaga coat of arms bearing the Bohemian Lion quartered with the original Gonzaga stripes, and a plaque inscribed 'Confines platearum'.

Fig. 3
Virgilio in Cattedra, marble, Red Verona marble with polychrome traces, 1170–1180 to the mid-13th century, Museo Virgilio Palazzo del Podestà.

- Piazza Marconi: Communal coat of arms of the city of Mantua (fig. 4).

- Vicolo San Longino, corner with Via Verdi: Communal coat of arms of the city of Mantua with the Gonzaga coat of arms. It is unusual to see the Gonzaga coat of arms, in use between 1394 and 1433, with the Bohemian Lion quartered with the original Gonzaga stripes. The inscription is no longer visible.

The communal coat of arms underwent several changes over time: When the Gonzaga family obtained the title of marquis from Emperor Sigismund of Luxembourg in 1433, the communal coat of arms was surmounted by the crown of the marquis. It remained largely unchanged until 1816, when the crown was in turn surmounted by the double-headed eagle of the Austrian Empire with outstretched wings. In 1866, when Mantua joined the Kingdom of Italy, the city once again adopted the old silver shield with the red cross and bust of Virgil, surmounted by the crown of the marquis only. Virgil wears a green laurel wreath and is shown from the front, dressed in a white chlamys knotted at the chest.

Finally, in 1870, the modern form of the coat of arms appeared, with the marquis' crown replaced by a mural crown, and the shield adorned with two branches:
one laurel and one oak. The two branches partially circle the shield, meeting below, where they are tied with a red ribbon (fig. 5) (PC)

Fig. 4
Communal coat of arms of Mantua bearing the image of Virgil, marble, late 14th century, Piazza Marconi.

Fig. 5
Current coat of arms of the Municipality of Mantua.

Palazzo Ducale

The Palazzo Ducale was the seat of the Gonzaga court between the 14th and 17th centuries. Some of the most famous artists, such as Pisanello, Giulio Romano, Andrea Mantegna, Rubens and many others, worked on the countless rooms of the palazzo over the centuries, contributing to the complex's particular stylistic heterogeneity.

The priceless works of art housed in the palace also include important evidence of the city's link with the Latin poet Virgil. The Salone di Manto contains a depiction by Lorenzo Costa the Younger of the story of Manto, legendary daughter of the fortune teller Tiresia. She is the mythical founder of the city ancient tradition relayed by Dante through the voice of Virgil in Canto 20 of 'Inferno'.

The Sala di Troia was frescoed by Giulio Romano and his assistants with scenes from Homer's poem, but also from the Aeneid and other 'minor' sources. (GV)

Fig. 6
Giulio Romano and assistants, *Il Cavallo di Troia e Vulcano forgia le armi di Achille*, 1538-1539, fresco, Mantua, Palazzo Ducale, Sala di Troia (@ MIC - Palazzo Ducale di Mantova - photo Ghigo Roli).

Archivio di Stato

Mantua's State Archives were established in 1868. They were first located in Palazzo Ducale, before being moved in 1883 to the former Jesuit College and Monastery, a complex which includes the Gambulini towers and former Santissima Trinità church, which now serves as its main depository.

The Archives contain documents from the communal period, the rule of the Bonacolsi and, above all, of the Gonzaga, who dominated the city for almost four centuries (1328–1707).

The Gonzaga family archives are some of the most complete records of any governing family in modern times. They are also a vital reference point for Mantua's medieval and modern history. Important too are the records from the Hapsburg and Napoleonic periods and the Restoration, as well as notaries' and cadastral documents, ecclesiastical records and other documentation relating to artisan cooperatives and the archives of local nobility, either donated or deposited, such as those of the Counts Castiglioni of Mantua and the noble Cavriani family.

No less important are the photographic archives. The documents recording the fortune of Virgil through the centuries are of particular value: From the communal registers stamped with his image to the Gonzaga inventories that mention the Virgil codices in the Court libraries, and letters from Isabella d'Este concerning her wish to involve Andrea Mantegna in a plan to erect a statue of Virgil. (fig. 7). (PC)

Fig. 7
Design for Isabella d'Este's presumed monument to Virgil. Photograph of an early-16th-century design from the Mantegna school kept at the Louvre, circa 1882, Archivio di Stato di Mantova ASMn, Portioli Attilio, b. 17, file XIV 'Album virgiliano'

Biblioteca Comunale Teresiana

The Teresian Public Libary is housed in a large wing of the Palazzo degli Studi, an imposing complex built between 1753 and 1763 by the Bolognese architect Alfonso Torreggiani. Originally conceived as a Jesuit college, it now houses the Library, State Archives and the classics high school named after Virgil.
The Imperial Regia Biblioteca opened to the public on 30 March 1780. It was built as part of Maria Theresa of Austria's programme, launched in 1749, to secularise and reform cultural and educational institutions. The library was housed on the first floor in two large rooms of the original Jesuit college, specially adapted by Veronese architect Paolo Pozzo: the Prima Sala Teresiana (First Teresian Room), where Pozzo designed the large double-tier, full-height walnut shelving (borrowing the idea from Fischer von Erlach, architect of the Hofbibliothek in Vienna), and the Seconda Sala Teresiana (Second Teresian Room), with three tiers of wooden shelves which were extended to four after the Second World War. The rooms house over 40,000 books dating from the 16th to the 19th centuries.

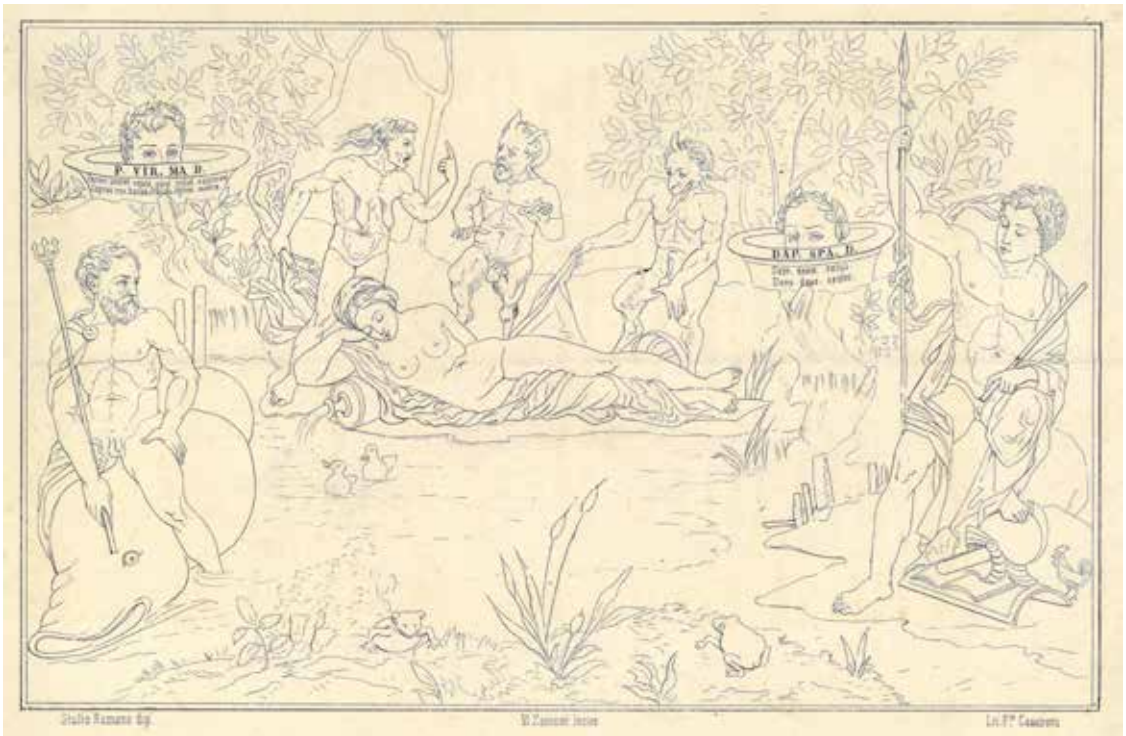
The library's most important collections, both in terms of rarity and number, arrived between 1782 and 1811, when many religious orders and monasteries were suppressed. The Restoration saw the return in 1816 of manuscripts stolen by the French, as well as the 1824 acquisition of the manuscript fonds of Leopoldo Camillo Volta (prefect of the Library almost uninterruptedly from 1779 to 1823) and the 1838 acquisition of a near-complete collection of the local daily newspaper, the 'Gazzetta di Mantova'.
When Mantua was annexed to the Kingdom of Italy in 1866, the Library became the property of the government and then, in 1881, the municipal administration. This enabled it to acquire further important donations and bequests granted to the municipality: private collections of the highest quality

Fig. 8
Vergilius Maro, *Vergilii Maronis Opera. Nunc demum scholijs paucis sed optimis illustrata, fi guris aptissimis ornata, studioque emendata accuratissimo,* Venetiis, Apud Hieronymum Scotum, 1549, Biblioteca Comunale Teresiana.

and value including law volumes, literature, history and science books, but also fonds and natural history and art collections.

The library held around 120,000 books at the beginning of the 20th century, and currently holds 400,000. In 1930, an agreement was made to add a valuable library belonging to Mantua's Jewish community to the collection (161 manuscripts, 1 incunable and 1549 printed texts) The library holds some 500 old and modern printed texts on Virgil, including two 15th-century manuscripts of the Aeneid, two incunables, various 16th-century editions, of which four were published in Mantua by Francesco Osanna, dozens of 17th- and 18th-century editions including the elegant 1793 Bodoni in-folio edition, as well as a number of 19th- and 20th-century editions, some of which are illustrated. (PC)

Fig. 9
Giovanni Battista Sezanne, *Belle arti. Illustrazione artisticostorica di una pittura classica di Giulio Pippi detto Giulio Romano*, Florence, Tip. Soliani, 1862, Biblioteca Comunale Teresiana



Palazzo Accademico Accademia Nazionale Virgiliana

On the site now occupied by the Palazzo Accademico an important medieval building once stood, of which only a few traces remain. Here, in 1562, Cesare Gonzaga of Guastalla established the Accademia degli Invaghiti, which organised the first performance of Claudio Monteverdi's Orfeo in 1607. From 1610, the palazzo was home to the *Accademia Letteraria degli Invitti,* which changed its name in 1648 to Accademia Letteraria dei Timidi. In 1767, Empress Maria Teresa of Austria had the academy renamed once again to the *Reale Accademia di Scienze e Belle Lettere.* Added to this were the *Accademia di Pittura, Scultura e Architettura* (established in 1752), the Colonia Filarmonica, the *Colonia di Arti e Mestieri and the Colonia Agraria*.

The entire complex underwent major renovation work between 1772 and 1775. The neoclassical façade is the work of architect Giuseppe Piermarini (1734–1808), while Paolo Pozzo was responsible for the rest of the building (1741–1803).
The complex includes Antonio Galli Bibiena's splendid *Teatro Scientifico*, built to host academic conferences, plays and concerts.

In 1797, Napoleon had the academy renamed the 'Accademia Virgiliana' in homage to the great Latin poet, whose profile appears on the building's façade (fig. 10). Only recently, in 1983, did it obtain the qualification of 'Nazionale'. Since the 18th century it has promoted knowledge and awareness of Virgil and his works at a national and international level.

In addition to preserving rare and old editions of the poet's works, it houses documentation relating to celebratory events dedicated to him, a copious bibliography of studies on Virgilian subjects and interesting artistic material (including the Giuseppe Menozzi's plaster maquettes of the two large marble sculptural groups dedicated to pastoral and epic poetry in Piazza Virgiliana next to the statue of Virgil). (PC)

Fig. 10
Profilo di Virgilio, high relief, 1772–1775, façade of the Palazzo Accademico.

Teatro Scientifico Bibiena

ISet within the neoclassical structure of the Palazzo Accademico and designed by architect, set designer, and portraitist Antonio Bibiena (1697–1774), the Teatro Scientifico is a Rococo jewel.

Once across the threshold of the austere Palazzo Accademico and the theatre foyer with its painted bust of Virgil, one is struck by the magic of this exquisite theatre, untouched by time.
The theatre has a bell-shaped plan and tiers of elegant box seats. While its load-bearing structures are built from brick, the interior incorporates a large degree of wooden elements.

The ornate sculptural decorations, sculptures and frescoes reflect late-Baroque taste. Worthy of note is the wooden statue of Virgil (fig. 11) shown with three books, in reference to his major works. It is set, along with that of philosopher Pietro Pomponazzo, in one of the two specially created niches in the theatre's fixed stage. Two other niches, either side of the proscenium arch, contain other Mantuan dignitaries: Baldassarre Castiglione, author of the famous 'Book of the Courtier', and the great engineer Gabriele Bertazzolo.

Officially opened in December 1769, the theatre was designed to host meetings and events of the Accademia. On 16 January 1770, a few weeks after the opening, the theatre had the honour of hosting a concert by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, who was not even 14 at the time. (PC)

Fig. 11
Statua di Virgilio, wood, 1767–1769, Teatro Bibiena.

Piazza Virgiliana and Virgil Monument

During French rule (1797–1799 and 1801–1814), Mantua was under the command of General Alexandre Miollis. A great admirer of classical culture, Miollis was particularly passionate about Virgil, the indisputable genius loci. He undertook many initiatives to honour the great Latin poet.

One of the most important of these was to create a large piazza by first filling in a meander of Lago di Mezzo. Works then began in 1797, based on a design by architect Paolo Pozzo (1741–1803).

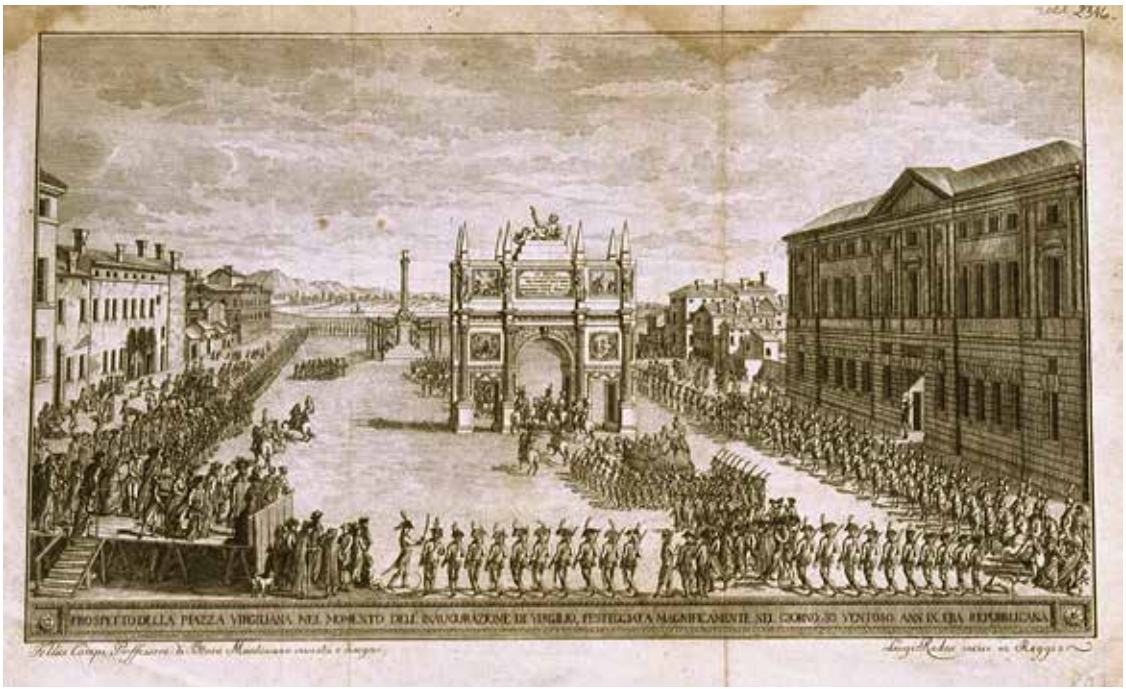
Following the French style, the new piazza consisted of a tree-lined route around a large central space left open to allow free passage for carriages.

In March 1801, the entire complex was dedicated to Virgil with the official inauguration of a monument comprising a bust of Virgil on top of a tall column (fig. 12).

Initially, a plaster cast of a marble bust was used:

Fig. 12

Felice Campi, *Prospetto della Piazza Virgiliana nel momento dell'inaugurazione di Virgilio festeggiata magnificamente nel giorno 30 Ventoso ann. IX Era Repubblicana*, print, Museo Civico di Palazzo Te.



Long part of the Vespasiano Gonzaga collections in Sabbioneta, and now exhibited at the Museo MACA Palazzo San Sebastiano, the marble bust was wrongly identified in 1775 as a portrait of Virgil as a young man (fig. 20), by Abbot Gian Girolamo Carli, secretary of the Regia Accademia di scienze, lettere e belle arti. The cast was removed a few months later and replaced with a bronze bust commissioned by Miollis. It was sculpted by Giovanni Bellavite and also based on the ancient bust (fig. 16).

Although it was moved when the Austrians returned to the city, it remained in the piazza until 1821, when it was taken down to make space for an amphitheatre. The amphitheatre, too, was demolished in 1919, to make way for a new, more contemporary monument to Virgil, promoted by a committee established for this purpose in 1877.
The winning design of the competition, only announced in 1924, was by architect Luca Beltrami. However, the bronze sculpture of the poet (5 m tall on a 12 m pedestal) (fig. 25) was designed and made by Emilio Quadrelli: The sculptor was inspired by Andrea Mantegna's design for a monument to Virgil for Isabella d'Este (now in the Louvre) (fig. 7).

The two allegorical marble groups depicting pastoral and epic poetry are the work of Giuseppe Menozzi. The current monument was inaugurated on 21 April 1927. The Accademia Virgiliana holds several of Menozzi's plaster maquettes for the two groups. The layout of the square, in the form of a public garden, was designed by the Turin architect Giuseppe Roda and completed in 1927 (fig. 13). (PC)

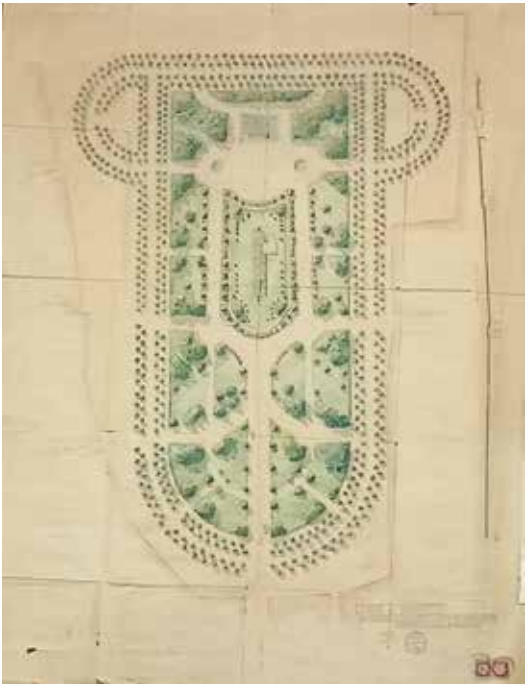


Fig. 13
Progetto per il giardino di Piazza Virgiliana, Indian ink and watercolour on paper, 1926, Archivio Storico Comunale.

Giardino Cavriani

In 1835, Marquis Luigi Cavriani had a marble statue of Virgil erected in the garden opposite his palazzo on Via Trento. Its sculptor, Stefano Gerola (circa 1795–1878) of Milan, was also responsible for the thirteen busts of Mantuans celebrated for their contribution to letters, science and the arts on the columns punctuating the railings.

The portraits include Ippolito Capilupi, Baldassarre Castiglioni, Filippo Cavriani, Marcello Donati, Teofilo Folengo, Cardinal Ercole Gonzaga, Marquis Francesco II Gonzaga, Duke Vespasiano Gonzaga, Pietro Pomponazzo, Antonio Possevino, Battista Spagnoli, Jacopo Strada and Sordello Visconti.

It was Marquis Cavriani's clearly expressed desire to erect a modern monument to Virgil after the one erected by the French in 1801 in Piazza Virgiliana was removed in 1821. Made of Candoglia marble, the statue is 3.18 m high, including the plinth (fig. 14).
The face is taken from an ancient bust recovered in Sabbioneta and mistakenly identified by Abbot Girolamo Carli in 1775 as a depiction of Virgil (fig. 20). The bust is now held at MACA, Palazzo San Sebastiano).

The body, however, was inspired by Possevino's description of the monument Isabella d'Este had wished to build in honour of the poet. The verses on the Botticino marble pedestal designed by Gianbattista Vergani are dedicated to Virgil (fig. 7). (PC)

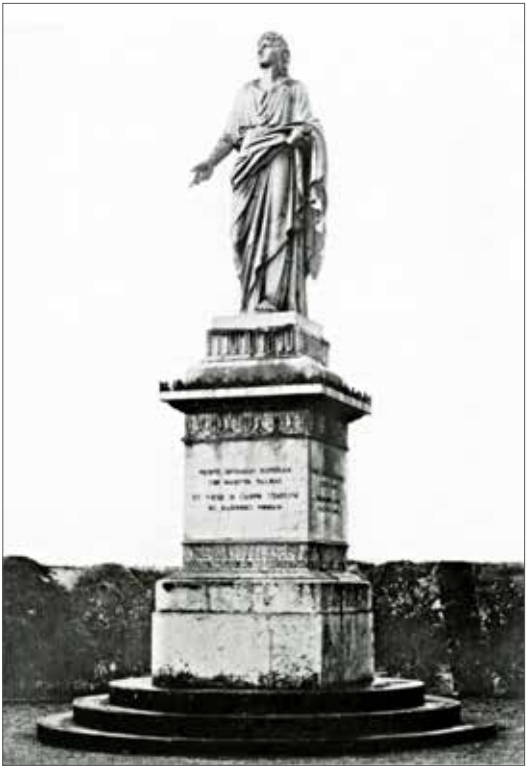


Fig. 14
Stefano Gerola, *Statua di Virgilio*, marble, 1835, Giardino Cavriani.

Palazzo d'Arco

Building work on Palazzo d'Arco, a splendid aristocratic residence, began in 1784 and lasted a few years. The work was overseen by Neoclassical architect Antonio Colonna for a branch of the Trentino Counts of Arco. The façade was inspired by the art of Palladio and is considered the most important work of 18th-century classicism in the Mantuan area.

In the rooms, the furniture and objets d'art were kept as they were when Countess Giovanna d'Arco, Marchesa Guidi di Bagno died in 1973. She had specified in her will that all her possessions, including the palazzo and its collections (herbarium, art gallery, archive, library, musical instruments, furniture, weapons), were to became a public museum.

The picture gallery is particularly interesting, containing paintings by Magnasco, Frans Pourbus the Younger, Van Dyck and Giuseppe Bazzani. Other important features include the Salone dello Zodiaco, painted entirely after 1509 by Giovanni Maria Falconetto, and the 19th-century kitchen, with its series of copper moulds, the archive and the library, with ancient volumes, including prints and publications dedicated to Virgil.

The 'Andreas Hofer' room features wallpaper from 1823 depicting a dance scene around a herm of the great Mantuan poet, with the Gulf of Naples in the background (fig. 15).

The architectural complex houses the Teatrino d'Arco, home since 1946 to the Accademia Teatrale Francesco Campogalliani founded by Ettore Campogalliani. (PC)

Fig. 15
Scena di danza intorno all'erma di Virgilio e sullo sfondo il Golfo di Napoli,
wallpaper, 1823, Palazzo d'Arco.

Palazzo Municipale

The sixteenth-century building was long owned by Scipione Gonzaga, Prince of Bozzolo. From 1797, the city offices were located in the palazzo.

The Municipality only bought it in 1819, when it undertook a series of restoration works to make it a more befitting location. In 1829, the architect Giovanni Battista Vergani redesigned the Neoclassical façade. Works were completed in 1832 with the construction of an ashlar ground floor, supporting the giant order of Ionic pilasters.

The only ornaments on the façade are the five stucco coats of arms summarising key phases in the history of the city. They represent (from left to right): The ancient coat of arms of the city with its three crescent moons; the Crusader coat of arms of the communal era; the communal coat of arms featuring the bust of Virgil wearing a laurel wreath, surmounted by the crown of the marquis obtained by the Gonzagas in 1433 (fig. 5); the communal coat of arms with the bust of Virgil wearing a laurel wreath and the coat of arms with the cross pattée and four eagles of the Gonzaga family (fig. 17).

In 1834, Vergani was also entrusted with decorating the hall of the Consiglio Comunale with seven busts of 'Mantua's most illustrious men' (Federico II Gonzaga, Lelio Capilupi, Saverio Bettinelli, Antonio Gobio, Gian Battista Bertani, Ippolito Donesmondi and Federico Zambelli).

Giovanni Bellavite's bronze bust of Virgil was placed in the hall in 1821, having been relocated from the monument erected in 1801 by the French in Piazza Virgiliana (fig. 16).

The poet is depicted very young with a classically beautiful face, framed by long, thick curly hair, tied back, only just, by a ribbon. The bust was commissioned by the French general Miollis, a great admirer of the poet's work, to replace the plaster cast of an ancient bust believed to depict Virgil, known as 'Busto Carli' (fig. 20), atop the high column erected that same year in Mantua's Piazza dell'Argine (later Piazza Virgiliana).

Miollis personally donated the cannon from which the bronze for Bellavite's bust would be salvaged.
The other seven busts, in bronze-painted terracotta, were entrusted to Stefano Gerola who would only complete the series in 1837.

The Bellavite bronze is currently located in the staircase of honour in the Municipio (Town Hall), where it stands in conversation with a marble bust of Dante. The other seven terracotta busts are displayed in the corridor leading to the council room together with a later cast of the pseudo Virgilio Capitolino. (PC)

Fig. 16
Giovanni Bellavite, *Busto di Virgilio,*
bronze, 1801, Palazzo Municipale.

Fig. 17
Stemma Comunale caricato dal busto di Virgilio laureato sormontato dalla corona marchionale,
1832, façade of Palazzo Municipale.

Raccolta Numismatica Monte dei Paschi di Siena

The numismatic collection of the Banca Monte dei Paschi di Siena (formerly Banca Agricola Mantovana), together with that built up by the King of Italy Vittorio Emanuele III and exhibited at Palazzo Massimo in Rome, is the most complete collection of ancient coins and medals linked to Mantua and the Gonzaga family.

The collection was started in 1986 with the acquisition of the collection of the notary Casero of Milan, which included many specimens owned by Giulio Superti Furga of Canneto sull'Oglio (Mantua), the renowned scholar of numismatics. Then, 1993 saw the acquisition of the prestigious collection of Count Alessandro Magnaguti (1887–1966). Over almost half a century, the scholar and wealthy Mantuan nobleman built up an important collection of Gonzaga coins and medals. Regulated by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage because it is deemed to be of 'exceptional artistic and historical interest', the collection is represented in volumes VII, VIII and IX of Ex Nummis Historia.

Fig. 18
Grossetto anonimo con Virgilio, silver, 1328- 1369, Complesso Museale di Palazzo Ducale.

Other specimens acquired on the antiques market complete what is now considered the world's largest collection of 12th-18th-century Mantuan and Gonzaga coins and medals. The splendid state of conservation and the rarity of many specimens, often unique and previously unknown, make it an invaluable and precious piece of cultural heritage. The 2,184 pieces in the collection (2,053 coins and 131 medals) are now deposited and can be visited in some rooms of the Appartamento della Rustica, in Mantua's Palazzo Ducale.

The role that Virgil's image plays in the history of the city's coinage is an important feature of the collection. Around the middle of the 13th century, Mantua adopted a coin based on the Venetian grosso. However, while the Venetian grosso bore the figure of Christ enthroned on one side, the Mantuan coin had a depiction of Virgil (fig. 18).

This is a unique choice in the context of monetary iconography of the period: When a human figure was depicted on coinage during that period, it was always either a representation of Christ or patron saints. However, in Mantua, we are surprised with an image of the poet, proud emblem of the city from whom the citizens draw a sense of identity.

The choice seems justified by the great fame Virgil enjoyed in the Middle Ages: It was a great source of pride for the city to have been his birthplace. The depiction of Virgil would remain prominent in the coinage of Gonzaga until Charles I, 8th Duke of Mantua (1580–1637). (PC)

Fig. 19
Orazio Lamberti, *Virgilio*, fresco, Palazzo Guerrieri Gonzaga.

Palazzo di Giustizia

The palazzo was purchased between 1599 and 1604 by Giovanni Battista Guerrieri. He then entrusted its renovation to the architect Antonio Maria Viani (1550–1635). After passing into the hands of the Colloredo Counts, it was purchased in 1872 by the Municipality of Mantua to house the Uffici Giudiziari del Tribunale (judicial offices of the court). Since then, it has been home to the city's Palazzo di Giustizia (courthouse).

The imposing pre-Baroque façade includes twelve large herms. One of the most striking decorative elements in the rooms is an image of Virgil within a Mannerist decoration that refers to the stars and their study. Located in a room on the first floor used for criminal hearings (not open to the public for security reasons), part of it was unfortunately lost in a fire. The Latin poet, along with other astronomers, mathematicians and poets, is depicted in monochrome within a niche surrounded by festoons of fruit and vegetables.

The figure of Virgil (fig. 19) follows the tradition of Mantegna's design for Isabella d'Este, now in the Louvre. Here, however, the poet holds a musical instrument in his arms, as if he were about to sing a song, perhaps the one from Book I of the Georgics, in which he teaches the peasants to read the movements of the celestial bodies so that they can make helpful predictions for their work in the fields. Based on a design by Viani, the works were painted by Orazio Lamberti (1552-1612), a student of Bernardino Campi. (PC)

Palazzo San Sebastiano Museo MACA

Palazzo San Sebastiano was the prince's only permanent residence to be built outside the vast court complex of the Palazzo Ducale; a unique instance in the Gonzaga tradition of power.

Francesco II Gonzaga had it built and decorated between 1506 and 1512 on the opposite side to the royal palace, close to Mantua's southern walls and next to the Porta Pusterla city gate.

It was an exclusive personal residence—serving both governmental and delegatory purposes—where Francesco II lived and received illustrious guests from 1508 to 1519. As well as numerous rooms frescoed with fantastical and exotic forms, and lavishly painted vaults featuring family symbols and heraldry, the Marquis had a 224-square-metre hall built on the main floor as a fittingly splendid home for Andrea Mantegna's famous and impressive Triumphs of Caesar painting series (now in Hampton Court, London).
Restored and converted into a museum in 2004, the palazzo is now fully renovated and home to MACA, the museum for the city's ancient collections.

Francesco II and Vespasiano Gonzaga, Giuseppe Acerbi and Ugo Sissa are the four key contributors to the MACA collection, building up the city's cultural heritage over centuries.
Francesco II Gonzaga's 'Triumphs', Vespasiano Gonzaga's fine collection of antiquities, and Giuseppe Acerbi's and Ugo Sissa's Egyptian and Mesopotamian collections make up the four itineraries of the museum.
The ground floor of the museum is dedicated to Francesco II Gonzaga, the patron of Palazzo San Sebastiano. The Sala dei Trionfi houses Vespasian Gonzaga's Greco-Roman statue collection and the new Egyptian, Middle-Eastern and Mesopotamian sections, including information on their respective collectors.

The bust is part of a group of three busts representing Francesco II Gonzaga, Virgil (fig. 21) and Baptista Mantuanus. The three busts made up the decoration of the underarch commissioned by the doctor Battista Fiera in 1514, and placed between his home and the Chiesa di San Francesco in Mantua. Next to the busts was the inscription BONIS MERCURIALIBUS ('Dedicated to those protected by Mercury' i.e. the good lyric poets), beneath which Battista Fiera wished to be buried, wearing a toga and with a book in his hand.

The bust of Francesco II, in the middle, was accompanied by the inscription ARGUMENTUM UTRIQUE SI SAECLA COISSENT ('Had the centuries united, the Marquis of Mantua would have been a cause of celebration for Virgil and Baptista Mantuanus'). Virgil has always been a genius loci and protector of the city of Mantua. The Carmelite friar Baptista Mantuanus, also known as 'the Christian Virgil', beatified in 1885 by Pope Leo XIII, was a major figure in the latter decades of the 15th century and the early decades of the 16th century. According to later sources he was also a painter, as well as a famous poet and writer.

In June 1514, Francesco II Gonzaga issued an edict to protect and preserve the monument, which had been defaced. It was unfortunately destroyed in 1852. The three rare and precious terracotta busts remain with us today. They were rehomed first in the Museo Patrio Mantovano and later in the Palazzo Ducale, in the atrium of the Castello di San Giorgio. (GV)

Fig. 20
Lar Vialis detto Virgilio,
Italian marble on a stucco bust, end of the 2nd century, Museo MACA di Palazzo San Sebastiano.

Fig. 21
Anonymous Mantuan sculpto
Ritratto di Virgilio, terracotta, 1514 circa,
Museo MACA di Palazzo San Sebastiano.

Palazzo Te

Formerly located on an island connected to the city of Mantua by the Pusterla bridge, the splendid suburban villa of Te, commissioned by Federico II Gonzaga and specially designed, built and decorated by Giulio Romano between 1524 and 1530, is a true jewel in the crown of high-Renaissance culture in Italy. The unique and brilliant architect Giulio Romano designed it as a place of 'idleness' for the prince, and to host the lavish receptions of his most illustrious guests. The rooms on the ground floor feature exquisite frescoes and stucco decorations as part of a splendid, overarching design inspired by the tastes and desires of Romano's noble client. The most famous and exceptional rooms are the Sala dei Cavalli, the Camera di Amore e Psiche, the Camera degli Stucchi, the Camera degli Giganti and the Loggia di Davide.

One of the most striking decorations is the unusual imagery in the lunette that marks the passage between the Loggia delle Muse (fig. 22) and the Sala dei Cavalli. It depicts a basin with a protome of a lion from which water is flowing. From the basin, a male head wearing a laurel wreath emerges.

Fig. 22
Giulio Romano, *Figura femminile*, Loggia delle Muse, fresco, eastern lunette, Palazzo Te.

Based on an invention by Mantegna, this would appear to be Virgil, that inexhaustible source of poetic creativity and wisdom: a tribute made by the city to its most illustrious fellow citizen (fig. 23).

The same depiction is also present on coins, prints and paintings of the 16th century. The female figure leaning against the basin and holding an astrolabe, compass and set square is considered by some to be the muse Urania, by others the personification of Mantua.

The palazzo is currently home to the Museo Civico, which exhibits some important collections. In addition to the Mondadori collection, with paintings by Federico Zandomeneghi and Armando Spadini, the Gonzaga collection of coins, seals, medals, weights and measures is particularly noteworthy.

This collection includes, among other finds, important examples of Gonzago coins bearing depictions of the bust of Virgil. The oldest Gonzaga coin on which the poet's image appears is the silver Grossetto attributed to Guido Gonzaga, Second Capitano of the city (1360–1369).

The poet's face also features frequently on coins minted by the Marquises Gianfrancesco, Federico I, Ludovico II and Francesco II, the Dukes Federico II and Guglielmo III Gonzaga and Charles I Gonzaga Nevers (1627– 1637). (PC)

Fig. 23
Giulio Romano, *Testa di Virgilio*, detail, fresco, eastern lunette, Loggia delle Muse, Palazzo Te

Centro Culturale “Gino Baratta”

The building that currently houses the Gino Baratta Cultural Centre stands partly on the former site of the Ospizio di Sant’Antonio hospice, commissioned by the Capitano of Mantua Guido Gonzaga towards the end of the 14th century. The Ospizio was closed by the Austrian government in 1786 and repurposed as an equipment store and shelter for troops stationed in the city.

In 1870, the Municipality of Mantua, driven by the need to find a new location for the ancient slaughterhouse located on the Lungo Rio, bought the property and decreed its total demolition.

In 1872, the architect Giovanni Cherubini (1805–1882) from Brescia built the new city slaughterhouse in the Neoclassical style. Once this activity had also moved outside of the city, the building underwent radical restoration work from the 1980s to the late 1990s.

The complex was opened to the public in December 1998, and houses the Biblioteca Gino Baratta (Gino Baratta Library), the Archivio Storico Comunale di Mantova (Historical Archive of Mantua) and the Istituto Mantovano di Storia Contemporanea (Mantuan Institute of Contemporary History).

Biblioteca Gino Baratta. Today, the Gino Baratta Library offers access to a rich array of bibliographic, musical and audiovisual heritage. It also manages the preservation of contemporary specialised document collections such as the Archivio della Poesia Visuale del ‘900 (Archive of 20th-Century Visual Poetry) and the Fototeca.
The library’s collection of materials related to Virgil consists of numerous printed publications published in the 20th century, including works by and on Virgil, and is updated with the most important editions published nationally.

Archivio Storico Comunale. The fundamental core of the documentation preserved in the Historical Archive of Mantua records the history of the government and changes made to the city of Mantua from the end of 18th century to the 1970s. It conserves precious documentary, graphic and photographic evidence relating to all the key places and monuments dedicated to Virgil.

Istituto Storia Contemporanea. The Mantuan Institute of Contemporary History is part of the network of Istituti di Storia della Resistenza e dell’Età Contemporanea (Institutes of the History of the Resistance and the Contemporary Age). Its objective is to promote and disseminate knowledge of the history of the 19th and 20th centuries with a particular focus on Mantua. (PC)

Fig. 24
Comitato per la erezione del monumento a Virgilio, *Monumento a Virgilio*, poster, 1882, Archivio Storico Comunale.

Fig. 25
Modello della statua di Virgilio di Emilio Quadrelli per piazza Virgiliana, photograph, Archivio Storico Comunale di Mantova.

Bosco Virgiliano

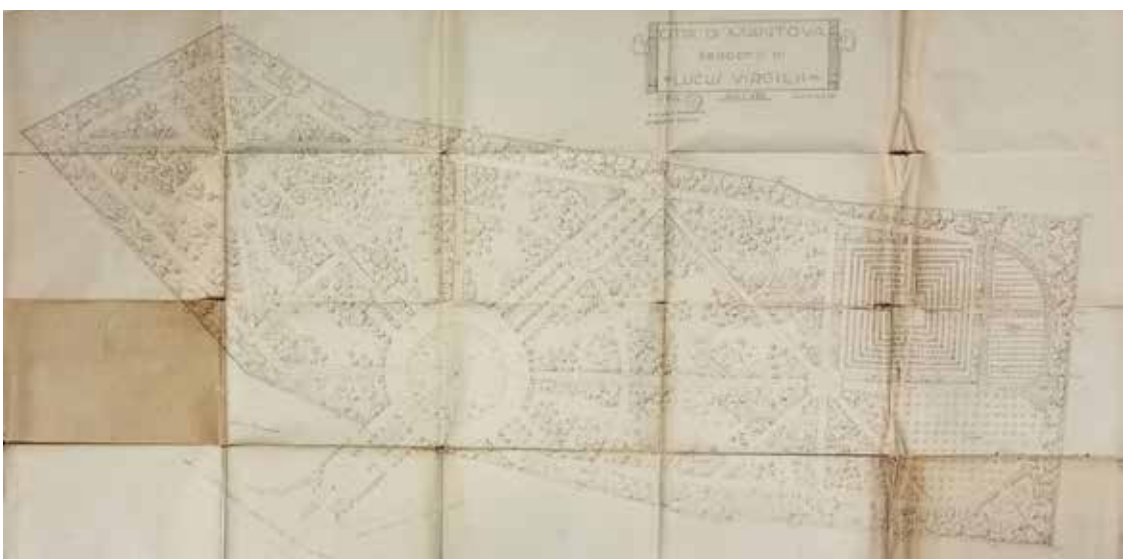
The park was designed and built from 1930 by Giuseppe Roda, a landscape architect, on the south-eastern outskirts of the city. Working for the Mayor of Mantua, Roda had intended to recreate a garden for pleasure and leisure as conceived by the ancient Romans.

The original area covered five hectares of woodland. The long driveway, flanked on each side by a double row of Lombardy poplars, formed part of a large circular piazza designed to host 'historical and patriotic performances' (fig. 26). The square was the starting point for a network of distinct paths.

The focal point was a concrete bust of Virgil placed on a high pedestal in the centre of the piazza. In the original design, this was flanked on one side by a thick forest and on the other by a shrubbery maze (now gone), a small pond, an 'orchard' and a vineyard.

A wide variety of trees and shrubs were planted here, all derived from the texts of Virgil: 500 conifers, 2,900 other kinds of trees, 15,000 shrubs of various species and several thousand fruit plants. Each plant had to be accompanied by a plate with the specific Latin name and the corresponding Virgilian passage. However,

Fig. 26
Giuseppe Roda, *Pianta generale del Bosco Virgiliano*, drawing, 1930, Archivio Storico Comunale.



as early as last century, certain changes were made, due in particular to the maintenance needs of certain plant species that found the Mantuan climate and soil unsuitable. (PC)

Pietole Monumento a Virgilio

Pietole is considered by most to be Virgil's birthplace, as it was built on the site of the ancient village of Andes. The importance of furnishing Pietole with a monument to Virgil, after the failed French project to create a vast Virgilian park, was recognised from 1870 by various scholars and lovers of their homeland.

In 1882, some citizens of Pietole took the initiative to have a column erected in the village to support a bust of the poet.

With the support of the municipal authority, a location for the monument was identified: on the exact intersection between the road leading to San Benedetto Po and the road to Pietole Vecchia, in line with the church. The monument was surrounded by a small garden with the trees that featured in Virgil's verses.

The architecture and the direction of the works was entrusted to Carlo Andreani. He built a base surmounted by a pedestal to support a column shaft bearing a Doric capital (fig. 27). The statue, however, was sculpted by Agamemnon Paganini and cast in iron with a bronze finish. For the inauguration, on November 30, 1884, a large wrought iron crown was added as a further ornament.
The monument was inaugurated in the presence of Giosuè Carducci: A school inspector at the time, he made his own inaugural speech, which greatly moved his audience. (PC)

Fig. 27
Monumento di Virgilio a Pietole come appariva nel 1884, photograph, in *A Virgilio la Patria*, mantua, 1924.

Parco Museo Virgilio Forte di Pietole

The Parco Museo Virgilio at Forte di Pietole is a site of historical and cultural importance and value for nature in Borgo Virgilio. Its exhibits tell two parallel stories: the events associated with Mons Virgilii, the poet's birthplace, featured in the Eclogues, Georgics and Aeneid; and the history of Forte di Pietole, a fort built by Napoleon, who, to accommodate this new structure, flattened the ancient site of Mons Virgilii near Pietole, including the house where tradition suggests Virgil was born.

As they explore the historical structures, visitors experience the museum itinerary through various kinds of exhibit and narrative tool, including video installations, used to great effect to spin a new tale.

The installation makes use of cutting-edge technology to retrace history, with the projection of evocative and immersive animated images onto the walls of each room, accompanied by sound effects and spoken narrative. There are also physical sections containing artefacts from the fort, archaeological finds, a Roman numismatic collection and 3D reproductions

The Parco Museo Virgilio traces a thousand-year history from the settlement of populations in the recent Middle Bronze Age to the Etruscans and Napoleon, intertwined with the ever-present connection between water and city that has always characterised Mantua. The fascinating itineraries are located in a large natural woodland. Indeed, over the years, nature has grown luxuriantly both inside and outside the fort,

surrounding the military artifact caressed by the waters of the Mincio and bordering Vallazza, a Site of Community Importance. The fort and its nature reserve are part of the Parco del Mincio.

Fig. 28
Parco Museo Virgilio, Forte di Pietole inside the Riserva Naturale Vallazza.

Fig. 29
Parco Museo Virgilio, Forte di Pietole, video installation, Eclogues section..

You can reach the Parco Museo Virgilio via footpaths, cycle paths and river boat. The instructions and signs guide you in exploring the flora, fauna and insect life, including one particularly key player in the secret life of the forest: the tireless bees. Searching for the trees and shrubs mentioned and described by Virgil in his works helps us rediscover the poet's place in the current world, to live in harmony with nature and enjoy its fruits while respecting it at the same time.

The Parco Museo Virgilio and surrounding countryside are part of the international network of the Parchi Letterari (Literary Parks), thanks to the presence of the Parco Letterario Virgilio. (GE)

Fig. 30 - Museo Virgiliano.

Pietole
Museo Virgiliano

It was possible to open the Museo Virgiliano because the building housing it was donated to the Comune di Virgilio by the heirs of the great archaeology enthusiast Vincenzo Prati. The museum combines the ancient tradition of its location with the splendour of contemporary art.

Indeed, it holds the Vincenzo Prati (or Loghino Prati) archaeological collection and the 'Ugo Celada' collection of modern art, with 55 paintings by the painter Ugo Celada, born in Virgilio in 1895.

The archaeological collection holds funerary urns discovered from 1873 onwards by Vincenzo Prati in land located in Pietole Vecchia.

The funerary urns date back to the Middle and Recent Bronze Age (second half of the 15th century to the beginning of the 12th century BC), when the territory of Mantua appears to have seen a dense succession of settlements based on agriculture and livestock, thanks also to the presence of the river Mincio. Of the original 150 urns, ten entered the Museum and four were donated by Prati to the Museo Pigorini in Rome. (PC)

Sasso di Virgilio

Originally located near the bank of the Mincio, the so-called 'Sasso di Virgilio' ('Virgil Stone'), was later transferred to Pietole Vecchia, near the small 'Prof. Serafino Schiatti' square, and is currently exhibited in the Parco Museo Virgilio–Forte di Pietole museum. Tradition has it that the great poet sat on this piece of stone looking at the river and imagined the construction of a temple dedicated to Caesar there. According to some studies, the stone marked the point where the old parish church of San Celestino stood, before the town of Pietole Vecchia was demolished by the French between 1809 and 1813, for military reasons linked to the construction of Forte di Pietole. The same stone bearing the inscription 'PIETV' was part of the 'Nuova Virgiliana di Pietole' park dedicated to the poet, built at the end of the 18th century by the French and demolished by the Austro-Russians a few years later. (GE)

Fig. 31 - Sasso di Virgilio.

Corte Virgiliana

Corte Virgiliana, originally Corte di Pietole, is located in Andes, Pietole Vecchia, close to the river Mincio and Mons Virgilii, an area in which Virgil is believed to have once lived.

A fine example of a rural Gonzaga court, it has an imposing, closed appearance, divided into several buildings around two large connected courtyards, protected by towers and perimeter walls. Corte Virgiliana belonged to the Gonzaga family from the beginning of their rule. On the occasion of the 1459 diet, Pope Pius II Piccolomini was welcomed here by Ludovico II before he entered the city. Under Francesco II, the court underwent major renovation

Fig. 32 - Corte Virgiliana.

and expansion works. Duke Guglielmo had the large stables built, while Duke Ferdinando was responsible for enriching the entire complex through 'magnificent works'. According to mid-16th-century sources, it included a 'Sala de Virgilio' (Virgil Room) decorated with a series of paintings dedicated to the poet. What remains of the original complex are the large courtyards, the marvellous stables and a 'conspicuous and solemn' building attributed to the architect Antonio Maria Viani dating back to the first half of the 17th century. (PC)

Riserva Naturale Vallazza

Vallazza is a vast wetland covering 521 hectares. Established in 1991 as a protected regional nature reserve, it includes lands traditionally believed to have been inhabited by Virgil. Located between the municipalities of Mantua and Virgilio, the area is the perfect continuation of Lago Inferiore along the river Mincio. It is home to a wide range of floating vegetation of high natural value, as well as marshland, spontaneous willow stands and shrubs.

The nature reserve, which is part of the Parco Regionale del Mincio, contains over 270 plant species, 62 of which are classified as rare. The rich vegetation creates an intact natural habitat for many animal species: Herons, kingfishers, little egrets, cormorants and various species of reptiles and fish.

Visitors can explore Vallazza and the nearby Carpaneta Forest on guided tours, to get closer to and learn about the environment and the natural landscape that inspired some of Virgil's most famous poetic works, such as the Eclogues and the Georgics. These famous works do indeed feature enraptured evocations of the idealised, poetic and Arcadian nature of his youth on the banks of the Mincio. (PC)

Tìtyre, tu patulae recubans sub tegmine fàgi
silvestrem tenui musam meditaris avena;
nos patriae fines et dulcia linquimus arva;
nos patriam fugimus; tu, Tìtyre, lentus in umbra
formosam resonare doces Amaryllida silvas...
(Virgil, Eclogues, Book I 1–5)

Tityrus, lying there, under the spreading beech-tree cover, you study the woodland Muse, on slender shepherd's pipe. We are leaving the sweet fields and the frontiers of our country: we are fleeing our country: you, Tityrus, idling in the shade, teach the woods to echo 'lovely Amaryllis'.

Fig. 33
Riserva Naturale Vallazza,
Archivio Parco del Mincio.

Foresta Carpaneta

The Carpaneta Forest is made up of a protected reforested area covering 64

leads visitors through a series of environments, accompanied by commentated passages from Virgil's poetry, letting them experience the profound link between the great poet and nature. (PC)

64 hectares in total, of which 43 is woodland, left to nature and 21 is a public park, dedicated to social and recreational activities. The forest is the fruit of a forestry project launched in 2003, itself part of the 'Dieci Grandi Foreste di Pianura' (Ten Great Forests of the Plain) project. This was a strategic move by the Lombardy Region to create new large natural green areas, focusing particularly on the Po Valley. The forest is managed by ERSAF, the Regional Agency for Agriculture and Forestry Services.

It is located in the municipality of San Giorgio Bigarello in the province of Mantua, at the Agroecologica Carpaneta farm, a regional-heritage property since 1 January 2002. As a biogenetic reserve, its goal is to recreate the genetic heritage of the English oak tree, originally part of the oak/hornbeam forests that covered the Po Valley in protohistoric period. The woodland area was created by planting about 100,000 trees and shrubs typical of the area, such as the English oak, common hornbeam, field elm, field maple, narrow-leaved ash and white poplar. Shrubs that were planted include hawthorn, common dogwood and elderberry.

The wooded area is complemented by the Parco di Arlecchino: a site of about 20 hectares for recreational and educational use, consisting of a lawn with single trees or rows of the various local species listed above. The park also contains the Horti Vergiliani, one of the three thematic areas inspired by the life and works of the Latin poet Virgilio, the illustrious poet of rural life, pastures and fields. A circular path eads visitors through a series of environments, accompanied by commentated passages from Virgil's poetry, letting them experience the profound link between the great poet and nature. (PC)

Fig. 34
Parco di Arlecchino e Horti Vergiliani,
Foresta Carpaneta.

Fig. 35
Bernardino Campi, Enea abbandona Troia,
detail, fresco, Camerino di Enea,
Palazzo Giardino, Sabbioneta.

Palazzo Giardino di Sabbioneta Camerino di Enea

The studio of Duke Vespasiano Gonzaga Colonna is one of the most exquisite rooms in Sabbioneta's Palazzo Giardino. Serving as a pleasure ground where Vespasian loved to retreat, seeking relief from the duties of government, the palazzo reflects Gonzaga's admiration for classical antiquity and humanist ideals. These are main sources of inspiration at play In the Camerino di Enea, the Duke's private room and study, so called because on the walls are adorned with episodes from the first six books of the Aeneide, painted in 1585 by Carlo Urbino and his assistants.
The semi-spherical vault of the small room, one of the palazzo's most splendid, is divided into several compartments. In each one, Bernardino Campi painted putti with the attributes of certain gods, exotic animals, hybrid figures and birds. The stucco ovals in the vault depict the four cardinal virtues. The decoration is completed by panels featuring personifications of rivers and bas-relief scenes of Roman life by the Mantuan sculptor Bartolomeo Conti. (PC)

Cycle path
Shuttle bus
Train station
Tourist boats
Parking
Infopoint
Lago Superiore
Lago di Mezzo
Lago Inferiore
PIAZZA S. LEONARDO
PIAZZA VIRGILIANA
PIAZZA SORDELLO
PIAZZA D'ARCO
PIAZZA S. GIOVANNI
PIAZZA BROLETTO
PIAZZA MANTEGNA
PIAZZA MARCONI
PIAZZA ERBE
PIAZZA CANOSSA
PIAZZA CAVALLOTTI
PIAZZA DON LEONI
PIAZZALE A. MONDADORI
PIAZZALE GRAMSCI
PIAZZA XXIV MAGGIO
PIAZZALE DI PTA CERESE
PIAZZA MILLE
CORSO V. EMANUELE
C.SO UMBERTO I
C.SO DELLA LIBERTÀ
VIA ROMA
VIA C. POMA
VIALE MONTEGRAPPA
VIALE RISORGIMENTO
VIALE MONTENERO
VIALE TE
PARCO TE
STRADA BOSCO VIRGILIANO
PADOVA FERRARA
A22 Mantova Nord
A22 Mantova Sud
MODENA REGGIO EMILIA
BRESCIA VERONA MILANO PARMA
Mantova
Bosco Virgiliano
Virgilio
Pietole
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25

In Mantua

1 Museo Virgilio Palazzo del Podestà
Piazza Broletto

2 Communal coat of arms featuring Virgil
Via Calvi, corner with Via Orefici

3 Communal coat of arms featuring Virgil
Piazza Marconi

4 Communal coat of arms featuring Virgil
Vicolo San Longino, corner with Via Verdi

5 Palazzo Ducale
Piazza Sordello, 40

6 Archivio di Stato
Via Ardigò, 11

7 Biblioteca Comunale Teresiana
Via Ardigò, 13

8 Accademia Nazionale Virgiliana
Via Accademia, 47

9 Teatro Scientifico Bibiena
Via Accademia, 49

10 Piazza Virgiliana

11 Giardino Cavriani
Via Trento, 21

12 Palazzo d'Arco
Piazza d'Arco, 4

13 Palazzo Municipale
Via Roma, 39

14 Raccolta Numislatica
Monte dei Paschi di Siena
Palazzo Ducale

15 Palazzo di Giustizia
Via Poma, 11

16 Museo MACA Palazzo San Sebastiano
Largo XXIV Maggio, 12

17 Palazzo Te
Viale Te, 13

18 Centro Culturale Gino Baratta
Corso Garibaldi, 88

19 Bosco Virgiliano
Strada Bosco Virgiliano

A Pietole di Borgo Virgilio...

20 Parco Museo Virgilio
Forte di Pietole

21 Monumento a Virgilio
S. P. ex S. S., 413 Romana

22 Museo Virgiliano
Via Parma, 34

23 Sasso di Virgilio
Piazzetta Serafino Schiatti

24 Corte Virgiliana
Via Virgiliana, 13

25 Riserva Naturale Vallazza

Surrounding area...

Foresta Carpaneta
Via Castelbelforte Bigarello di San Giorgio Bigarello

Palazzo Giardino
Piazza d'Armi, 1 Sabbioneta

Key
River itinerary
Cycling or walking itinerary
River dock
Train station
Shuttle bus
Parking
Infopoint
Places of interest
EUROVELO 8
Piazza Virgiliana
Museo Virgilio
Palazzo del Podestà
MANTOVA
SABBIONETA
VIA CAROLINGIA
FORESTA
CARPANETA
Parco Museo Virgilio
Forte di Pietole
ANDES
PIETOLE VECCHIA
EUROVELO 7
VIA CAROLINGIA
VIA MATILDICA

Cycling or walking itinerary

Piazza Virgiliana, Mantua – Forte di Pietole, Borgo Virgilio: 8 km

Departing from the Virgil monument in Piazza Virgiliana, head towards the opening in the walls and on to the shores of Lago di Mezzo via the pedestrian walkway, then turn right along the Mincio. The route passes under the San Giorgio bridge and continues along Lago Inferiore to Porto Catena. Turn right over the bridge, then left on the opposite bank of the Rio. Stay on the bank until you reach Via Argine Maestro. Go straight on then turn right onto Viale Ariosto. Cross the Baden Powell garden as far as the railway underpass leading to Bosco Virgiliano.

From here, there are two options: The first, almost entirely on cycle paths, follows the Bosco to the end, crossing the SS62 state highway on the right and then, a little further on, Via Visi on the left. The route then continues along a cycle path until the next SS62 underpass. Go straight ahead until you reach Borgo Virgilio, then turn left onto Strada del Corriere (about 200 metres along a road accessible to vehicles) until you reach the bridge over the Paiolo canal, where you turn left onto a gravel road leading to the entrance of Forte di Pietole.

The second option follows Strada Bosco Virgiliano to the entrance; turn left and continue along Viale Learco Guerra (a road with no cycle path) until you reach the dirt track on the right bank of the Mincio that leads directly to Forte di Pietole.
After visiting Forte di Pietole, you can continue along the bank of the Mincio, through the Vallazza Nature Reserve, as far as Andes – Pietole Vecchia, the Po and finally the Adriatic Sea.

River itinerary

Depart from the pier on Lago di Mezzo, opposite the Castello di San Giorgio. The route by motorboat follows the course of the lake until the Virgil statue in Piazza Virgiliana comes into view. Allowing you to admire the skyline, with the Ducal Palace in the foreground, the route follows the water course into the Vallazza Nature Reserve where you disembark, after just over an hour on board. The nearby trail then brings you to the entrance of Forte di Pietole after a few hundred metres.

The Vallazza Reserve is a protected wetland that includes areas where Virgil is traditionally believed to have lived, and which served as the inspiration for some of his most famous works of poetry, such as the Eclogues and the Georgics. These famous works do indeed feature enraptured evocations of the idealised, poetic and Arcadian nature of his youth on the banks of the Mincio.

Part of the Mincio Regional Park, the reserve contains a wide stretch of the lake with abundant floating plant life of high nature value, as well as marshland, natural willow groves and hedges: habitat for numerous animal species including herons, kingfishers, egrets, cormorants and various reptiles and fish..

The 'Sulle tracce di Virgilio' ('In Virgil's footsteps') routes are part of the wider project to promote the Aeneas Route and the network of Virgilian cities, connecting the main landmarks and locations that help us understand Virgil's philosophy, life and work.

TOURIST INFOPOINT INLOMBARDIA
Piazza Mantegna, 6 – 46100 Mantova
0376 432432
turismo.mantova.it | *info@turismo.mantova.it*

INFOPOINT CASA DI RIGOLETTO
Piazza Sordello, 23 – 46100 Mantova
0376 288208
info@infopointmantova.it

comune.mantova.it
mantovasabbioneta-unesco.it
mantovadestinazionesostenibile.it
museimantova.it
museovirgilio.it
maca.museimantova.it

Mantova città d'arte e di cultura

cittadimantova

Comune di Mantova
Settore Cultura, Turismo e Promozione della Città
Tel. 0376 338645/627/334
turismo@comune.mantova.it

COMUNE di MANTOVA

PATRIMONIO MONDIALE LOMBARDIA

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