



FONDAZIONE BANCA DEL MONTE DI LOMBARDIA

Pavia e la sua provincia



13-la Via Francigena

In 990 the archbishop Sigerico, returning to Canterbury from Rome, where he had been invested of his high office, described his voyage in a manuscript, today preserved in the British Library of London.

In 1994, the European Council has included that journey of long ago, into the cultural itineraries of the old continent. In great approximation it can be identified with the street that, around the year 1000, began being called Francigena: coming from the land of the Franks. It was used mostly by the pilgrims who, numerous, would go to Rome for devotion or penitence. It was not, therefore, the only way, but one of a vast net of pathways that, in correspondence to mountain passes or fords of the river, were made obligatory.

Along the via Francigena, monasteries and rest areas slowly arose, and parallel to those, trafficking and trade developed. Cities such as Siena became very rich, founding banks and opening trade points that were beautiful, calling and forming the best artists of the era.

Of the official stops of Sigerico, also appear Santa Cristina, Pavia and Tromello, respectively the 40th, 41st and 42nd stops of his journey. But various other centres of the province of Pavia are part of the via Francigena, of which Palestro, Mortara and Chignolo Po.

Our itinerary starts near the north eastern border: at Palestro. Rising on the left shore of the river Sesia, it was an important medieval centre: at that time in fact, date back the crenulated crooning tower, the last remains of the antique fortified belt, and the typical street system, with the structures leaning on it. Even the parochial of Saint Martin, enlarged in the 14th century on the lateral naves, is of Romanesque origin.

Just outside of the built up area, an ossuary is in memory of the fallen in the famous battle of Palestro in May 1859, that witnessed the collision between the Frank-Piedmonts and the Austrians.

Proceeding toward east brings to Mortara. The quadrilateral plan of the city, cut orthogonally from the cardoon to the decumanus, proves the Roman formation. Noteworthy are the Gothic parochial of Saint Lawrence, ornated inside by different prestigious artworks, and the church of the Saint Cross, dating back to the 11th century and completely remade in the 16th century on a project by Pellegrino Tibaldi.

It was certainly a resting place for the pilgrims, the enchanting abbey of Sant Albino just outside of Mortara. Immersed in the green of the countryside, it rises there where two churches were since the 5th century. Legend says that in the surrounding area the battle between Carlomagno and Desiderio was fought, and that the remains of two of the most valuable Frank paladins, Amico and Amelio, were buried underneath the alter of one of the churches.

This would explain the medallions placed below, on the portal of the existing church of the basilica, and representing the two heroes of the cycle of Orlando.

Returning onto the State Street of the Cairoli and passing Tromello, the Tremel of Sigerico, brings to Pavia. From here the itinerary proceeds on the state street 235 for Cremona along which Santa Cristina is encountered. The borough is developed around an abbey that had an important economic and political role and of which documented news are available from the year 768. Finally, it ceased to exist in 1776 when it passed to the Austrian-Hungarian college of cadets. Today three bodies of the structure remain, remodelled in the 1700s on a project by Pollack. On the margins of the built up area of the Bissone of Santa Cristina fraction, is erected a massive castle of the 300s, which today is private.

Proceeding still east, Chignolo Po is reached. It is wedged between the Po and Lambro, exactly how the etymology of its name reports, deriving from the Latin Cuneulus. Antique instalment, it was a fortified, Roman center and in the 9th century, territory of the Abbey of Saint Cristina. Surrounded by a scenographic Italian garden, is the beautiful Cusani Visconti castle. It was founded in 1200 and then rebuilt in neo medieval forms in 1700. It preserves a few furnished rooms with furniture of the era and hosts the Museum of Wine and of History of the Lombardian Agricultural Civilization.

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