

## “TREVIGLIO”

### BASILICA OF ST. MARTIN AND OUR LADY OF THE ASSUMPTION

Taken from “**Treviglio: storia, arte e cultura**” by Barbara Oggioni - *ed. Clessidra 2002*

According to a tradition handed down by history-writers, but not supported by documents, the origins of the church date back to the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century when there was a small church dedicated to our Lady of the Assumption outside the fortified *castrum vetus*. The building had a north-south axis and stood more or less on the site of the present-day presbitery. According to the historian Emanuele Lodi, the first enlargement, almost a re-building project was completed in 1008, a Latin-cross form on an east-west axis almost the same length as now. Further extensions were carried out, probably in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when the roof was raised on a cross-vaulted system in Lombard Gothic style and a small bell-tower was built in the position of today's apse. This is clearly seen from the outside along the side of the church and from inside by carefully observing the imposts of the arches in the central aisle and in the spans, hidden today by the work carried out by the Galliari brothers during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The side aisles, the Sacristy and the space known as the Gothic Chapel on the western side in a symmetrical line with the steeple, called Torre Civica or Campanile Maggiore, were added during the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

The Basilica takes its present form both in layout and structure from the innovations carried out by the Galliari brothers in the last decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century when they opened up the deambulatory, enlarged the side chapels, transformed the Gothic arches, re-plastered and gilded the columns, and painted the scenes which today characterize the vaulted ceilings of the central and side aisles.

The visitor's itinerary starts with the facade, its ornate late-Baroque style being the work of Giovanni Ruggeri (1740). The classic form of Eastern doorway in white stone and wood dates from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Over the doorway there are typical elements of 18<sup>th</sup> century decoration, also evident inside in the rich illusionist decorations: shells, vases, floral scalloping and glorifying angels. The moulding surrounds a statue of St. Martin by Antonio Maria Pirovano who also sculpted the other statues on the facade. These are arranged in a hierarchical fashion starting from the lowest level with prelates, St John Neponucemo and

St. Francis Xavier; on the second level there are two bishops of Milan, St. Ambrose and St. Charles; and at the top there are two popes, St. Felix whose relics are held in the church and St. George.

Moving inside the church, at the end of the southern aisle, next to the entrance from Via San Martino, is the so-called Gothic Chapel, with its projecting rivaulting and decorations testifying to its 15<sup>th</sup> century origins. The walls and the ceiling show strong traces of the original painted decorations done by Nicola Moietta from Caravaggio. Pseudo-renaissance architectural forms around the scenes from the life of Mary, through the use of perspective and some specific types of decoration, make the style of the Chapel very similar to that of another very important work – the polyptych of St. Martin by Bernardino Butinone and Bernardo Zenale. It is found in the southern aisle next to the presbytery and represents a particularly fortunate period in Treviglio's artistic history, as well as being a precious piece of art history itself, marking the movement from the long use of International Gothic to that of Renaissance language in Northern Italy. This work, dated 1485, shows two panels depicting saints who are specially venerated in Treviglio: at the top is the Madonna and child, flanked by St. Lucy, St. Catherine, and Mary Magdalene on the left and St. John the Baptist, St. Stephen and St. John the Evangelist on the right. In the lower panel, St. Martin and the Pool Man stand in the center, St. Zeno, St. Maurice and St. Peter are shown on the left while St. Sebastian, St. Anthony of Padua and St. Paul are on the right.

On the dais there are scenes from the life of Christ alternating with those of St. Jerome, Pope Gregory, St. Ambrose and St. Augustine. Distinguished art scholars have lauded the unity of the perspective used as well as the wealth of decoration and detail. The view of Treviglio in the background of the panel showing St. Zeno, St. Maurice and St. Peter, can be recognized by the presence of top of the bell-tower. It is interesting to note that according to tradition there were churches dedicated to St. Zeno and St. Maurice in the first villages or villae from which the city grew, which would imply that Butinone and Zenale, internationally famous artists, wanted to pay homage to Treviglio and its history in this work which they left to their birth-place.

The area around the altar is hung with three canvases: the two on the sides are the work of Gian Paolo Cavagna who was commissioned to paint the walls and the whole of the



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vault of the Basilica in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. These wall decorations and were later covered by the Galliari brothers' paintings except for the story of the Bible in the central bay, left visible and surrounded by moulding.

Cavagna's canvases in the altar show the Last Supper on the left and the Manna from Heaven on the right, and were delivered to the vestrymen in the Basilica in 1601.

the canvas hanging at the back of the altar is an 18<sup>th</sup> century work by Federico Ferrario, who worked with the Galliari brothers, and depicts Our Lady of the Assumption in Heaven and St. Martin the Bishop. The next stop is the first chapel to the right of the altar in the southern aisle, dedicated to Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, with its Baptismal Font, completed in 1529 but with gold-leaf carvings added by the Terni brothers in 1625.

the last chapel along this aisle, next to the entrance from Piazza L. Manara, and dedicated to the Martyred Saints, is of devotional interest in that it houses relics brought from Rome in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. They are kept in a reliquary constructed by Attilio Mozzi. The chapel was originally hung with five canvases painted by Camillo Procaccini, two of which are still hung on the side walls. The most important of these is Our Lady of the Assumption in Heaven which can now be seen in the deambulatory.

Along the central aisle are ten canvases depicting stories from the life of St. Martin painted between 1677 and 1682 by Giovanni Stefano Doneda, known as Montalto. Who also painted the series dedicated to the life of the Madonna in the Sanctuary, a curious fact concerns the payment for his work.

There are numerous paintings displayed in the deambulatory, amongst which the most important is the Assumption by Procaccini and various works by Cavagna and Montalto. Opposite Procaccini's painting there is a small 15<sup>th</sup> century statue of St. Martin, called Martinello by the locals, to distinguish it from the large statue of him which was originally installed in the front of the church and is now in the Civic Cultural Center.

The wooden Choir is the work of Bartolomeo Piazzini, known as Lanaro, constructed in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, with inlay work done by Edoardo Cassani and his studio at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Other side chapels along the southern aisle worth mentioning included that dedicated to St. Catherine, near the main door with paintings by Cavagna; the Chapel of the Rosary at the



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middle point of the aisle, work of the Galliari brothers and hung with a series of works by Federico Ferrario depicting the Mysteries of the Rosary; and th Chapel of the Sacred Heart, the work of Spirito Maria Chiappetta with decorations by the painter Eugenio Cisterna done between 1905 and 1907.

Painting hung from the columns show images of saints by different 17<sup>th</sup> century Lombard artist, including some by Cavagna's studio.