

2 : Piazza Cavour and its buildings



Here we are in Piazza Cavour, where the citizens of the town gather and where the most important public buildings can be found. Since Mediaeval times it has taken on a primary role in the life of the city and its appearance has changed profoundly over the centuries. On the side nearest the Corso it was shut off by the church of San Silvestro, demolished in 1583, while on the opposite side it was open to the original Cathedral of Santa Colomba, demolished in 1815.

Standing with your back to the Corso, you will see three buildings on your right: Palazzo Garampi, on the corner of Corso d'Augusto, Palazzo dell'Arengo and Palazzo del Podestà, the mayoral residence.

The oldest is the one in the middle, Palazzo dell'Arengo, built in 1204. Justice was meted out beneath its spacious arcades while the municipal assembly met in the great hall on the first floor, with its multi-mullioned windows.

On the left of this building you will see that of the Podestà residence, built in the 14th century with a ground floor that would have opened on to an arcade. The entrance on the shorter side featured an arch with the symbols of the new lords, the Malatesta. Towards the end of the 1500s, work began on the last of the three buildings, known as Palazzo Garampi, the present municipal residence. The 17th century bronze statue of the Madonna sheltering in a niche on the right hand corner of the building is particularly praiseworthy.

The Church of San Silvestro, between the square and Corso d'Augusto, was knocked down to give unity to the headquarters of civic authority, while the other end of the square was closed off by the public bakery.

This last was substituted by the "Victor Emanuel II" theatre, now dedicated to "Amintore Galli", which was built between 1843 and 1856, and designed by Luigi Poletti, a famous architect who interpreted the achievement of power and the ambitions of the ruling classes in sumptuous and monumental, neoclassical forms. It was inaugurated in 1857 by the performance of Giuseppe Verdi's Aroldo. The theatre was badly damaged during the Second World War.

The fulcrum of the square is the Pinecone fountain. One inscription states that Leonardo da Vinci, was struck by the sound of water spouting from its fifteen pipes as he passed through the city on the 8th August 1502 in the retinue of Cesare Borgia. In 1543 the fountain was reconstructed in its present form. On the top, though, there was a statue of San Paolo, which is now in the civic museum, and which was substituted in the 19th century by the pinecone that gives its name to the monument.

In 1614 the Statue of Pope Paul V by Nicolas Cordier was erected in the centre of the square: even today most of the residents do not recognise the pontiff in this statue, but San Gaudenzo, the patron saint of the city. This misunderstanding comes from the fact that, in Napoleonic times, the statue was camouflaged by that of San Gaudenzo to escape destruction, and it was restored in its original form only about a century later.

On the opposite side to the Palazzo dell'Arengo you can find the Fish Market, designed by Francesco Buonamici and inaugurated in 1747. It looks like a two-sided loggia with semicircular arches at each end. The inside is bordered by two lines of counters in Istrian limestone, while in the corners there are four lion-like fountains. Today the old fish market with its adjacent square of San Gregorio – called by the residents the 'little clam square' – has become the centre of night life for the young, full of pubs, wine shops and various other meeting places.

Let's now move on to the back of the theatre to admire the imposing construction of the Sismondo Castle, the third stop on our journey.

When you reach the entrance to the Castle, listen to file number three.