



**The Old Cathedral of Brescia**  
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 from 9.00 a.m. to 12.00 a.m.  
 from 15.00 p.m. to 18.00 p.m.



## THE OLD CATHEDRAL OF BRESCIA

This huge cylindrical building of the Romanesque age presents a series of steady sets: it is made of white local stone with some little round-arch windows. Besides, in the upper side a cycle of thin pilasters and some triple embrasure windows characterize the building that presents also an interesting high terracotta frieze decorated with little hanging arches. The present entry, was opened in 1571, is placed on the front side of the building, above the presbytery. At the back we can see a series of structures from the XVth-XVIth centuries: the transept area, the apse, the Chapel of the Holiest Sacrament and of the Holy Crosses, that show the development of the cathedral during the centuries. The installation of big windows instead of the old little hanging arches ones also shows the change of the church with the passing of time. The cathedral could finally acquire its original beauty only at the end of XIXth century: the general director of the renovations was Luigi Arcioni.



CATHÉDRAL  
DI BRESCIA

The excavations of the end of XIXth century have drawn the attention on the Lombard foundation, or the Carolingian one, of this site.

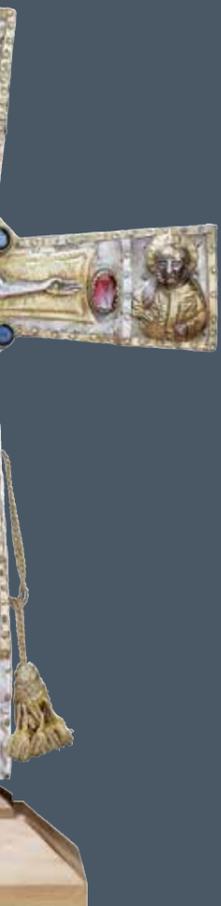
The previous church that has been dug up, had a longitudinal plan and ended in the Crypt of Saint Filastrio and the first presbytery should rise up on this building.

According to recent studies, we can suppose that the achievement of the impressive massive building "Rotonda" has taken place in two different periods. The ambulatory and the lower part of the lantern have been made probably in the Xth century or at the beginning of the next one. The upper part of the lantern should date back to 1095: this area is marked by thin pilasters ending in the terracotta frieze with little hanging arches of the attic.

At the end of the XIII century, thanks to the bishop Berardo Maggi (1275-1308), the presbytery of the Cathedral of Saint Mary was enlarged and his walls were decorated. But the most important works concerned the same area at the end of the XV century, when the architect Bernardino da Martinengo (XVth-XVIth cent.) was engaged and decided to expand the major Chapel (1490), therefore the Chapel of the Holy Crosses (1495). The whole cathedral underwent new works by 1571, when Giovan Maria Piantavigna (Brescia XVIth cent.) was entrusted with the task of coordinating the renovations of the inside of the building. During this same period the Chapel of the Holiest Sacrament was opened and new arrangements o have been made to the Chapel of the Holy Crosses, which acquired the present shape at the beginning of the XVIIth century.

Tommaso Sandrini and Francesco Giugno, both from Brescia, were put in charge of the fresco decoration, which partially lives on in the transept and dates back to this period.

During the XVIII and XIX centuries the cathedral underwent some other little works. The great renovations, started by Luigi Arcioni (Brescia 1841-1918) at the end of XIXth cent., dug up many hidden medieval structures, giving back a part of the essential original look to the impressive massive building.



### 1 Left Ambulatory and the Mary's Chapel

Near the stairway to the lower area there is the slab gravestone of Aurelio Duranti, who was archdeacon of this cathedral and died in 1541. Forward there is the Chapel consecrated to the Virgin. The altarpiece, created between XVIth and XVIIth centuries, is made of golden wood and characterized by some classical elements like fluted Corinthian pillars and a double curved tympanum. In the middle of this structure, built during the XVIIIth century in rococo style, there is the precious painting of *Madonna with the Baby (Madonna col Bambino)* by Pietro Marone from Brescia. Alongside the Mary's Chapel we find the burial monument to Domenico De Dominici, who was a bishop from Venice (1464-1478). This memorial represents a remarkable example of the sculpture of XVth century. The grave presents precise and strict lines; it is decorated by candelabra, festoon and "clipei" round spaces where some ancient heroes are portrayed. The whole framing reminds us the triumphal arch: two pillars in Corinthian style support the architrave and the triangular tympanum. They also flank the deep curved space: here we find the coffin upon which there is the sculpture of the bishop lying cross-handed. Moreover, a long Latin inscription reminds and celebrates De Dominici, who had a great humanistic culture and who was interested in politics and diplomacy.

### 2 The Saint Mary's audience

The stairway leads us to the large round Saint Mary's audience. At the back we can see the big arch of the old entry to which people could once access thanks to two doors linked by a corridor. Here today a font from XVth century has been placed. In 1894 excavations have highlighted the foundation of the old early-Christian cathedral Santa Maria Maggiore, whose outline has been marked on the present floor. At the centre of the audience we can appreciate the severe impressive beauty of this Romanesque building which presents also eight big arches opening on the ambulatory and ten thin windows.

### 3 The Crypt of Saint Filastrio

Alongside the stairway to the transept and the presbytery, we find two little stairs leading to the so-called Crypt of Saint Filastrio. It received this name because 9th April 838

the bishop Ramperto placed here the Filastrio's relics. This last one was a bishop of Brescia and lived during the IV century. The present structure does not reflect the former arrangement from the Carolingian age, but keep only its perimeter-walls. Besides, the nave and the two aisles with their cross-vault have been realized later on. Still today, in the central apse, we can see some fragments of fresco pictures from XIth-XIIth centuries about *Cristo in Gloria con i Santi Filastrio e Apollonio (Jesus Christ in Glory with Saints Filastrio and Apollonio)*.

### 4 Left transept and the Chapel of the Holy Crosses

The actual arrangement of the left transept follows on many transformations occurred during 70's of XVIth century thanks to the architect Piantavigna. On the floor we can see some outlines of Romanesque and early Middle Ages decorations. In front of the Chapel of the Holy Crosses, on the wall, there is the cardinal Francesco Morosini's grave (he was bishop in Brescia from 1585 to 1596): it was achieved by Antonio Carra (cent. XVIIth). At the top, the painting, representing *Melchisedech offers bread and wine to patriarch Abram*, hangs upside down. It is the latest Moretto's work in collaboration with Luca Monbello (1554). The chapel contains the Holy Cross relics and it was built by Bernardino da Martinengo in 1495 in the place where the old sacristy of Saint Mary was situated. In 1596 the stuccos of the cupola were created, while the dome was built by Andrea Colomba of Arogno. In 1605 the decoration was completed with a cycle of five paintings. However, only two of them were finished and placed on the sidewalls of the chapel. On the left there is *Cross Appearance to Costantino*, a painting by Grazio Colossali in 1606. On the right there is *The Bavaria Duke Namò gives the Holy Cross relics to the city of Brescia*, by Antonio Gandino in 1606.

The balustrade and the altar, made of fine marbles, are decorated with white puttoes: they are both works by Carlo and Antonio Carra. Behind the altar a big grating guards the ancient box in golden iron where the Holy Cross reliquary, the field Cross or so-called "Orifiamma" and the "Stautoteca" were put back. They all represent some precious goldsmith's art works. In 1477 the town Council of Brescia com-



The interior is evocative, austere and solemn. Its present aspect follows on the renovation works of the end of XIXth cent. which dug up the Romanesque structures, hidden by many stratifications. The actual entrance was opened because of the rise of the square ground floor. Originally the entrance was situated in a lower position and it brought directly into the church. The enlargement of the baroque portal led to the collapse of the high Romanesque tower in 1708. The only reminders of that tower are two little stairways which are situated alongside the present entry. They are dug up by

missioned Bernardino delle Croci the base of the Holy Cross relic. Indeed, a new shrine, created by Giovanni Maria Mondella, a goldsmith from Brescia, was added in 1532. Nowadays relics are locked up, but three keys of this strongbox are still left in care of the bishop, the mayor and the president of the Holy Crosses Company. By an ancient tradition, the Company guards this precious faith and art treasure by 1520, when it was created.

### 5 Presbytery

The wide cross vault, which joins structures from Romanesque Age and Renaissance, was originally a part of the first presbytery. It was decorated as well as the whole Rotonda when Berardo Maggi was bishop. Its frescoes were found out in 1957 and they were again repaired in 1984-1985. They depict the Evangelists' symbols in four different parts while there is an angel with the tree of life in its lunettes. Once more the Virgin Mary together with some angels is painted on the lunette of the audience. The enlargement of the Saint Mary's presbytery occurred in 1489 following the plan the architect Bernardino da Martinengo (XVth-XVIth cent.). He planned a very high building with a square bay enclosed by a cross vault. Moreover, he planned a polygon apse covered with an "umbrella vault". The keystones represent the *Virgin Mary and Saint Anatalone*, the first bishop of Brescia. They were carved and then painted by Gaspare da Coirano from Mi-

### 6 Right transept and the Chapel of the Holiest Sacrament

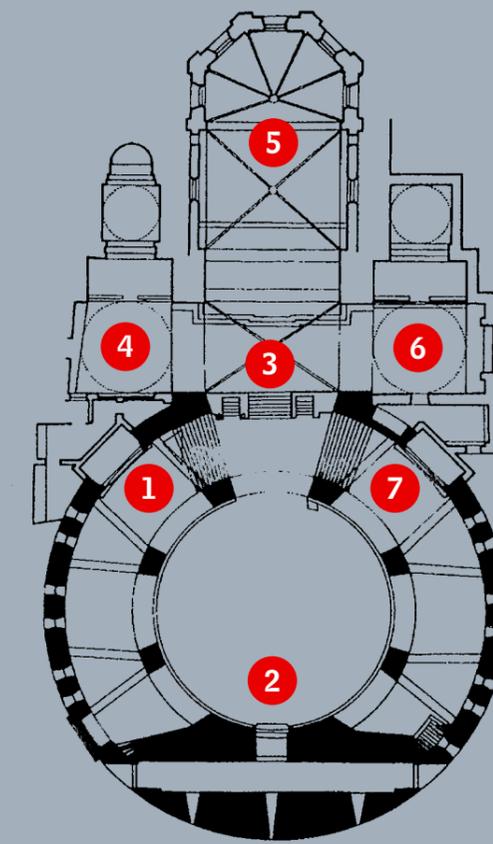
The present aspect of right transept follows on the rearrangement of the Saint Mary's Cathedral at the end of the XVIth century. It seems that frescoes were painted by Tommaso San-

drini and Francesco Giugno at the beginning of the XVIIth century. At the top of the right transept there is a golden wood altar which presumably dates back to the end of the XVIth century. On the right wall, in front of the Chapel of the Holiest Sacrament, a big painting was placed: realized in 1656 by Francesco Maffei, it depicts the solemn procession of the *Transfer of the bishops' Dominatore, Paolo and Anastasio* relics from the Saint Steven in Arce church. This procession occurred in 1581 in Saint Carlo Borromeo's presence. The construction of the present Chapel of the Holiest Sacramento started in 1572. After the demolition of San Pietro de Dom chapel, its paintings were brought here inside. These paintings were commissioned to Romanino and Moretto in the mid-XVIth cent. to decorate walls. The frame, on a square plan with a little dome, is towered by the altar which is made of precious marbles and it is decorated with white stone statues. All this, as well as the balustrades, are brothers' Giovanni and Carlo Carra works (XVIIth cent.). *The Flagellation of Christ*, which is a late XVth century fresco, functions as the altarpiece. The Moretto's paintings decorating the walls are: *The prophet Elijah with an angel* (on the left wall), *The Paschal Lamb* (on the right wall) the *Evangelist Marco* and the *Evangelist Luca* (at the back). Alongside the railing there are two paintings representing the *Evangelist Matthew* and the *Evangelist John*. They are both Francesco Barbieri's works. Moreover, there

"guelfi" and "ghibellini". On the other cover there is the representation of the *Bishop's burial*. Here Berardo is represented in full-scale, lying in pope's clothes, while the other figures of the funeral procession are represented smaller. Next to the bishop there are the four apocalyptic images which are the Evangelists' symbols. In the four corners of this cover there are on the one side Saint Peter and Saint Paul; on the other Saint Filastrio and Saint Gaudenzio (on the left) and Faustino and Giovita (on the right). The two side gables show a simple cross and *Saint George and the Dragon*.

### 7 Right Ambulatory and the Guardian Angel's Chapel

At the entrance of the hallway corridor, inside a niche, the burial monument to the bishop Balduino Lambertini from Bologna was placed, carved by Bonino da Campione. The box is decorated with an high relief representing the *Virgin with the Baby (Vergine col Bambino)* at the centre. He is blessing the bishop Lambertini who is introduced by Saint Laurence to other saints. Among them, we can identify, on the right, Saint Ambrogio who holds a scourge in his right hand. On the sides of the box, in two rectangular spaces Saint Peter and Saint Paul are represented as half-length portraits. On the box there is a truncated pyramid peaking in the statue of the *Christus patiens*. This structure reminds a canopy with open curtains: here it is placed the bishop lying in pope's clothes and cross-handed. Next the monument, there is the Guardian Angel's Chapel which is enclosed in a golden iron and bronze railing. The altar from the XVIIth century presents an elegant classical shape and it is made of white marble of Botticino and pinkish stone. It also contains an octagonal painting of the beginning of the XVIIth century. It is a work by Antonio and Bernardino Gandino and it portrays the Guardian Angel who shows the skyway to a baby.



1. Left Ambulatory and the Mary's Chapel
2. The Saint Mary's audience
3. The Crypt of Saint Filastrio
4. Left transept and the Chapel of the Holy Crosses
5. Presbytery
6. Right transept and the Chapel of the Holiest Sacrament
7. Right Ambulatory and the Guardian Angel's Chapel