

CATHEDRAL

The Cathedral of Tortona is dedicated to the Blessed Mary of The Assumption and to St. Lawrence. The Cardinal Gian Paolo della Chiesa of Tortona laid the foundation stone in 1574, while the Bishop Cesare Gambara consecrated the Church in 1583. The bays toward the façade were finished in 1588-89 and the main building was completed in 1592. In the first half of the 17th century the interventions on the building stopped until the episcopacy of Mons. Carlo Settala, who commissioned the construction of the gallery called “il passetto” in 1661 to connect the Bishop’s palace to the Cathedral. In the second half of the 19th century the **façade** was rebuilt by the engineer Nicolò Bruno. The façade was not only plastered but also crowned by a neoclassical fronton and embellished with sculptures representing God the Father, the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Virgin Mary. The **interior** of the church is divided into a nave and two side aisles by two series of cross-shaped pillars. The nave is barrel-vaulted with intrados, while the side aisles are covered with little cross vaults.



The perimetric altars lean directly against the walls in correspondence to each bay. The sacristy is connected to the left aisle, and the bell tower is connected to the right aisle. The **presbytery** is quite long and narrow and is four steps higher than the level of the hall. The 18th century high altar in polychrome marble comes from the Dominican cloister of St. Thomas in Pavia and keeps the urn with the relics of St. Marcian, patron of the Diocese of Tortona. He is traditionally said to have been the first Bishop of Tortona and to have suffered martyrdom in 122 BC. The altars in marble inlay in the right nave came from the Genoese Church of St. James and Philip. Leaning against the first bay’s wall is the imposing marble staircase that takes to the Episcopal’s palace. The parapet of the stairs was made in the years 1937-40 using the small pillars of the 18th-century balustrade, not longer been used for the presbytery.

SAN GIACOMO

The church of St. Giacomo is an excellent example of late baroque architecture. The present-day church was consecrated in 1784, but its origin dates to the Middle Age. The documents report that a hospice, run by the “Confraternity of Templars”, was established next to the church in 1252 to host the many pilgrims on their way to Santiago de Compostela. During the 18th century the old Church was about to collapse and it was decided to knock it down and rebuilt it in obedience to the will of the Cardinal Carlo Alberto Guidobono Cavalchini of Tortona. This fact is commemorated with a tombstone inside the Church on the right of the high altar’s balustrade. The Cardinal had entrusted the Milanese architect Carlo Riccardi with the reconstruction plan. The constructions started in 1770. The **façade** stretches out into the narrow space of Lorenzo Perosi’s street and is embellished by: a stringcourse, sculpted Corinthian capitals in marble of Varallo, two stone statues representing two angels, and the coat of arms of the Cardinal Guidobono Cavalchini, that is indicated by a galero (wide-brimmed hat) surrounding turquoise and gold rows above which is a crowned black eagle.



The **interior** of the church is elegant with a rich ornamentation on the single nave’s walls. Distinctive elements of the church are the bays overlooking the nave and the lateral chapels. The bays are fenced off by a balustrade in stone of Serravalle with wooden gratings, painted and golden. The two lateral chapels house a balustrade and a polychrome marble altar, which style can be credit to a Lombard workshop and dated mid-18th century. In the left chapel there is a wooden statue of *Our Lady of Sorrows*, who is the patron saint of the Church of San Giacomo. The statue was sculpted by Luigi Montecucco of Novi Ligure in 1842. The altarpiece in the right chapel, representing the *Martyrdom of St. Agatha*, is attributed to Montecucco’s brother Francesco. Francesco’s interpretation of the story is a St. Agatha with an intense and serene look, surrounded by the three executioners who are about to torture her in obedience to her persecutor’s wish, who is sitting on the left of the painting. The high altar of polychrome marble features two little angels in marble of Carrara, who are supporting the Lord’s Table. At the center of the frontal is a low relief with *Jesus Christ in the Garden* by Antonio Riccardi.

SAN CARLO

The church usually called "Oratory of St Charles" is actually dedicated to the Saints Sebastian and Charles and is located in one of the oldest streets of the town, where the existing Carlo Varese street meets and crosses Padre Michele street (coming from Carbonara). The oratory was built accordingly to the wish of the "Confraternity of the Saints Sebastian and Rocco", established near the church of St. Matthew during the first half of 16th century and aggregated in 1581 to the "Confraternity of St. Mary of Gonfalone" in Rome. Due to disagreements with the Canons Regular of the Lateran, who were in charge of St. Matthew, the brothers were granted the authorization to build their own oratory by the bishop Paolo Arese in 1622. The new construction was dedicated to the Saints Sebastian and Charles because Tortona had already an oratory dedicated to St. Rocco. The construction started in 1623 and finished two years later. In 1625 the building was consecrated with a solemn ceremony. In the early 18th century the bell tower was built and the oratory took on an actual form. In



1910 the gabled **façade** was adorned with frescoes by Pietro Mietta of Tortona, on the occasion of the third centenary of the canonization of St. Charles. Today we can admire only the central scene of the fresco depicting *St. Charles communicating with the victims of the Plague*. Particularly valuable is the 18th-century portal: on the central door, inside a medallion, is the depiction of St. Charles in prayer on his knees. The **interior** has a hall with a semi-circular apse and some interesting works. The left altar houses the processional wooden statue of *The Assumption*, made in 1851-52 by Luigi Montecucco of Gavi Ligure. A nice polychrome marble balustrade separates the hall from the presbyterial area. The balustrade was made between 1757 and 1758 by the Lombard family De Giudici, the same people who also sculpted San Rocco's oratory's balustrade. Above the walnut wooden choir, dates around the end of the 18th century, is an altar piece with the depiction of the *Virgin Mary on Throne with Child and the Saints Sebastian and Rocco*, made by the painter Cortonese Scipione Crespi between 1577 and 1579.

SAN ROCCO

The oratory of San Rocco was commissioned during the 17th century by the "Confraternity of the Misericordia", a group founded to assist and console prisoners and criminals condemned to death. The construction started in 1622 and despite financial difficulties in 1626 the brothers began to officiate the new oratory dedicated to the Saints Rocco and Sebastian. The **façade** was finished in 1725 and arranged in two orders: a lower part and an upper part. The lower part displays a three-arch portico surmounted by a large window with a lunette on both sides of it. Inside the niches there are two little putti with their arms raised to hold a sea shell on their head. The upper part is a triangular pediment. The **interior** of the oratory has a typical baroque ornamentation. The oratory has a single nave and a semi-circular apse. Four lateral stucco altars, two on either side of the nave, were made by skilled craftsmen



from Lugano during the mid-18th century. The first altar on the left is dedicated to the *Virgin Mary*, the second one is dedicated to *St. Anthony of Padua*. On the opposite side is the *Altar of the Guardian*



Angel and the *Altar of St. Rocco* (the first on the right). The niche above St Rocco's altar houses an 18th century statue of St Rocco, who was invoked by popular religiosity as a protector against the Black Death. A polychrome marble balustrade separates the nave from the presbytery, which is slightly suspended. The high altar in pietra dura marbles, was commissioned in 1754 to a Lombard family of marble cutters (the Giudici's) and it was completed in 1757. The apse above the choir displays *The Decapitation of St. John the Baptist* (1630) a painting made by the Milanese Melchiorre Gherardini, brother-in-law and disciple of Giovanni Battista Crespi (known as Cerano). Another very interesting painting ascribed to the Genoese Giuseppe Badaracco is on the right wall at the entrance of the oratory: it represents *St. Francis of Paola*, surrounded by some stories of his life.

S. MARIA CANALE

Santa Maria Canale is the only church in town to retain the antique Romanesque style, even if modified by several restorations along the years. The actual **façade** is gabled with angle buttresses and two slim pilasters alongside the high portal. However, the wall's structure draws attention to the original double-sloped profile. The lower part of the **façade** features large sandstone blocks followed by alternating cotto and sandstone blocks. The central portal shows a splay of little pillars and semi-columns ending in capitals with stylized acanthus leaves or palmette motifs. Just above the central lunette is a large cotto window datable to the 14th century. It replaces the original rose window, of which only the round arch is still visible. Beneath the top of the **façade** is a little Greek-cross window with four circular painted ceramic basins in the final part of the arms: this Byzantine pottery is dated around the first half of the 12th century. The **interior** of the church is composed of three



naves. The central nave has a rectangular-plan choir that dates 1564 and two side aisles ending with semi-circular apses. The three naves are divided into: four spans, a non-projecting transept and a presbytery. The roof, originally a roof truss, was replaced in the 14th century by rib cross vaults. The vaults are supported by pillars with a rectangular section connected by two semi-columns leaning longitudinally and held up by stone plinths. The pillars sandstone capitals are not identical and they feature two groups of stylized vegetal elements. One group of capitals is datable to around 1040, the other one dates around 1165. Two lateral chapels open on the side of the aisles. On the left aisle there is the Chapel of St. Louis with a stucco decoration from the 18th century and other three decorations that were remade at the beginning of 20th century. In the left apse there is an interesting panel showing the *Nativity of Jesus*, commissioned by the "Company of the Blessed Sacrament". The panel has been dated back to the first decade of the 1500s and ascribed to a Lombard painter whose style reminds the one of Leonardo Da Vinci.

SANTA GIUSTINA TORRE GAROFOLI

The foundation stone of the Church of Saints Giustina and Agnes in Torre Garofoli was laid in 1590 at the presence of the Bishop Maffeo Gambarà of Tortona and the princess Cristierna di Danimarca, lady of Tortona, while the solemn consecration dates back to 1595. The history of the little Church beyond the Scrivia river is intertwined with that of the Garofoli family since the beginning. Erected in obedience to the will of the noblewoman Giustina Garofoli of Tortona, the Bishop had granted her family the right of perpetual patronage of the Church as a sign of respect and gratitude. The lower part of the **façade** is decorated with grooved pilasters and capitals rich in floral and vegetal motifs. In the upper part of the **façade** there is the Garofoli family crest on the left, and the Garofoli Visconti family crest on the right. The top of the **façade** is crowned by a neoclassical pediment. The **interior** has a single nave with a raised semicircular presbytery. The deambulatory in the



apse's area is bordered by small columns. The actual look of the church reflects the reconstructions during the year 1880, when the baron Vittorio Guibonono Cavalchini Garofoli commis-



sioned the enlargement and the decoration of the building, as it is proved by the tombstone on the counter **façade**. In that period the paintings by Camillo Procaccini (Parma, 1561 - Milano, 1629) were moved from the Church of St. Francis in Tortona to the church in Torre Garofoli. The twenty-four current paintings that represent the decorative elements of the Church of Santa Giustina and Agnes are believed to be part of two separate pictorial cycles originally designed by Procaccini for the Church of St. Francis. From the *Chapel of The Immaculate Conception* come the pictorial cycles of the *Life of the Virgin* and *The Life of Christ* together with those of the *Four Doctors of the Church* and the *Prophets*. From the *Chapel of St. Agnes* come the pictorial cycles of St Agnes martyrdom.