



*the Baptist* (1630) a painting made by the Milanese Melchiorre Gerardini, brother-in-law and disciple of Giovanni Battista Crespi (known as Cerano). The influence of Cerano in the way the Geradini depicted the face of the saint is quite evident, but there is a new theatricality in the figure of the bare-chested headsman, depicted from behind, while decapitating

The Baptist with an axe. The painting is inserted in a rich stucco frame, made by the same skilled craftsmen who had realized the first two lateral altars. 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. The painting comes from the destroyed shrine of St. Mary of the Graces of San Bernardino's Church and was commissioned in 1631 by the Christian community of Tortona as an ex-voto to give thanks for the ending of the Black Death's epidemic. The oratory vaults were decorated in 1936 with fresco medallions of saints by Domenico Fossati and Pietro Mietta. On the counter façade there is a pipe organ built by Antonio Giudici of Bergamo in 1851, who at the time was working for the well-known company of the Serassi Organ.

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DIOCESI DI  
TORTONA

# PROJECT OPEN CHURCHES

# SAN ROCCO TORTONA





The oratory of San Rocco overlooks the homonymous piazza at the end of Fracchia street. It was commissioned by the Confraternity of the Misericordia, mentioned for the first time in a document dated 1534. This group was founded to assist and console prisoners and criminals condemned to death, give them help and support especially during the three days preceding the execution, accompany them to the gallows, and provide for them religious services and Christian burial. The brothers of the Confraternity originally lived at the abbey church of Santo Stefano, that no longer exists but it was located on the eastern side of the existing Malaspina square. In 1586 the Confraternity moved to the parish of St. Michael but as life in common with the priests became difficult the brothers felt the urge of building their own oratory. 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 a 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, features Solomonic columns with sculpted vines carved into their spiraling *cavetto* and pilasters decorated with angel-stelamons made by skilled craftsmen from Lugano during the mid-18<sup>th</sup> 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 18<sup>th</sup> century statue of St Rocco, who was invoked by popular religiosity as a protector against the Black Death. Decorated in sumptuous golden clothes he is represented according to his traditional iconography: carrying a pilgrim's stick and a sea shell and displaying the plague's bubo in his thigh, he is accompanied by a dog bringing him a piece of bread. 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. In the center of the Lord's Table is a sculpture in white marble of the chopped off head of St. John the Baptist. On the upper side the altar is crowned with a beautiful small temple with columns for the Eucharistic exposition. The apse above the choir displays *The Decapitation of St. John*

