



## The historical background



Owing to its favourable position, Lomellina (the Lombard district west of Pavia, deriving its name from the ancient main town, "Laumellum") attracted hosts of successive invasions. The first inhabitants were the Levi, a tribe of Ligurian stock who settled in Lomellina about 800 B.C. The next who came were the Celts, in turn coming from what is today's France. The Romans followed and built *castra*, roads and bridges, so that the soldiers could go to any part of the Empire. In that period Lomello assumed strategic and economic importance, since it was a *mansio* on the arterial road connecting Pavia to Turin along the route to Gaul. In 1984, the archaeological excavations made by the Universities of Pavia and of London brought to light tombs and epigraphs of the Imperial period

as well as the ruins of a fortification and an entrance door. During the Longobard domination (569 –774 A.D.) Lomello began to know considerable prosperity. This was the place where Queen Theodolinda (King Autari's widow) met Agilulf, Duke of Turin, in 590. They soon got married and Agilulf came to the throne. Their meeting and engagement is told by Paolo Diacono in his famous *Historia Langobardorum*. Teodolinda had a leading role in the conversion of the Longobards from arianism to catholicism, while Agilulf was strong enough to put down rebel dukes. Lomello is also known as the place of Gundeberga's imprisonment. In his chronicle, Friddegar tells about the vicissitudes of Queen Gundeberga (Theodolinda's daughter), who was charged with betrayal by her husband Arioald. According to the chronicler, in 629 the luckless queen was imprisoned in a tower; she was released after three years thanks to the first «God's Judgement» which was celebrated in Italy. In the Carolingian period Lomello became the place of a *comitatus*. In 1024 the fortress of Lomello was chosen as the residence of the *Palatine Counts*, who had taken an oath of allegiance to the German emperors. They had the right to hold courts of justice and they exerted their power over a vast area. In the following years the *basilica* of *Santa Maria Maggiore* was built as a mark of wealth and prosperity. Situated not far from the "Via Francigena", Lomello became a point of reference for pilgrims in medieval times thanks to the presence of two hostels. At the end of the Middle Ages the history of the village was mainly connected with two noble families, the Visconti and the Sforza. The former built a new castle and new boundary walls, the latter assigned Lomello to the Crivellis, who held it for three centuries. In 1707 Lomello was annexed to Savoy. In that period Mortara became the most important town in Lomellina, while Lomello lost its supremacy. In 1861 it was included in the Province of Pavia. Nowadays Lomello is a small, rural village keeping the memories of its glorious past. Here visitors can come across some artistic treasures of outstanding beauty which are part of the present-day heritage.



**Main sights:** the Pre-Romanesque *basilica* of *Santa Maria Maggiore* (11th century); the baptistery of *San Giovanni ad Fontes* (5th-7th centuries); the Romanesque church of *San Michele* (12th century); Crivelli Castle (15th century); *San Rocco* (16th-17th centuries).

### The *Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore* and the *Baptistery of San Giovanni ad Fontes*

Near the excavations of the Roman settlement (the ancient *Laumellum*) there is the religious complex of *Santa Maria Maggiore* and the baptistery of *San Giovanni ad Fontes*. *San Giovanni ad Fontes* is one of the most ancient baptisteries in Lombardy. The lower part dates back to the 5th century, the central one to the 7th, while the small dome on the top belongs to the 11th century. The plan of the building is a Latin cross, with four little semi-circular apses alternated by some rectangular ones in the arms of the cross. The hexagonal baptismal font keeps some hints of the original decoration, a red cross with the inscription "piscina" and the words "in regnum Dei". One of the apses keeps the remains of the original floor. Around the baptistery there are traces of Roman and medieval graves. Next to the baptistery stands the *basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore*, which was built from 1025 on a sandy outcrop. The basilica is an excellent example of Pre-Romanesque style. The building was once longer than now, with three extra arches linking it to the early medieval walls, remains of which can be seen in lower part of the façade and around the church. The original hut façade was damaged in 1140 during a military assault to the fortress of Lomello. As an old legend goes, it was the Devil who destroyed the church, but he was compelled to rebuild it by an Angel. The



Devil worked all night long but at sunrise he had to flight away: this is why the present building is incomplete and so irregular in shape (the central nave is not rectilinear; the left side aisle is shorter than the right one; the arches are different in width). The asymmetry of the church has a strong emotional impact on visitors. The main apse is symbolically turned to the East, the place where the sun (the Light of Christ) rises. Under the apse there is a crypt with semi-columns and capitals reminding us of a previous, Longobard church.





## ***The parish church of San Michele***

In spite of its Baroque façade, the church is a treasure of medieval architecture, though altered all over the centuries. In 1950, radical restoration work brought to light a tile indicating the year of the foundation of the building, 1121, and the dedication to St. Michael, the warrior archangel. Both in the right aisle and in the apse there are remains of frescoes of the late Middle Ages. Outside the church it is worth noting the octagonal tiburium in red brickwork with blind *loggias* running horizontally. The bell-tower displays the Romanesque decorative element of hanging arches under the plaster. *San Michele* houses a precious Mentasti organ, which is used for concerts.

## ***San Rocco***

This building is a symbol of popular devotion: according to tradition, people wanted to build an oratory in honour of Saint Roch to claim his protection against plagues. It soon became the seat of a brotherhood whose aim was the celebration of funerals for the humble and the poor. The present building is made up of two sections: the front part is the result of a widening dating back to the 17th century, while the section behind the altar is the original oratory (16th century). The interior is decorated with lozenge motifs. A fresco shows scenes of the crucifixion. In 1973 the church was desecrated and then restored. Nowadays it is used as a conference centre.



## ***Crivelli Castle***



The origin of the castle dates back to the 14th century, when the Visconti extended their power over Lombardy. The entrance tower with the hints of the draw-bridge still keeps the Visconti coat of arms, representing a snake with a Saracen in its mouth. At the beginning of the 15th century the castle was destroyed by Facino Cane in his vain attempt to conquer Lomellina. In 1450, Duke Francesco Sforza gave Lomello the Crivellis, who set up their feudal court here. The courtyard was embellished with columns and the interior was

decorated with frescoes covering almost all the rooms where the Crivelli lived. On the first floor it is worth visiting a hall showing the Winds and the Zodiac in the vault and a calendar in the *lunette*. The calendar with



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the monthly labours is an echo of Flemish almanacks. In the contiguous room there are frescoes representing Paradise and St. Catherine's life. A room on the second floor houses the remains of a mosaic once belonging to a Roman *villa*. The mosaic has geometrical decorations and magical symbols. In the hall of the Town Council (the castle is now the seat of the City Hall) there are works by the painter Silvio Santagostino (1884-1971), an artist from Mortara who loved to represent the people and landscapes of Lomellina.



### A map of Lomello:

1. Info point and "Pro Loco Lomello"
2. Crivelli Castle
3. *San Giovanni ad Fontes* and *Santa Maria*
4. *San Rocco*
5. *San Michele*



### The Pro Loco Lomello guided tours

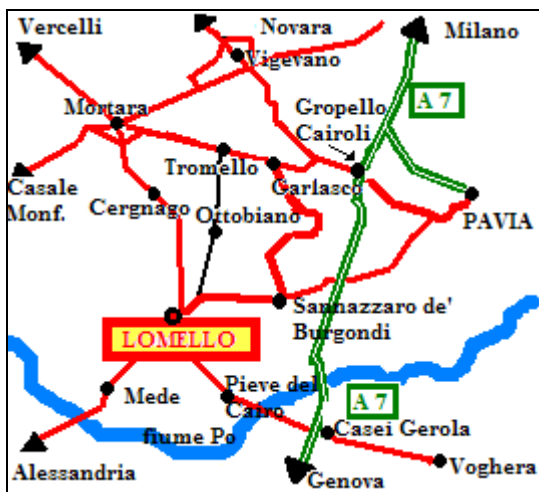
- Guided tours in Italian: from Easter Day to the end of June /from September to the end of October, on Sundays and public holidays, 3 pm. - 6 pm.
- In other periods: guided tours for groups, on reservation.
- Guided tours in English/French/German: on reservation.

### Information and booking:

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### How to reach Lomello



By coach: from Milano (bus stop "Famagosta"), Pavia, Vigevano, Mortara and Voghera.

By train: Pavia - Alessandria.