

Curious aspects

Oecc' bulin (in local dialect: Burin eye): a slit reaching to the lake, of karstic origin. It is located above the road between Laveno and Caldè, after the Lazzaretto path.

Bridge of **Valsorda** (between Mombello and Leggiuno): on the homonymous stream. The bridge was built between 1821 and 1822 in 'moonstone' (a chalk scale that easily sticks together) and is linked to the legend of a brigand who in the early 1900s terrorized the passers-by with the demand for money.

After heavy rains from the mountain hanging on the center of Laveno there are small waterfalls that seem to spring out of the rock; in the local dialect: **Aves**.

The village of **Casere**, that is within the municipality of Laveno Mombello, cannot be reached by car from Laveno but only passing through Cittiglio and Vararo. There is a large, accessible mule track that starts from the hamlet of Brena / Monteggia, used in ancient times but still easily accessible by adults and little ones. 24 people live in Casere.

In Cerro, at the beginning of Via Vignola, coming from Via Gattirolo, there is a **small column**, made inside a wall: this is a memorial stone in memory of Alessio Lucchini who in 1958 lost his life there. Alessio Lucchini was a farmer who was crushed by his cart right at that point.

In Laveno, the **Riale stream** that descends from the Casere Valley and is visible up to the starting point of the cable car, up to the nineteenth century, crossed the existing Via Tinelli (there was a bridge at the bottom of the cable car park) and Via Roma, leaving the "Old Church" to the right, and went to Piazza Italia. The Riale course was later covered but, of course, continues to emerge today at the intersection between Piazza Italia and the beginning of the lakefront of Via de Angeli. Similarly, in Cerro, **the Rialto**, the stream descending from Mombello (which also includes the "torrente Scolmatore" that comes from the Torbiera and crosses the Vignola area in the Valley of Brugo) ends today in the open air just before Piazza Dant in Cerro's lakeshore: if you turn your back to the lake, you look carefully at the old houses to the right of the square, you can imagine what the area was like in the past!

At the beginning of the sixteenth century when the Duchy of Milan was slowly declining, **Switzerland**, which between 1512 and 1513 had conquered Lugano and Locarno (still Swiss today), subsequently sought to Luino, Valtravaglia and Valcuvia. Occupation takes place between May and June of 1513. It will return to the "property" of the noble Stefano Cotta on January 4, 1514 but the valley dominion will remain to the Swiss cantons of Lucerne, Uri and Nidwalden. In September 1515 after the defeat of Swiss troops in Marignano (Melegnano) by Francis I, King of France, Valcuvia (with Valtravaglia and Luino) returns to the Duchy of Milan in exchange for Mendrisio and Balerna (still Swiss): that moment they fixed the border, until today, between Italy and Switzerland. If there had not been the defeat of Marignano (since then Switzerland will remain a "neutral" state), today Laveno would be the border with Switzerland!

In the seventies on the top of Sasso del Ferro a small **ski lift** was built. In winter the boys, after school, went up the cable car to ski in the afternoon. With the lesser snowfall, since the 1980's the plant is no longer usable but is still there on the top of the mountain

In Cerro, in Via Roccolo there is the House of Jesus Christ (Gesù Bambino), run by the Sisters **"Little Daughters of Sacred Heart of Jesus"**. In the beautiful park overlooking the lake there are two structures. One houses a small community of elderly Sisters in rest. The other structure, after having been for a long time used as a home for children with difficult family situations, has been transformed into a center of spirituality: here the "Little Daughters" welcome groups for spiritual exercises, retreats and self-organized training sessions; on request there is also the possibility to be accompanied by a community nun to enjoy reflection and prayer times.

In the small village of **San Biagio** in Cittiglio, each year in February, is celebrated the feast of St. Biagio, which has its center in the Romanesque church dedicated to the Holy Bishop, protector of the people's throat (church on the hills at about 200 mt from the station and from the hospital of Cittiglio). The tradition now consolidated in the years provides: S. Mass with blessing of the throat in the church dedicated to the saint; at the end, bowl charm, bonbon, "panettone" and vin Brulè, the distribution of the blessed bread. The priest blesses the faithful crossing two candles near the person's throat.

The **"Milano"** ferry between Laveno and Intra was attacked, machine-gunned and sunk by six Anglo-American aircraft on September 26, 1944. The captain was killed at the helm, a passenger who, with the

flaming vessel, managed to sail the boat until Punta Castagnola, near Villa Ermitage of Pallanza, where the survivors managed to land. Officially, the victims were 26 (12 civilians and 14 militants of RSI - The "Social" Republic of Mussolini), but some sources claim that the deaths were probably more. In the afternoon of the same day, the ropes that tied to the shore trees the blackened wreck of the "Milano" boat broke, and the boat went drifting away to 250 meters from Punta Castagnola, here the ship broke in two and sank (the wreck, which is 235 meters deep, was found in 2007). There were three motorboats that were sunk on Lake Maggiore in two days, all three of the "Milan" class were hit: the steamboats "Torino" and "Genova", towed to Luino. There were no casualties on the latter, while there were several casualties on board the Torino. The "Torino" was recovered, transformed into a motorboat, by a steamship which was, and it is still possible to see it still on the waters of Lake Maggiore.

During a tremendous storm off Punta Cavalla between Maccagno and Zenna, the Guardia di Finanza's "**Locusta**" Torpediniera sank on January 8, 1896. It was a twenty-meter steel cruiser vessel with 12 crew members (8 soldiers from Royal Navy and 4 Royal Guardia di Finanza Officers) who, in anti-smuggling service on the lake border, had been surprised by the storm. From the shore, some witnesses saw him peck at the center of the lake with the large lighted light, and then the beam of light perλούstrating the surface was suddenly pointed up and disappeared without leaving traces of survivors. The "disappearance" of the Locust and its 12 military remains today enveloped by the mystery despite numerous attempts to search

A roar and then a part of the small town ended under water. 18pm Friday, March 15, 1867: when, suddenly, at **Feriolio**, a spectacular hamlet of Baveno (Piedmont's bank), the land landed slipping into Lake Maggiore, carrying houses, animals and people. In disaster 16 the victims, mostly children, but only 6 recovered bodies. "As a boy," said a senior professor, "I was right in front of the beach and I often saw my peers, swimming experts, who dived to recover pots and pans that were among the rubble of the submerged houses. . "To cause disaster - the professor explained - was the lack of attention for the territory. Houses were built where they should not be made and then, being a quarry of granite quarries, the subsoil was constantly stressed by the vibration of the mines. The drop that overflowed the vessel was the work for the construction of the dock. "

In the Lake Maggiore stretch overlooking the **Arolo** village, the underwater cone of the Ballarate stream collapsed in January 1989. The event provoked an anomalous wave of over 2 meters with damage and floods but fortunately no injured and no victim.

The only painting of the «**Madonna of the football players**» (**Madonna dei Calciatori**) in the world is located in the church of Laveno Mombello dedicated to Sant'Ambrogio (New Church). The painting, after the consecration, had been abandoned in the sacristy and risked to disappear, devoured by woodworms and humidity. Over the years the **Italian National Football team** paid tribute to the opera, visiting Laveno Mombello during the preparation of a match against Yugoslavia, and numerous teams from the A series. The painting has a beautiful story. The war has just ended, Don Natale Motta, a partisan priest, is worried by the large number of war orphans, orphans of murdered partisans, orphans of Fascists shot. He occupies abandoned villas and hosts and assists these "frightened sparrows", the villas' owners are back soon and orphans must leave. Don Natale, supported by friends including Franco Ossola, Varese's Grande Torino striker, finds a villa in Laveno (Villa del Cast ex Villa Porro, at the end of Viale dei Tigli). On 4 May 1949 Ossola died in the famous plane crash of Superga, Turin. His friends want to continue his work and support Don Motta, the institute takes the name of Ossola, but they want to do more: to also give the players a patroness like the Madonna del Ghisallo for cyclists. The picture is commissioned to Carlo Cocquio (from Ligurno, Cantello) who takes his daughter Maria Elvira as a model. The Madonna with light hair rises above the lake, below are the Borromean islands and a soccer field surrounded by the flags of the teams of the A series 1950-51. In 1952 the painting is blessed by Cardinal Schuster, archbishop of Milan, and brought to **Pope Pius XII** who consecrates it defining the work "beautiful and modern", except to note that the flag of his Rome team was a bit at the bottom. But Cocquio had chosen the position of the second-placed teams and the Rome team that year was relegated to B series! A heated diatribe starts on where to place the picture: the chapel of the Ossola Institute or the New Church? And the picture ends in the sacristy. A few years ago the New Church was closed, infiltrations ruined it and affected the painting. The "model" of the past, Maria Elvira, takes over the restoration of the painting of the father, the community responds. Thus, in 2016 the Madonna returns to her place in the Church of S. Ambrogio.

On the Island Bella in 1935 (from 11 to 14 April), the meeting between the first ministers of Italy, France and England took place in the music hall of the Borromeo Palace. For four days, thanks to the presence of Benito Mussolini and the prime ministers of France and England, Pierre Laval and Ramsay MacDonald, who were engaged in the **Stresa Conference** aimed at halting Hitler's aggression, the lake town

occupied the front pages of the newspapers of all the world. The correspondents of the major international newspapers flocked to Stresa. The three prime ministers met in a unique place, Palazzo Borromeo, in the music hall that still maintains the decor used on that occasion.

On September 11, 1960, an S2F-1 aircraft of the 87th Group fell into the lake in front of Laveno, causing the death of Lieutenant Giovanni Tosches, from Laveno, and the Lieutenant Riccardo Ugo. A witness remember: "That day I was present, just with my father (mom and sister) and the memory of that terrible accident always comes to mind. What people said in Laveno at those dramatic moments was that the pilot had lowered (perhaps) too much to say goodbye to relatives who were at the dock, but during a turn, the plane lost control (left) touching the rooftops, the aircraft might have touched the electrical wires of the nearby railway station down to a few meters from the front of the ferry leaving: the pilot was able to avoid, even at the last moment, an even greater disaster, as the ferry was full of passengers. I picked up that ferry shortly afterwards, and even though I was only seven, I remember with anguish the sight of oily spots on the very deep-water surface and some floating scraps, then recovered. "At that point the lake is very deep: they found nothing of the crew, unfortunately.

When the lake was part of the Spanish empire, a local **pirate, Polydor**, captured after a long reign of terror, was condemned to be hanged on Cerro's beach. When asked if he had a last wish before the execution, he asked for a glass of wine, with dismay the soldiers found that there was no tavern in Cerro. When he was told he could not satisfy his last wish, the pirate gave the village a look of disgust. He turned to the executioner, who was ready to execute him, and said, "Better the hell than this village of teetotals" and went quietly to his destiny. The Gulf of Polidora, between Punta di Ceresolo and Reno, takes its name from the pirate.

Just after the end of World War II, **Winston Churchill** (who had already made his honeymoon here many years earlier) stayed on Lake Maggiore and even in a villa (Villa Tarlarini) still existing on the lake between Laveno and Cerro to cultivate his hobby of painter. Some say that Churchill was on Lake Maggiore to find compromising letters with Benito Mussolini and carry those letters to Switzerland (north of Lake Maggiore is Swiss). A lady said: "At the end of World War II, I was 15 years old and I was displaced in Cittiglio, a small village just a few miles from Laveno, on Lake Maggiore, where I went to my dear friend to bathe. The villa was facing Cerro, ancient and magnificent, with a large dock and one day I had the surprise of seeing, in front of the caretaker's house, British military truckers forbidding me to enter. The villa had been seized and the owners and servants had been moved to the great caretaker's home. When my friend saw me, she ran out of the park and told me that her home was full of British soldiers and nobody could either go to the boat or approach their home. He told me that motorboats, carrying big boxes, kept coming from Locarno. In addition to the many officers cheering in his villa there was also Churchill: and for what reason? The famous cards between Mussolini and Churchill! Many people know of these happenings but have always tried to conceal them. I finish with just a few words: I saw and remember: I was there! "

San Carlo Borromeo and Federico Borromeo are characters that have influenced the history of Lake Maggiore and beyond. Before Carlo (until 1584) and then his cousin Federico (until 1631) were **Archbishops of Milan and Cardinals during the Catholic Counter-Reformation against Protestantism**. Both, part of the powerful Borromeo family, were in Laveno, Mombello and Cerro. Charles Borromeo (Italian: Carlo Borromeo, Latin: Carolus Borromeus) was a leading figure of the Counter-Reformation combat against the Protestant Reformation together with St. Ignatius of Loyola and St. Philip Neri. In that role he was responsible for significant reforms in the Catholic Church, including the founding of seminaries for the education of priests. Borromeo diocesan reforms faced opposition from several religious orders, particularly that of the Umiliati (Brothers of Humility), a penitential order which, although reduced to about 170 members, owned some ninety monasteries. Some members of that society formed a conspiracy against his life, and a shot was fired at him (by a **Friar who stayed in Mombello**) in the archiepiscopal chapel. His survival was considered miraculous. In 1576 there was famine at Milan, and later an outbreak of the plague. The Governor and many members of the nobility fled the city, but the bishop remained, to organize the care of those affected. He used up his own funds and went into debt to provide food for the hungry. He is honored as a saint by the Roman Catholic Church, with a feast day on November 4. Federico followed the example of his elder cousin in promoting the discipline of the clergy, founding churches and colleges at his own expense, and applying everywhere the reformed principles set by the Council of Trent. In 1609 he founded the Biblioteca Ambrosiana, a college of writers, a seminary of savants, a school of fine arts, and, after the Bodleian at Oxford, the first genuinely public library in Europe. Federico had the **famous Saint Charles Borromeo statue** (Sancarlone) erected in Arona, supported the development of the Sacro Monte of Varese (today a World Heritage site), and participated in the embellishment of the Duomo di Milano where he is buried. San Carlo is patron of Lombardy, Canton Ticino (CH) and, for example, of Monterey in California; among the many churches dedicated to him, we recall: St. Charles at the Four Fountains in Rome and the

Karlskirche in Vienna. Charles persecuted Swiss Protestants and had strong ties with British Catholics; both fought against "heretics" and "sorcery" according to the logic of those times.

The "Centro Comune di ricerca" (CCR), (in English: **Joint Research Center, JRC**), is a Directorate-General of the European Commission and is directly financed by the European Union, to pursue its international mission. The JCR has seven research institutes in five member countries of the European Union (Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain). The only one in Italy is in Ispra, just a few kilometers from Laveno. Researchers from all European countries have worked in the JCR for over 50 years. **The European schools** are schools with the purpose of receiving the children of European officials but also general students and of offering them a complete teaching (kindergarten, elementary, lower secondary and higher) in their respective mother tongues and in other European languages. The only European school in Italy is based in Varese.

After September 1943 and the Nazi occupation, the Jewish population of northern Italy (many were those who had taken refuge in Italy from other European countries) began to flee to Switzerland, even through holes in the area's border network. In **Meina** (shores of the lake) the entire families from Thessaloniki (Greece), who had lived in a closed tree for years, were exterminated. In **Laveno**, two women, one elderly and one young (of whom no one remembers the names), moved to the house owned by the Ferrovie Nord in Via Garibaldi (now that house is in the center of the Via Garibaldi car park). Everyone knew about them (including the authorities) but everyone pretended not to know and the two women could live in (relative) tranquility. One day the youngest decided to return to Milan, probably to get some objects in their house: she never returned.

Looking at the roof of the restaurant "Il Piccolo Moro" from the initial part of Vial Labiena "inside", it is possible to see a small statute that represents, in fact, **Il Piccolo Moro**.

The **Mergozzo** is a rushing wind that blows from Fondo Toce (Verbania) towards Cerro and sometimes it is scary: the lake becomes dark and seems to see a seastorm. When the Mergozzo "goes up", all the sailors look for a safe harbor as soon as possible.

The pirates of Lake Maggiore: Polidoro between history and legend. We are in the second half of the '500: pirates robbed the Swiss areas of the high lake. The freedom of action of these brigands lasted twenty years, so the constant complaints of the good bourgeois pushed the militia of the Tre Cantoni (Uri, Schwyz, Unterwald), at that time tutors or masters of Ticino, to act decisively: in a few weeks the pirates of the Alto Verbano vanished, fleeing southwards, to Lombardy, where the tangled political situation and the ignorance of the authorities allowed them ample freedom. Traces on these "pirates" can be found in the State Archives in Berne, in the German-language reports of the Balivi dei Tre Cantoni and in the writings of Ranci (1895-1942), Morigia and other authors of the past centuries. In these, however, there are no historical data but, for the most part, accounts of legendary deeds and curious anecdotes: that is, what the readers of their time most liked. This is how the figure of **Polidoro da Cerro** (in fact he was from Ceresolo) was remembered: he had his den in an impenetrable gorge near **Reno** and kept the boat at anchor in an inlet nearby. Polidoro was one of those pirates whom Stevenson would have liked: handsome, virile, of good education, perhaps of noble birth. In contrast, his crew was composed of repulsive and evil jailbirds. Rather than approaching the boats offshore, these pirates preferred to attack in shallow waters, so that even if the ship was overturned, it would have been easy to recover the stolen goods. Among his exploits we remember the capture of a small ship carrying the treasures full of gold sequins of the "gabellè", the proceeds of the collected taxes.

It is said that he had hidden huge treasures, the proceeds of his collisions, near Laveno, in a **ravine of the Sasso del Ferro**, and that he planned to retire to private life and live the pleasure-loving old age of the rich bourgeois. Unfortunately, he made the mistake of falling in love with a bride, a certain Cecilia, who was kidnapped on her wedding day and, after he raped her, he gave her to his men with the result we can imagine. This caused quite a stir and the local Capitano di Giustizia could not avoid collecting a small army of fifty soldiers, all armed with muskets and spades, and marching against the pirates of Polidoro. The military uselessly beat the wooded ravines between Cerro and Arolo until they discovered and set fire to the pirate boats, well hidden at the mouth of the **Bardello** river. Desperate Polidoro attacked a farm in **Mirasole** (a hamlet of Leggiuno) but was repulsed, pursued and his men were mostly killed. Captured, he was hanged in **Ceresolo** by the lake that had seen his deeds.

On 21 September **1924**, the first section, from Milan to Varese (currently classified as A8) "autostrada", of what will become the **"motorway of the Lakes"** and which will be **the first toll motorway (dual highway)** in Italy and **in the world**, is inaugurated in Lainate.

Porto Valtravaglia is not in Valtravaglia (Valle Travaglia): the valley begins in Grantola, where the Margorabbia, coming from Valganna, joins the Rancina stream, coming from Valcuvia. The valley ends in Germignaga, where the Margorabbia flows into the Tresa river.

Torre is part of the municipality of Porto Valtravaglia; the small village has **only one street** called, precisely, *Via Unica* (just one street) and **all the inhabitants** have **Isabella as their surname**.

Via Labiena, the most important street in Laveno, does not end in Laveno: there is a *Via Labiena* in Comabbio about 20 Kilometers to Milan. Probably they are two remains of a Roman road that led from Laveno to Milan.

Candoglia marble is a white / pink (or gray) marble which is extracted in the Candoglia quarries in the municipality of Mergozzo in the province of Verbano-Cusio-Ossola, in Val d'Ossola. Leaving Lake Maggiore behind the mouth of the river Toce and passing the lake of Mergozzo, which overlooks the homonymous and characteristic Municipality, soon the village of Candoglia is found, a few houses built on both sides beyond the road that crosses it, and which continues towards Domodossola. On the right, **Mount Orphan** (Monte Orfano; visible from Cerro: it is the small isolated mountain behind the Borromeo Gulf), which for centuries was quarried by laborious stonecutters in order to extract the marvelous marble that was used to build the Milan Cathedral. The pink color of this marble is caused by the widespread occurrence of iron oxide within the marble itself. From the marble quarries of Candoglia the marble is quarried **only for the construction of the Milan Cathedral (Duomo)**. The Lord of Milan Gian Galeazzo Visconti granted in 1387 the use of the Candoglia quarries to the "Veneranda Fabbrica del Duomo" to extract marble for the construction of the cathedral. The extraction of marble from the Candoglia quarries was difficult and expensive but became economically convenient for the cost savings allowed by transport on water (100 km!): from Lake Maggiore, the river Ticino and the Milanese Navigli (which are artificial canals) up to where, today, is the current *Via Laghetto* (in Milan), in memory of the small dock where the marble blocks were finally disembarked, just behind the Duomo. The vessels that transported the marble (free of tolls) were marked with the writing *ad Usum Fabricae Operis* (for the use of the manufacture of the work) from which the Italian expression "*ad ufo*" (joking way: get something without paying). Another interpretation of the expression "*ad ufo*" is linked to the custom (undocumented) of the barges that descended from the river Toce up to the Navigli via the river Ticino, to offer free passages to the population: according to this version, go to Milan "*ad ufo*" was going there without spending a penny. **The Duomo of Milan is the third largest church in Europe**, after St. Peter's in Rome and the Cathedral of Seville (where the tomb of Christopher Columbus is located).

Count Nasi has been known to many generations of young people in Laveno for dozens of years: a worker in the ceramic factories, as soon as the work shift ended, turned into an apparent nobleman who has courted and conquered generations of young and naive girls. Count Nasi was so named for the rather large nose ("*Nasi*" is the nose plural in Italian).

Following the road that leads from Brinzio to Cuvio passing through Castello Cabiaglio, it is possible to stop to drink at a source that is on the side of the road, and which flows directly from **underneath the roots of a centuries-old beech tree**. This source is called "**ul funtanin de l'avucatt**" (the small source of the lawyer), since the old owner of the land in which it flows was a lawyer: the water of the "funtanin" would possess aphrodisiac virtues.

In Vagna, a hilly hamlet of Domodossola, **Christmas is celebrated in summer**: the tradition dates back four centuries, but why in 1600 in this corner of Ossola began to celebrate Christmas in July, with the meadows in bloom and the typical summer temperatures? The answer is as simple as it is disarming: it was not possible to bring families together at another time of year. This particular Christmas, established at the beginning of the 17th century by the Confraternity of the Name of Jesus, has even more ancient roots, linked to a history of nomadic breeders and woodcutters, with migrations around Europe that only in summer allowed to return home over the Alps, an operation impossible in the winter months. July was therefore the only time in the year when the fathers found their families and the community gathered around the church. In this small village in the Ossola Valley, in the middle of summer, you can see decorated trees and nativity scenes. The "*Festa dul Bambin*", as Christmas in Vagna is called, begins on Saturday with a concert of bells and bonfires and continues on Sunday (always the second of July) with the Christmas songs included in the morning mass.

The **boat of St. Peter's** is an old peasant tradition: on the evening of June 28th you have to deposit the egg white of an egg in a glass vase filled with water. The jar will remain there all night. The next day, the day in which St. Peter's is venerated, the egg white will have crystallized and taken on the strangest forms, perhaps just that of the boat with the sails spread that gives the name to the ritual.

The **Dutch Village**, built 50 years ago by a Dutchman in the mountains of Bedero Valcuvia, is a meeting point for the Dutch community that spends its holidays on the lake and also the place where many boys in the area have given their first kiss to a girl or have returned home, disappointed, for shyness. In summer it has over 1000 inhabitants, in winter about twenty.

Lake Biandronno no longer exists! The lake was drained at the end of the 19th century: the province of the seven lakes had eight!

In Cerro di Laveno (in Gattirolo, Via Camp Prueè) there has been for decades the seat of the **Germanic Sports Association** - Milan, with a sports field and a lawn just above the beach, in fact, of the Germans.

Almost certainly in **Leggiuno there was a castle**, and can be traced back to the time of Eremberto (ninth century), the location Castellazzo is also evidenced by a document of the fourteenth century. According to P. Puccinelli (*Memorie Antiche di Milano ...*, Milano 1650), the area dedicated to Apollo by Lucio Nevio Secondino, which after various vicissitudes is now preserved in the Civic Museums of Como, has been preserved here. According to tradition there is a passage that allows you to get to the hill of Ballarate (hamlet of Leggiuno), currently not accessible, because partly collapsed. Ancient stories tell that at the time of the Carboneria, inside the castle there were the meetings of the Piedmontese Carbonari who, no longer feeling safe in Piedmont, met on our shore of the lake. In case of danger they took refuge in the basement of the castle and, through the passage, they could again reach the lake. On the wall of the oldest part of the castle, now collapsed, there was a Gothic window with mullioned windows removed before the collapse and which, it is said, is now in a courtyard of the Visconti di Modrone palace in Milan. The loopholes in the high wall of the castle itself are still clearly visible.

In Cocquio Trevisago (Caldana) there has been a **German Lutheran Evangelical Church** for many years.

Some place names are repeated and can also cause confusion: in addition to Laveno (with emphasis on e) in Laveno Mombello there is a Laveno (with emphasis on a) of Lozio in Valcamonica (between Brescia and Bergamo), the lake of Lâvena in Val Trompia (Brescia), Lavéna - Ponte Tresa on the Swiss border on Lake Lugano, Baveno between Stresa and Verbania and Lavenone is a town in the province of Brescia in Valle Sabbia. In addition to Cerro di Laveno Mombello, there are Cerro Maggiore and Cerro al Lambro (municipalities near Milan) and Cerro which is a hamlet on the Campo dei Fiori in the municipality of Cocquio Trevisago. There is the Swiss town of Brissago with Brissago Islands near Locarno in Switzerland and Brissago Valtravaglia. Bedero is a hamlet in the municipality of Brezzo di Bedero in Valtravaglia and is about 10 km from Bedero Valcuvia. Ligurno is a hamlet of Porto Valtravaglia but also a hamlet of Cantello (between Varese and Switzerland). Mount Brianza in Laveno (looking at the lake on the left of the Gulf of Laveno) is called after Brianza which is the area north-east of Milan. Similar names have Caldana hamlet of Cocquio Trevisago and Cardana hamlet of Besozzo, which are about 3 kilometers as the crow flies. There are also similar but very distant names: Nasca in Porto Valtravaglia and Nazca in Peru, Agra near Luino and Agra, imperial city in India, the municipality of Brenta and the river Brenta which is in Veneto (not far from Venice) ... Finally Piero (diminutive of Pietro/Peter in Italian ...) is a village of Curiglia with Monteviasco ...

Laveno, in the diocese of Milan with Ambrosian rite, is on **the border with the diocese of Como**: this diocese has an enclave in the province of Varese that starts from Cittiglio, Caravate, Gemonio for the whole of Valcuvia and Val Marchirolo. This is how it has been since the early Middle Ages (about 600 AD: at the time of Justinian, Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire and the Longobards), when the diocese of Como wanted to submit to the distant Patriarch of Aquileia in disagreement with Milan.

The **Viganella torrent** has **two names**: the torrent is born above Orino, on the north-east side of Campo dei Fiori, has a length of about 13 km, it bathes the municipalities of Azzio, Gemonio and Caravate; then it changes name and becomes "Monvallina", because it bathes the municipality of Monvalle and flows into Lake Maggiore.

La Bozza is the only access to Lake Maggiore in the municipality of Besozzo; it is a narrow strip of land that stretches from the hamlet of Bogno, between the municipal territories of Monvalle to the north and Brebbia to the south: probably this "finger" has medieval origins to give Bogno (now incorporated into Besozzo) access to the lake.

In the past the **Lake of Varese** was indicated as "Lake of Gavirate", because in Gavirate stood the palace of the feudal lord, lord of the parish church where he was part of the lake. Varese acquired access to the shore of the lake only in 1927 when Varese became the provincial capital and annexed some minor municipalities.

In Agra, above Luino, there is an opening called "**Court of the Jews**", a reminder of the presence in that area of the ghetto. Until 1927 Agra had access to Lake Maggiore through the hamlet of Colmegna: from that year Colmegna became a hamlet of Luino and Agra became a mountain village.

Lake Mergozzo was not a lake: in ancient times Lake Mergozzo was the extreme tip of the western arm of Lake Maggiore, the so-called Sinus Mergotianus. In the past, however, the lake was larger and higher. For about five centuries, the continuous floods and floods of the river Toce have formed a strip of land that divided the two basins (Lake Mergozzo, precisely, and Lake Maggiore) and on which was born the village of Fondotoce, belonging to Verbania.

The Margorabbia is a "strange" river: it is born in Valganna, just north of the sources of the branch of the Valganna of the Olona river, but unlike this, its path proceeds in a south-north direction, going through the upper Valganna, and crossing as tributary and emissary the lakes of Ganna and Ghirla. Taking advantage of the orography of the valley, a canal also connects it to the Olona (which ends in Milan). When it was in normal conditions the waters of the same were conveyed into the basin of Lake Maggiore, when there were intense and continuous days of rain, the river swelled, and also came to discharge in the opposite direction, that is in the Olona Valley. After Ghirla the Margorabbia, after receiving some tributaries, bends north-west and its waters, with forced pipeline, go to feed a power plant near Ferrera di Varese, where the river forms a small artificial lake and a waterfall. Near Cunardo, it sinks into a system of caves called Pont Niv, Antro dei Morti, Grotte di Villa Radaelli and Grotte del Traforo. It re-emerges near Ferrera, embedded in a narrow labyrinth, and here with a jump of 27 meters forms the Fermona waterfall, then continues along the Valtravaglia. A few hundred metres before Lake Maggiore, in Luino, it joins up with the river Tresa, of which it becomes a tributary.

Piero Chiara in his most famous novel, "La stanza del Vescovo" (translated into a film with Ugo Tognazzi) talks about Cerro and the Golfo Polidora. Laveno is mentioned by **Antonio Fogazzaro** in the famous novel "Piccolo mondo antico".

The lake of Voldomino, where the people of Luino used to skate, no longer exists.

The Castles of Cannero are not in Cannero. Despite the name, the three rocky islets on the shore of the Alto Verbano are located in the municipality of Cannobio and not in that of Cannero Riviera. The two largest ones preserve the remains of fortifications and a ruin of the castle that make them picturesque views of the lake and particularly striking. The islets are now owned by the Borromeo family.

The church of S. Clemente is on the top of Mount Sangiano: the church has a wonderful view of Lake Maggiore. Curious, interesting and a source of important controversy is also the geographical position of S. Clemente, on the border of the municipalities of Caravate, Laveno Mombello and Sangiano, belonging to two different dioceses that of Milan (Laveno and Sangiano) and that of Como (Caravate), in past times in relationships not quite idyllic. In 1566, the disputes even led to a physical clash until the definitive attribution during the 20th century to the Ambrosian religious jurisdiction of Sangiano but to the civil jurisdiction of the Municipality of Caravate (but to get there, you have to pass through Sangiano).

Due Cossani is a geographical hamlet of the municipality of Dumenza since 1927: in 1863 the municipality, originally Cossano, changed its name to that of Due Cossani (2 Cossanos), due to the fact that the stream that descends from Agra divides it into the two parts of Cosan de chi and Cosan de là (Cossano here and Cossano there).

In the past, **the border with Switzerland** was not so defined for farmers. During the First World War a farmer from the Indemini area (north of Luino), born across the border in Switzerland, left for the war against Austria with the Italian army, despite being technically Swiss (Switzerland was neutral) and never returned as he died on the battlefields.

In Fignano, a hamlet of Gavirate, in the 13th century there was a "Domus" of the **Templar Knights**, that is, a hostel, warehouse and stopping place. Today on a portal you can still see the cross of the Order of the Temple. It is believed that the Domus of Gavirate depended on that of Novara, dedicated to St. William.

At the beginning of the seventies, when Santa Caterina del Sasso was already closed because of the structural problems of the building, there was an attempt **to steal the remains of Blessed Alberto**. The remains, including the skull, were found outside the entrance door of the Hermitage. They were recovered, then brought and kept temporarily in the parish church of Leggiuno. Once the works of the first restorations were completed, they were relocated with a procession inside the Sanctuary, where they are still kept today.

The war memorial in Laveno (Viale Porro, in honor of the Fallen in WW1) has had a troubled history: it consists of four columns supporting a bronze eagle and was inaugurated in 1921. The first monument had an eagle with spread wings, which was almost immediately replaced by an eagle resting on a beam, in turn removed in 1941, for use of bronze for war purposes. Left without an eagle, the monument was completed with a closed-wing eagle and inaugurated on November 4, 1953. A little less animated is the monument to the fallen of Cerro (in front of Palazzo Perabò) inaugurated on 14 September 1924 with the bronze statue of a infantryman with a flag and raised right arm, the work of sculptor Alessandro Laforet: the statue was cast in 1941 and the monument was rebuilt after the war, in the shape of a column. Finally, the monument to the fallen of Mombello (near the cemetery) was built on the basis of a project by the famous Milanese architect Piero Portaluppi. There is also a war memorial to the Fortress (Via Canvale) and an Avenue of Remembrances to the Church of S. Maria in Ca Deserta, also designed by Portaluppi.

The stones dancing (Sassi Ballerini): the hermitage of St. Catherine became a pilgrimage destination and the place itself was considered miraculous because of a famous miracle of the early eighteenth century, when five huge boulders "dancers" fell on the church, but were caught in the vault of a chapel, without causing serious damage, remaining suspended for almost two centuries, until 1910.

The Sasso del Fungo (**mushroom stone**) or table of S. Caterina is an erratic boulder that has the unusual peculiarity of being two superimposed boulders: the Sasso is on the mule track that leads from Monteggia to Casere (deviation on the left marked). For safety reasons the Sasso has been consolidated with cement some years ago.

Lazzaretto di Laveno: a place little known even by the inhabitants of Laveno, but great to visit! It can be reached on foot from the curve of the 'House of dolls'. The path begins after the barrier, on the road to the Locanda Pozzetto. The lazaretto was bordered by 3 chapels that still exist: that of the tip of the Olives, the chapel of St. Charles in a wooded area further upstream, next to the path that led to the woods and Caldé, the chapel at the "House of Dolls" near the first bend of the road to Monteggia. Of the ancient road (path) that led to Caldé, there remains the stretch from the dollhouse to the Oeucc Boulín (karst sinkhole that reaches the lake); further on in the locality of Il Campanile (above the sinkhole on the right before the last tunnel) there is finally the Bus de La Vaca, another sinkhole. At the lazaretto there were confined the sick, and buried the dead, of the plague of 1630 and previous years.

The Casa delle Bambole (**dollhouse**) is a masonry building in Via Professor Monteggia at the first bend to climb towards Monteggia. It is a miniature house built for the children's games of an ancient owner of the area (Frua family).

In Laveno, to the north, the waterfall of Mount Beuscer is admirable. These for some months of the year you see sparkling wines coming out from the middle of the mountain, similar to the Milk River. (Estore Lanzani manual geographical, statistical, commercial and diocesan province of Como 1846): it is the cascata del Diavolo (**devil's waterfall**) in Brenna hamlet.

On an old house in Ceresolo there are the following **verses by Paolo Buzzi**, futurist poet:

" ... and the Borromean Islands palpitate

Like huge shells on the water.

Above, Mount Rosa and the Simplon.

The millenary tower of Ceresolo has

the always problematic majesty of

An extinct sea lighthouse."

Followed by the indication "from Gattiolo" and the signature "P. Buzzi". Paolo Buzzi lived there.

Stendhal wrote part of "**La Certosa di Parma**" (The Charterhouse of Parma) on Lake Maggiore.

In 1953 **Gregory Peck** stayed at the Moro Hotel, now the Piccolo Moro Restaurant, and so did Bettino Ricasoli, future President of the Italian Government Council under the pseudonym of Robert Laude, in 1862.

The queen of Italy **Margherita** (from whom the pizza Margherita took its name) visited Laveno during her reign. The queen was staying in Stresa and with a boat together with her son Vittorio Emanuele she crossed the short stretch of lake to reach the **beach of Cerro**, which at the time was a meadow where the flocks grazed. The little **Vittorio Emanuele** could run and play freely, in Cerro. Vittorio Emanuele III (Victor Emmanuel of Savoy) was the King of Italy from 29 July 1900 until his abdication in 1946, was also Emperor of Ethiopia and King of Albanians. During his reign of nearly 46 years, which began after the assassination of his father Umberto I, the Kingdom of Italy became involved in two world wars. His reign also encompassed the birth, rise, and fall of Italian fascism and its regime.

The obelisk to the fallen of the Battle of Laveno in 1859 (war of Italian independence against Austria)/ **Garibaldi war memorial** (monumento ai caduti garibaldini) has had a turbulent history has been moved three times in a hundred years: first placed in Piazza Italia in front of the former Town Hall, it was moved to Piazza Pullè (the small square at the beginning of Viale dei Tigli), from here once again and always for reasons of circulation, was moved to Colle Castello!

Lake Maggiore periodically overflows. During the last very important flood (in 2014) the lake had invaded the internal Via Labiena. The largest recorded flood is that of 1868: even today there is a notch on a wall on the lakeside of Caldè, while in Laveno the water reached almost the top of the porch of Casa Finetti (Via Labiena 39)!

The name "camp strii" (**field of witches**), in Via Cologna in Mombello, comes from the fact that in the past the stories had made it the meeting place of witches and later smugglers and bandits. The clearing disappeared when at the end of the 19th century the trench of the Novara-Pino railway cut it in two. In 1636 the inhabitants of Mombello defeated the soldiers of France, Savoy and Parma who, after having sacked Gemonio, wanted to go to Laveno. It then became a place of arms: the National Guard of Mombello practiced right here.

The village of Viganella in Valle Antrona has been in the shade for centuries from November to March. For some years now the inhabitants have built a **huge mirror that gives sunlight to Viganella in winter!**

Twenty years before the Emancipation of Catholics, the English Apostolic Vicars found themselves faced with one of the **strangest priesthood aspirants** they had ever had: **Sir Harry Trelawny of Trelawne**. He was a baronet from Cornwall, an Anglican priest who became a Catholic priest! As a young man he was ordained a congregational minister. Later he was ordained again as an Anglican priest, then in middle age he became a Catholic. He had a wife and six adult children. The bishops were reluctant to grant his request to be ordained for the third time as a Catholic priest. It wasn't until long after he got his wish, and he was ordained in Rome - at the age of 74, in 1830. Sir Harry - now - Reverend Sir Harry - died, at the age of 77, on February 25, 1834. He was buried in Laveno, where he spent the last four years in the parish house, in a tomb inscribed with lines from Saint Augustine. The sarcophagus, after two movements, is now in the Parco delle Rimembranze, in via Ronco S. Maria.

In Musadino, a hamlet of Porto Valtravaglia, there is a coenubium, a small **Russian Orthodox mountain monastery**, which is subordinate to the Patriarchate of Moscow.

The Clockmaker's House is a house located in Ghiffa, on the western Piedmontese shore of Lake Maggiore, and is able to rotate 360 degrees and orient itself according to the position of the sun. The **rotating house** was designed at the beginning of the 70's by the industrialist Natale Boletti, owner of a watch factory who decided to build his residence in the immediate vicinity.

The film "Judith & Holofernes" shot in Cerro di Laveno in September 2017 arrived in Los Angeles and won a major award: it was awarded at the Los Angeles Film Awards for Best Independent Short Film. Filmed in the small town, it is directed by Oscar Turri from Laveno and has as main actress Aurora Maria Lopez, who also comes from Laveno Mombello and has been living overseas for years. Steve Wong and Donatella Reggiori, also from Laveno, are also in the cast.

In the small cemetery of Cerro (Via Buonarroti) there are the very simple tombs of a very famous and important family of entrepreneurs and artists including Giovanni Pirelli and his wife Marinella ("Marinellia", also an artist). **Giovanni Pirelli** (Velate, 3 August 1918 - Genoa, 3 April 1973) was an Italian writer and man of culture and the designated heir of the Pirelli Group (tyres): Giovanni incredibly gave up the company to devote himself to art. Also in the cemetery of Cerro rest members of other important and historical Italian families, for example: Prof. Giulio **Sironi**, **Countess Elena Visconti di Modrone** in Castellini. The Sironi family, of which Prof. Giulio Sironi is the founder, owns or has owned many important residences in Cerro, including Palazzo Perabò (Midec), Villa Stampa and the Casa del Min Traghetatore. Professor Giulio Sironi (1885 -1955) organized a school of agriculture in the framework of the Opera Pia Perabò at Palazzo Perabò: for this reason it was called "Profesur di Fires" (**professor of ferns**) in an ironic way by the peasants of Cerro and Mombello. Davide Sironi builder of the unusual hydroelectric power plant of Lake Delio and so on .. The Visconti family is one of the oldest noble Italian families, attested since the end of the tenth century in the territory of northern Italy, where the homonymous Visconti Duchy with the capital Milan was enfeoffed.

Villa **Castellini** (better: the villas), in Cerro, belongs to an important family in Milan that has been closely linked to Cerro for generations. Of the family members: they participated in the expeditions of Garibaldi in the wars of Italian independence, contributed to the industrialization of Italy, expressed very important figures in the Italian banking world, married persons of considerable importance (Antonio, the daughter Luisa of the famous architect Piero Portaluppi, of whom there are many works in Laveno, Anna, Vincenzo Maranghi at the head of MEDIOBANCA and right arm of Cuccia, the most important Italian banker since the postwar period). A family that has been the protagonist of the wider history. In fact, all the great themes of Italian events, from the Risorgimento to the economic miracle, are embodied in the main characters of the first four known generations of Castellini: Nicostrato, the founder, who directly participated in the Garibaldi epic; Clateo, an exponent of that enlightened entrepreneurship which, starting from a solid and rigorous ethic, laid the foundations of modern Italian industry; Gualtiero, a journalist and writer committed to the political debate of the early twentieth century; and finally Nico and his sons Antonio and Vittorio, who experienced the two world wars and the boom of the 1950s - carrying on with the same principles the work begun by Clateo. The Villa Grande was bought by Adele Medici in Castellini (Clateo's wife) in 1891. The Villa belonged to an **English family, the Frankfurts**, bankers in London, probably of German Jewish origin. Antonio Castellini married the daughter Luisa of the famous architect **Piero Portaluppi**. In the garden of the Villas of Vittorio Castellini were shot some scenes of the film dedicated to the life of the architect Piero Portaluppi: "L'Amatore"(the Lover).

Between the '20s and '30s came to Cerro an English conductor, Eric Coates, who was in the villa now Sarti (Intragnola), the one on the tip of Cerro. And every now and then **Bernard Shaw** came to visit him: then it happened to see this man with a white beard bathing in the lake...

On the wall towards the lake of the former town hall of Laveno, there is a plaque to **Ernesto De Angeli** (Laveno, 29 January 1849 - Milan, 17 January 1907): he was an entrepreneur who brought Italy from importer to exporter of textile products. He was born in what is now Viale De Angeli. To be precise, in the stretch between Piazza Marchetti and Viale De Angeli: on the facade a plaque recalls that it was the seat of the Parish Convention Contardo Ferrini.

After the primary schools in which he had as a teacher Gerolamo Bassani (grandfather of Franco Bassani di Villa Bassani and president of the retirement home Menotti Bassani) he studied at the college of Cerro opened by the parish priest Don Giuseppe Della Chiesa (outside the cemetery of Cerro there is a plaque in memory of this priest). After his death, his company, De Angeli-Frua, continued its growth under the guidance of Giuseppe Frua, his brother-in-law, who had married his sister Anna in 1883.

On the wall of the former town hall of Laveno in Piazza Marchetti, there is a marble plaque with bronze portrait of **Gioachino Silani**: on the night between 11 and 12 August 1913, in the waters of Lake Maggiore, near Laveno Mombello near the mouth of the river Boesio" (now Gaggetto), Gioachino Silani, Major of the Royal Financial Police, who had been conducting "intensive investigations to crush a complex traffic of smuggled goods" with Switzerland for some time, was murdered by criminals. In those days, the Gaggetto was a swamp!

The **Austrian Fort** which is in Via Fortino, between Cerro and Laveno, is also called Batteria Sud or Forte Sud. Designed in 1840 and built in 1840-53. It was a two-storey building with a terrace, a ditch around it and a drawbridge. The architect Emilio Lancia transformed it into a holiday home in 1935. During the Second World War, in its basement, were hidden the important treasures, stained glass windows, paintings and **relics of the Cathedral of Genoa!**

In Piazza Manzoni in Cerro, in front of Palazzo Perabò (Midec), there is the monument to the fallen of the world wars. Today the monument is a simple column, but it has not always been so! Inaugurated on 14 September 1924 with a bronze statue of **a soldier with his right arm raised** (typical Fascist greeting...) and flag. The statue was cast in 1941 for reasons of war. Cerro with the hamlet of Ceresolo was an autonomous municipality until 1928, then merged with Laveno and Mombello (about 500 inhabitants in 1911).

Villa Preziosa: Former Villa Besozzi-Talini became Villa Adele in the fifties and more recently Villa Preziosa former nursing home. The local stories tell that the Talini family was of Jewish origin and during the Second World War, before fleeing, they hid a **small treasure in the walls of the villa**: it seems that some local farmers discovered the treasure and suddenly they began to buy houses and land... The Talini never returned to claim their property...

Punta Granelli is a popular spot for divers, because in the depths there is a very beautiful white rock wall to explore with a wetsuit, but there is also a delightful round balcony - and a beach - from which to embrace a very broad view of the Lake Maggiore which includes the Rocca di Caldè and the beautiful

Piedmontese shore up to Intra. It was October 27th 1930 when the cousins Bruno and Pietro Granelli drowned in the waters facing the then called "Americana point": with the passing of the years to the two unfortunate cousins, other missing victims were added. Since then that place, loved by divers from all over Europe, is called Punta Granelli. Since then, moreover, every year a mass is celebrated that brings to mind all the missing people in the lake. Pious hands put a statue of Christ (**the Christ of the Abyss**) under water at a depth of 22 meters and also a plaque in memory of two disappeared divers.

The very famous architect **Piero Portaluppi** (1888-1967) had many ties with Laveno Mombello and Cerro. His daughter Luisa married Antonio Castellini of a very important Milanese family that has several villas on the lake in Cerro. Among the works and projects by Piero Portaluppi in Laveno-Mombello: Cottage for the director of the Italian Ceramics Society Laveno Mombello (Varese), via Roma 21, Villa Fumagalli Frascoli Via Labiena 1935, Remembrance Park Via Ronco S. Maria 1923, Factory of the Italian Ceramics Society, via Buozzi 2 1924-1926: Ceramica "Ponte"; Project for the Verbano Laveno Mombello plant via XXV April 1924, Reorganization of Villa Scotti for use as a nursery school (Asilo Scotti), Project for the Zari houses 1924; Study for a hotel in Laveno Punta San Michele 1922, Project for the expansion of the cemetery of Laveno 1925, Villa Fumagalli greenhouse Laveno via Labiena 1962-1965, Cerri Tomb - Cerro Cemetery 1947. Portaluppi in Laveno was a bit like home: he not only designed the historic buildings of the Italian ceramic company (Portaluppi was a friend of Luciano Scotti, manager and owner of the Italian ceramic company), but he took to heart the relaunch of this brand that he would write an important chapter of Made in Italy, suggesting the name of the one who was the artistic director for 40 years: Guido Andlovitz.

Villa Bassani takes its name from **Franco Bassani**, "commendatore" and lawyer, born in Milan in 1895, and who attended Laveno Mombello, where his grandfather was a teacher at the Elementary Schools (and had as a student Ernesto De Angeli, the famous textile entrepreneur). Bassani dedicated himself to the direction of the Plasmon company (baby food), founded by his father-in-law, Cesare Scotti. In 1960 he was elected president of the then "Casa di Riposo Opera Pia Perabò" (Rest home for the elderly) in Cerro di Laveno and had a new modern retirement home built, built with his own funds, inaugurated in 1966, in Brianza in Laveno (the mountain to the left of the ferry landing). In 1973, due to his particular merits and dedication, he was proclaimed "Honorary Citizen", the first, of Laveno Mombello. Upon his death in 1985, he devoted a large part of his conspicuous assets to the institution for the construction of a fourth pavilion, for non self-sufficient patients, leaving his wife Giannina the task of continuing the journey undertaken. Giannina Scotti Bassani died in 2008. The Laveno rest home for the elderly is named after the "Knight of Labor" **Menotti Bassani** (Laveno 1.1.1864 - Milan 7.4.1927) publisher-printer. The Scotti-Bassani family is buried in the cemetery of Laveno.

On the Laveno lakeside in front of the former town hall and next to the large flowerbed, engraved in the stone of the parapet you will find the **date of construction of the lakeside** of Piazza Italia: 1928-29. Curious that the year of the fascist era is also indicated (seventh): VII E.F... . The **canal bridge** is a bridge over which runs a water course, which allows you to overtake another waterway or a drop. There is a canal bridge that passes over the Luino-Gallarate railway line just before the Gaggio tunnel near Mombello. It is visible from the small bridge over the railway, in Sangiano between Via Verdi and Via Mazzini.

The **Vegezzi house** is in Via Labiena 35, Laveno. The first document relating to the Vegezzi family dates back to 1307. The descendants of the Vegezzi in Laveno, after the death of the last heirs, Sig.ne Elisa (1906-1975) and Maria Teresa Vegezzi (1907-1992), are completely extinct. The ogival window on the Vegezzi palace should be 300 or 400 or in the worst case of the first 500.

The **Moroni chapel** is at the intersection of Via Profarè with Via Rebolgine, Laveno. The name of this Cappelletta derives from the Moroni family, owner of the area. Even today in May the locals recite the rosary in front of the chapel.

Villa Porro is at the end of Viale dei Tigli, Laveno. The Villa originally had a large park that reached the beginning of the present Viale dei Tigli where **there are still today the columns of the original entrance**. The Villa just after the Second World War became an orphanage founded by Don Natale Motta of Varese thanks to the contributions collected by the friends of the soccer player of the Great TORINO, Franco Ossola (from Varese) who died in the famous Superga plane crash in Turin in 1949 : the institute took the name of Franco Ossola. The Villa then became the property of the Fathers of the Precious Blood and finally of the CAST non-governmental organization for the development of countries in the southern hemisphere. It is currently owned by an American citizen. Edoardo Porro (Padua, 13 September 1842 - Milan, 18 July 1902) was an Italian gynecologist, academic and politician, famous for his contributions in the field of obstetrics and gynecology, later appointed Senator of the Kingdom in 1891.

In the former kindergarten of Cavona di Cuveglio, there is the museum of **The American Southwest**. It is the extraordinary collection of Lorenzo Vescia, a doctor with a passion for Native Americans. There are 350 pieces purchased by Dr. Vescia in thirty years of travels to New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, Utah, California, East Coast and Mexico: the papers of Lincoln for the end of slavery, the objects of daily life of Aztecs, Mayans, Apache, Navajo, Sioux and the ban issued by the provisional government of Texas during the war against Mexico which, in 1836, cost the life of the popular hero David Crockett.

The **Magone plateau** is the flat area where today there is the Gigliola restaurant in Casere, Laveno. The Capanna Gigliola was built in 1882 by the owner of the ceramics factory Revelli in Laveno, who was looking for a "corner of paradise" to rest the body and mind after the days at work by the lake. In 1945, the villa was transformed into an inn.

Sass Barbé (barbers tone) is also called Sass de Solireou (Solirö) and has a wonderful view from the top of Laveno and its gulf. From the lake or from the road to Cerro, Sass Barbé is the "point" to the left of the Sasso del Ferro, divided by the basin of Vararo and Casere and by the valley of the Riale di Magona stream. The Sass Barbè has a height of 920 meters. From the mule track from Monteggia to Casere there are white red signs that at a crossroads that you have to leave to continue uphill to the left for Sass Barbè. The climb is without obvious signs ... you pass next to an enclosure then to a repeater with a view of Lake Maggiore, then a hunting plateau and then only a very wild wood, with very little evidence of a path and full of fallen trees. Reached the Sasso Barbè, go down to the homonymous Pass, where the "beaten" and marked path of the "Pizzoni di Laveno" begins.

The hill of **Montecristo** (Mount Christ, once called Mongello) is more or less high like Monteggia. Montecristo stands out in isolation, looking from the lake or from the road to Cerro, to the left of Laveno between the Castello and Monteggia hills. It is recognizable by a long red building almost at the top. Between the Montecristo and Monteggia (and the top of the stone of the Fungo, of Sass Barbé and I Pizzoni) there is the path of Piazza or "Piash". Via Montecristo starting from via Valdinacca (on foot) or from Via Professor Monteggia (by car) leads to Montecristo and Piazza.

The Strecia del Ronchiolo joins Via De Angeli to Via Roma, Laveno, and is also called the De Angeli staircase. Ronchiolo means small rocky ledge. Strecia means narrow in dialect. It should not be confused with the **Strecia del Ronchè** that starts from Piazza Marchetti and arrives in Via S. Fermo. Ancient staircase that crossed cultivated fields until the eighteenth century. The name ronchiolo was given because it led to the area of the lake Ronchiolo where at the end of the eighteenth century a second municipal port had been built of which today no trace remains (but where today there is Porto Labieno).

At the top of Mombello in Via Canvale, there is the **Belvedere of Canvale** (also called Belvedere di Mombello) the view extends between the trees on the gulf and the plain of Laveno and on Mount Sasso del Ferro. Tradition says that in the Vicolo Canvale in the afternoon of May 31, 1859 Garibaldi, coming from Cittiglio, went to this place to direct operations against the fort Castello. Other sources speak of Monte Brianza.

La Carona (the same name of a town near Lugano, Switzerland) is the wooded area south of Via Cittiglio and the slope of Mount S. Clemente in the municipality of Laveno Mombello. From the Carona you can reach the Ca 'dul Triz and the beautiful surrounding meadows near the aqueduct beyond the parking lot of the former Moulin Rouge nightclub. The path starts from Via Nazè and goes up to the Sanctuary of S. Clemente in the parish of Sangiano (but in the municipality of Caravate). The municipality of Laveno ends a few meters before the church of San Clemente.

In Cerro, from Piazza Manzoni take Via Clateo Castellini, a beautiful and narrow street once upon a time. Go up and turn to the left to reach a small group of houses with a pictorial effect. Passing under a portico with a wooden ceiling, you come a few steps from the lake. Beyond a low wall the waves beat with rhythmic flow against the underlying cliff. This is the enchanted corner of the **Paruscée** where the simplicity of ancient things fuses with the taste of the small detail. The clear light of the lake that stretches out in front penetrates and envelops the small corner creating a timeless atmosphere.

Brèra not to be confused with the much more famous street and entertainment district of Milan (Bréra, acute accent) is the traditional name of the area behind Nisso (Mombello) towards the chapel of Via Olive and towards Casanova. An area that remained as it was 200 years ago with green fields and centuries-old plants. Beautiful meadows and woods stretching up to the Bostano and Mirasole. It can be reached for example by passing under the underpass (a kind of small tunnel under the old houses) of **Casanova**.

A few minutes walk from the center of Laveno Mombello is a small unmarked waterfall, formed by the waters of the Riale stream. Locals call it the **Devil's Waterfall (Cascata del Diavolo)**. There are no

indications on site, however it is really easy to reach. The route is short and starts from the Via Repubblica car park. The path is the same one that leads to the Sasso del Ferro and is known as the "Vararo mule track".

From the parking lot we cross the pergola and head towards the old part of Laveno. After the fountain turn left into Via Caprera, then a little further on we turn right into Via Vararo, following the sign for the villages of Brena and Casere. The climb starts to get very steep right away. After passing the last house the path curves to the left, so a little further on you will hear the sound of the waterfall. On the right side of the path, just before a light pole with a yellow-green paint stamp, you can see a track(not indicated) that goes down towards the river. Following it you can reach the water in a few minutes and the Devil's Waterfall appears before our eyes. The water jump is small but very suggestive. Walking time: 15 minutes, distance 1.5 km round trip, height difference 90 meters.

Giovanni Battista Podestà was an artist of Italian **Art Brut** (or irregular art). Born into a large family (12 sisters) of Lombard farmers, at the age of ten he left school. In 1915 he fought at the front and was taken prisoner by the Austrians, when he returned home the land does not allow the sustenance of the family, forcing him to leave. He arrives in Laveno Mombello where he becomes a policeman and then a worker. With the outbreak of the Second World War, he is again called to arms. Between the wars he painted Lake Maggiore, also to be able to sell some paintings and round up the salary. After the Second World War, Podestà took on the appearance that everyone remembers of him: he grew his beard and hair and built **the famous inlaid stick**. He dedicated himself to sculptures and bas-reliefs made from recycled materials, such as fragments of mirrors, metal, scraps and sawdust, with which he transmitted a colorful universe rich in religious symbolism, close to the peasant world, almost medieval. His works also show a desire to denounce the loss of traditional values in the nascent consumer society. When his wife Maria died in 1974, he stopped creating and took refuge in an interior and unreal world. He died two years later. His works have been exhibited in various exhibitions in Europe, from **the Museum of Art Brut in Lausanne to the Halle Saint-Pierre in Paris**. In Laveno, he is remembered to come down from Via Roma from his home (Vicolo Monteggia, in the buildings for workers in Korea, nicknamed after the Korean War of the Fifties for their low appearance) with that stick transformed into an authentic work of art, with his thick beard and often you could see him admiring the lake just above the former ceramic factory (now Hotel Charme), just where Laveno has now dedicated a street to him (the road that from Piazza Cacciatori delle Alpi, at the end of Via Roma, goes down to the Hotel Charme). The inhabitants of Laveno remember him as tall, with a **long beard and hair and dressed in a very curious way**. In the work of Giovan Battista Podestà we find recurrent motives of death, religion and society. That death that he saw up close with the loss of six of his twelve sisters, during the two wars, with hunger, always present in a frugal life like his. Religion: at Easter, Podestà went around Laveno with the crucifix on his shoulder and climbed to Montecristo (at the top of Via Montecristo). On the mountain there was a hotel (now a villa recognizable by its elongated shape and red color) where immigrants from southern Italy stayed, who watched him pass and followed him. Society: the observation of changes from the post-war period onwards. For example, the arrival of television in the 50s, the change in customs in the relationship between men and women, immorality, the nonsense of futile speeches, the relationship between man and money.

Luigi Russolo (Portogruaro, 30 April 1885 - Laveno-Mombello, 4 February 1947) was an Italian composer, painter and inventor. Signatory of the manifesto *L'arte dei rumori* (art of noises), in which he theorizes the use of noise in the musical context, he is considered **the first artist** to have explored the concept of **noise music**. His music is performed with an instrument he designed himself called *intonarumori* (intone noises). Russolo organised a series of concerts at the Coliseum Theatre in London in 1914 (where he caused a riot) and at the Théâtre des Champs Élysées in 1921. **John Cage**, American composer and music theorist, considered one of the most important and significant personalities of the twentieth century, admitted that he was deeply influenced by Russolo who understood the **importance of electricity for the future development of music**. After living in Paris from 1927 to 1933, he returned to Italy and moved to Cerro di Laveno. Russolo was absorbed in the study of occultism and in the practice of meditation and yoga. He began to paint romantic landscapes, a genre against which he rebelled 20-30 years earlier. The **beautiful landscape of Cerro di Laveno inspired him in a series of paintings**. Russolo is buried in the **cemetery of Laveno**, in Via Ronco S. Maria, entering left at the top. In his house in Via Rosmini (which still exists today) he received some friends including Paolo Buzzi (who instead had a house in Via S. Defendente: it is the house with a poem on the walls) that will remain close to him until his death, the painter Mario Auber, Boris Georgiev and the painter Innocente Salvini (there is a museum dedicated to him in Cocquio Trevisago).

The church of S. Rocco, documented from the fifteenth century, at the foot of the Comabbio hill, was **demolished and rebuilt** in 1960 during the works for the construction of the Vergiate-Besozzo road. A location not far from the original was chosen for the new building, on the left side (from Besozzo) of the new road. Some of the interior frescoes of the disappeared building were recovered by tear and replaced in the new church.

The mysteries of Lake Maggiore

Sesto Calende

A Christian church on a pagan place

Just outside the village of Sesto Calende, near a wood, there is the famous "**Sass da Preja Buja**" (dark stone pebble): it is an erratic boulder, an important place of pagan worship that presents curious footprints, summit and some basins, used to host votive objects during the ancient rituals. In all likelihood, it was used as a sacrificial altar in prehistoric times to propitiate fertility rites: a few years ago, young women used to go to the rock to propitiate fertility. Next to the boulder you can see other large erratic stones with interesting petroglyphs. Sass da Preja Buja has been declared a **national natural monument**. A little less than 200 meters from the small Oratory of San Vincenzo emerges, a small church from the 12th-13th centuries: the building is near the boulder, testimony to the fact that, very often, the buildings of Christian worship were built on ancient pagan sites, so that Christianity could replace the previous local cults. A few hundred meters from the Abbey of San Donato, in a flat expanse where once stood the ancient port of Sesto, called Scozola, there is the oratory of San Vincenzo near the erratic boulder of Preja Buja.

These are two monuments, the first historical, the second natural, very different from each other yet united by an aura of mystery, also due to the proximity to the "dragon pit".

One of the frescoes of San Vincenzo represents St. George, the saint who defeated a dragon, and another the Magi, symbol of the Nativity: this makes this place even more fascinating and magical, where until recently young women they went to pray to propitiate the gift of fertility.

San Vincenzo has its roots in the mists of time: it seems that a pagan temple existed already in the I-II century AD. The foundations of the current building date back to the 10th-11th century.

A few steps from the Oratory stands in all its majesty the erratic boulder of Preja Buja, a dialect term that can be translated as "dark stone" or "pierced stone". It is a huge stone dragged downstream following the melting of the glaciers in the Quaternary, consisting mainly of serpentinite and therefore of green color.

The rock really has something magical both in color and in shape and in its magnetic characteristics: it seems that here the compass stops working!

How to get there: Follow the Oratory of San Vincenzo, when you reach the church take the road to the forest following the sign that leads to the boulder



Angera

The "Door of the Fairies"

At the foot of the castle of Angera, there is a cavity, difficult to spot, which in ancient times was a mithraeum: it is the only example in the whole of the worship of the god Mithras, widespread in other regions. The cave was given the name of Tana del Lupo, Antro di Mitra and Grotta delle Fate. Outside there are still traces of rather mysterious reliefs, linked to ancient rituals, and cavities that had to contain tombstones or votive objects. A legend tells that inside the cave, every 100 years, opens a magic door that leads to another dimension populated by fairies and supernatural beings. No one has ever crossed the threshold to tell what is actually on the other side ...

The miracle of blood sweat

Also in Angera, the Sanctuary of Madonna della Riva deserves a visit, in which the miracle of the "blood sweat" of the Madonna with Child happened, still present and venerated inside the church. It was June 27, 1657 and it happened that blood gushed from the front of the Virgin Mary, positioned on a side wall of the door that served to the Casa Bern. The fact was noted by a woman praying on her knees in front of the image. The woman, intimidated by the inexplicable event, cried out to the miracle. The Provost Mr. Giorgio Castiglioni, wiped the miraculous blood with a white linen.

How to get there: The sanctuary is located in Piazza Garibaldi - Angera

Brebbia

The temple dedicated to the goddess Minerva

We move along the coast up to Brebbia, in front of the Church of SS. Pietro e Paolo di Brebbia is one of the most beautiful Romanesque churches in the Varese area, of which there is documentation from the tenth century (but the construction took place from the fifth century). The name derives from "Brabia", ie "prize", "victory", "honorable thing", but also from "Plebia", or plebs. The B and the P were often confused and happened to call it with both names. As an etymology, the first hypothesis would make more sense, that is the definition of victory, for the glorious past of the city that was an important strategic node for the control of the road to Sesto Calende. It was founded on the ancient temple dedicated to Minerva (Athena for the Romans), goddess of war and intellect, center of an important sacred wood. Even today on the northern side it is possible to see a stone with a Roman inscription which confirms the presence of an ancient pagan temple. Almost certainly it was realized to remember that Christianity replaced the ancient religions, causing them to perish. The stone, difficult to read because it is ruined by time, is located outside the northern part and shows the following inscription:

MINERV (a)
E. C. ALB (in)
VS. CAS (yes)
ANUS
V S L M



The thumb miraculously healed

In Brebbia we remember the legend of a miracle: a carpenter, during the construction of the church, because of a clumsy blow, he cut his thumb clearly. San Giulio pity, appeared to the poor man miraculously hanging up his finger. This saint first founded the church of Santa Maria in the 5th century. He was also the first to evangelize, together with his brother Giuliano, the lands of Lake Maggiore and especially of the Island of Orta, where a legend says that he would even fight a dragon. How to get there: The church is located in the main square

Gemonio

Flowers of Life and hidden tunnels

The church of S. Pietro a Gemonio was built in the seventh century, when there was already a small chapel owned by the monastery of San Pietro in Ciel d'oro of Pavia, but the current Romanesque structure dates from the X-XI century with additions in the XV. The mysterious object is the altar of the year 1000, decorated with pagan images of the god Mithras, stars, crosses, flowers, stairs and the sun of the Alps. In the central "arch" niches, some "flowers of life" are very visible, ancient symbols linked to pagan cults and to the Knights Templars; on the sides, instead, there are two series of vertical squares. Legend has it that the altar concealed a secret access to a tunnel that connected the church to the fortified tower of Cocquio Trevisago. Because of the plague of 1631 that had devastated these areas, it was transformed into a lazaretto and ossuary, in fact the restoration of the last centuries brought to light several burials under the pavement. In 1912 the church was declared a National Monument.

How to get there: Gemonio, Piazza Vittoria

Info: Via Rocco Cellina, 20 - 21036 Gemonio (VA) - Tel. 0332601501 Fax. 0332604012

info@comune.gemonio.va.it

www.comune.gemonio.va.it



The mystery of the UFO that frightened Mussolini and disappeared in America

In June of '33 a UFO crashed in Italy. The Mussolini regime covers everything. But according to Pinotti, of the National UFO Center, that event led the Duce to ally with Hitler

There is a mysterious story of UFO hidden and buried by the fascist regime, led by Benito Mussolini.



It is that of an unidentified aircraft that crashed near Lake Maggiore, in Italy.

An event that, according to Roberto Pinotti, founder and secretary of the National UFO Center, could redefine the history of the pre-war period and the alliance between Mussolini and Hitler. The UFO - a term that had not yet been coined at the time - crashed on June 13, 1933 at the border between Piedmont and Lombardy, more precisely in Vergiate, in the province of Varese, near Lake Maggiore, not too much distant from Malpensa airport. Among the remains of that aircraft, not only wreckage: the bodies of the pilots are also found.

The only trace and testimony of the first UFO case in Italy is a dispatch from the Stefani agency, of a "very reserved" nature. The story was immediately secreted, even if an office, the Cabinet RS / 33, which also included Guglielmo Marconi, continued to take care of the thing. Professor Pinotti explained that "the remains of UFO, which in the drawings is described as a cylindrical aircraft, with a narrowing just before the bottom, with porthole on the side, from which came out white and red lights, were brought into the warehouses of the Siai -Marchetti (airplanes factory) in Vergiate, where they remained for 12 years, as well as the pilots' bodies, preserved in formalin, studied for a long time. It is known that they were 1.80 tall, had light hair and eyes ".

From the features of the bodies found, Pinotti, advances his personal hypothesis, based on the resemblance between the two aliens and the German pilots. "The Duce believed, perhaps, that it would be" opportune "to ally with a military power like that of Nazi Germany, capable of producing an aircraft never seen before, rather than having it as an enemy," says the secretary National UFO Center.

But the mystery has remained so over the years. In fact, after the war the Allies took those objects and sent them to America. But the mistery is not resolved, on the contrary, as Pinotti points out: "Strangely, the three people who knew about the transport of those boxes in the US died, two in sea accidents, one suicide".

As is evident there are still many missing answers. What is certain is that the experts agree that the area between Lake Maggiore and Ticino is among those with more signs of unidentified objects.

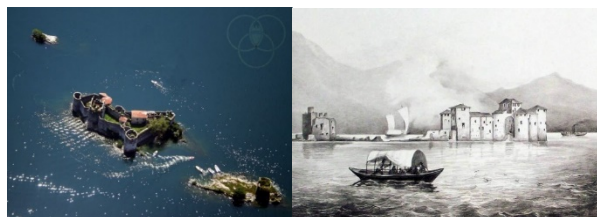
The castles of Cannero

*This castle, from the unusual position of being in the middle of the water rather than on a classic hill, was built by the five **Mazzarditi brothers**, nicknamed the "Malpaga brothers", who around 1404 formed a group of feared brigands. As a sort of "lake pirates", after seizing the village of Cannobio, they plundered every village and vessel they encountered. This castle, called precisely "Castello della Malpaga", constituted their refuge. Wrapped in the fog, impregnable, disturbing, no one had the courage to get closer to recover their stolen goods. But ten years later, the Duke Filippo Maria Visconti, following too many complaints from the inhabitants of the place, decided to besiege the fortress with his army, making the brothers surrender by starvation and destroying the castle. It was later rebuilt and renovated by the Borromeo family in 1520, at the time lords of the lake, to be used as a watchtower against Swiss raids.*

The hidden treasure and the ghosts of the pirates

Over the years the Mazzarditi brothers managed to accumulate a wealth of riches, which perhaps, before succumbing before the Duke Filippo Maria Visconti who conquered them, threw into the lake itself. Who knows that these waters do not yet keep an ancient treasure! It is said that in the days of thick fog, you can see around the castle their ghost sailing ship that still wanders around their ancient home in search of the lost treasure. The treasure was never found but only, thanks to a fisherman, a slab of marble on which it was engraved: "At the Calends of May, at the dawn of the sun, the treasure will be found" ...

..and different incisions whose interpretation could let the Treasure emerge! If we were to pass between Cannero and Cannobbio we met the famous "Orrido di Sant'Anna", a place where the Mazzarditi brothers threw their hostages: but we also find the miraculous imprint of San Carlo Borromeo!





Walserhouse and Monte Rosa

The mysterious Walser people

Article and photographs by Francesco Teruggi - info@francescoteruggi.com
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At the beginning of the year 1000, just when it seemed to approach the dreaded End of the World announced by the Apocalypse, while folk tales were flourishing and millenarianism spread among superstitions, prophecies and eschatological doctrines, a group of still mysterious origins, perhaps high-Alemannic, came Valle del Goms, along the steps left free from the snows that had covered them in previous centuries.

The Walser, these sturdy people, perhaps the last descendants of the Saxons who had migrated to central and southern Europe in the eighth century, arrived in the heart of the Swiss Alps, between the Gotthard and the Bernese Oberland, did not choose the plains or the lower pastures, but climbed to the highest and inhospitable altitudes. Here, where only demons and monstrous animals could survive, they founded their first colonies, shaping and taming the mountain.

Their spreading to the south-east only occurred later, between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, when small groups of settlers began to detach themselves from the mother colonies in search of new pastures and new cultivable land. At the end of the fifteenth century there were as many as forty Walser colonies scattered all around Monte Rosa.

Feudal lords and monasteries - especially Benedictines - sensing their abilities, certainly favored their settlement in the high pastures. They never remained isolated groups, their settlements were always crucial junctions on transhumance routes and the excess products coming from agriculture and breeding were sold to the fairs, religious or not, of the alpine arc of which they were frequent visitors. The Walsers were always "independent", untied by nobles and powerful, even by those who had promoted their arrival and preserved almost intact their cultural heritage, which influenced and changed forever that of the indigenous peoples. They managed to build roads, bridges, walkways, steps, shelters where there were only steep cliffs and prohibitive for men as for animals, thus creating new routes and new routes to connect the settlements between them and with other centers. They made terraces on the mountain slopes for growing, almost without the use of the plow, winter rye, alternating with barley, millet, oats and a few vegetables. They created vast lawns for livestock from which milk produced cheese and milk and wood for the supply of firewood and for building.

They lived in houses partly in stone walls and partly in wood, covered by an equally stone roof, in which the shelter for the animals on the ground floor and a large room for the family coexisted: the family lived around the hearth, on the upper floor ..





Santuario Della

Guardia - Breastfeeding of the Madonna - Siren Coat of Arms of the Village - Proto-Romanesque Figures - Statue Holding the Grail - Butterfly Symbol - Symbolism of the Energies - Symbolism of the Rotating Sun - Alchemical Painting of the Altar of Saint Joseph and Floor Signs

The mystery of the "alchemical" cathedral of Ornavasso

On the other hand, the inhabitants of a Valaisan colony of the Ossola region were unaware of the equally prodigious and extraordinary events. Mysteriously, in the seventeenth century, while the Inquisition triumphed, they embarked on a dangerous and unsustainable project: to build a grandiose Sanctuary, as they had never seen in the valley, around the unseemly and prodigious image of a breast-feeding Virgin Mary, like an ancient Celtic goddess, the Great Primordial Mother. One hundred years after the building, never completed, stood on the village with its unmistakable octagonal profile.

For what purposes was it truly raised? How and why a community of only 1600 souls managed to make it happen? Where did they find the necessary funds? Who was really the abbot-knight who, a few years before the start of construction, had established himself in that same country?

The story, only recently unveiled, begins in 1659, when a cadet son of the noble and powerful Milanese family of the Visconti di Modrone retires to an unknown location on the north-western outskirts of the duchy. Here, in only five years, he built his private residence, a curious octagonal building, where he immediately withdrew.

In the following years, a few meters from his possessions, a simple Marian chapel scattered among the wooded cliffs, will become the fulcrum and the main altar of an immense sanctuary, just as octagonal, whose dome reaches 27 meters in height and it stands only on eight large stone columns. A little-known work by one of the leading Milanese architects of the time, Attilio Arrigoni - a pupil of the famous Francesco Maria Richini - is a masterpiece of the most austere Alpine Baroque, a monument of unexpected perfection.

In it, the principles of the most rigorous Counter-Reformation, the same ones that emerged from the Council of Trent and were extensively treated by San Carlo Borromeo, seemed to be realized with the utmost precision. Instead, he was secretly conceived, built and built like a real old-time cathedral, like Chartres, Stephansdom in Vienna or Notre Dame in Paris, thanks to the silent and almost invisible intervention of expert magistri, builders of cathedrals and at the will of that mysterious knight-abbot. The proportions of the building, never finished and never truly consecrated, show the presence in every detail of the golden number. Its structure suggests the desire to create a huge roundabout, which, however, was never completed. Its position and its seemingly random directions hide unexpected, coherent and powerful alignments with local astronomical and telluric phenomena. Equally in the paintings, in the frescoed cornices, in the inlays, in the stuccoes, so perfectly adhering to the dogmas, tradition and orthodoxy, the hidden symbols and the occult glyphs of an ancient and powerful wisdom, of that Grail that a statue on the altar once held in the right hand.

The abbot's death, games of power and an unfortunate structural failure prevented the building from reaching its final form. The successors of the nobleman, however, tried to complete the project: another construction, always based on the same eight-sided geometry, saw the light soon by desire of the most powerful brotherhood of the country, but in the meantime the residence of the prelate, left to 'negligence of his heirs, was gradually abandoned and dismantled.

In the nineteenth century then, the repeated floods of the stream that ran through Ornavasso settled the last hard blow to the decadence of those monuments, definitively sweeping them away. Only the sanctuary remained, abandoned and closed, which, after more than three centuries, still stands on the plateau, the only and silent witness of the story, to the shadows of the ancient signal tower.

Inside it continues to guard the precious clues, hidden and shamelessly in sight, of that incredible story made of intrigue and domination, of hermetic knowledge and perfect sciences, of alchemy and ancient rites: the true epic of an impossible project: the legendary history of the Walser Cathedral, the immense "spiritual machine", a masterpiece of the unknown abbot-knight-chemist, who in it had lavished all his knowledge and his bonds of blood and power; a project never equaled, not even more than a century later, by the famous Rennes Le Chateau.

The miracle of the Madonna who cries

It is the evening of 8 January 1522 in Cannobio, on Lake Maggiore, in the current province of Verbano Cusio Ossola. In the tavern of Tommaso Zacchei there are only a few customers left when the 13-year-old daughter of the owner, Antonietta, launches a cry of wonder. "Come, come, the picture of the

Madonna is crying", screams the girl. Immediately, all those present flocked: the picture of the Sorrowful (the Pietà), hanging on the wall of one of the upper rooms, facing the stairs, is shedding tears of blood. All those in the inn could witness the miracle. But the most amazing prodigy happened the following evening, at 6 pm. Numerous witnesses witnessed the swelling of the rib wound and from it they saw a small rib come out, proportionate to the size of the painting, which fell on the chest below. On 25 January the Archiepiscopal Curia of Milan charged two Delegates for the interrogation of witnesses most worthy of faith; the sworn depositions of the witnesses are recorded in a public deed of the notary Bartolomeo Albertini. Ten of those who witnessed more than one prodigy were chosen, as the tears were repeated on other occasions. The holy rib is today the object of popular devotion.



Those victims swallowed and never returned and the mysteries guarded by the lake

The lake does not always return those who swallow. The Lago Maggiore basin, 212 square kilometers and a maximum depth of 370 meters, is wide, with steep slopes, equipped with strong currents. It's dangerous. This is the case of Damiano Citton. On October 3, 2009, the 118 nurse, who was then 47 years old, had gone out on the lake with his boat. The vessel was found empty near Ghiffa. The research had no effect and in January 2013 the Verbania court declared its presumed death. The following July it seemed that the yellow could have been solved with the finding of a corpse. The firefighters who were looking for an elderly man who had fallen off the ferry came back to her by electronic means. Subsequent findings excluded that it was Citton.

For thirteen years, the lake has retained the remains of Antonio Cabra, the postman from Biella who was staying in a campsite in Fondotoce in August 2002. Released for a motorboat trip and never returned, it was long sought by rescuers, who found the boat adrift and with the keys inserted near Baveno. No trace of man.

After ten years and a file still open to the Prosecutor of Verbania for the crime of murder, it was not possible to explain why the body of Don Valentino Moretti, old parish priest of Solcio di Lesa, was found to float - in April 2005 - near the Borromean Islands. The autopsy said that the priest was thrown into water already lifeless, with the probable intention to make the body disappear. But in that case, evidently, the lake did not want to contribute to feed a mystery (the disappearance), bigger than the already intricate mystery (the murder) of Don Valentino.

On the other hand, the search for the T19 Locusta motor-boat has taken on the outline of a "treasure hunt". The medium of the Royal Guard of Finance in service at Cannobio sank due to bad weather on the evening of 8 January 1896 (there were twelve people on board) in the arm of the lake between the center of the Piedmontese highlands and Maccagno. Since then many have looked for it, but no one has identified it, nor reported it to the surface. Unlike the boat Milan, which crossed the lake with soldiers on board the RSI (Italian Social Republic of Mussolini) and, machine-gunned by Allied aircraft in 1944, sank beneath the hill of Castagnola, where the fire brigade robot I 'resumed in 2007.

Val Grande: a valley and its mystery!

*Val Grande is **the largest wild and uninhabited area in the Alps**: it is located in the north of Verbania. To admire the cupels of the Val Grande you have to follow the Cicogna - Alpe Prà path which allows us to go from the 732m of Cicogna (the last inhabited village) to a height of 1250m of the Alpe Prà meadows.*

The altitude rises constantly between the chestnut wood and the agricultural terraces now in disuse; You are helped in the ascent by slow bends that allow you to catch your breath.

Through the branches of the last trees of the forest that comes back to life after a long winter, we begin to glimpse Lake Maggiore and the tops of Nibbio's horns.

Once you have come out completely outdoors, and overcome some outcropping boulders surrounded by bushes of brooms, we see the refuge of the Alpine (about 1 hour 1 and 15 walk). Before reaching the refuge you have to take a narrow path that is detached from the main one on the left to deal with the boulder of Alpe Prà.

Near a cherry tree there is the famous rock: flat with the point facing the valley and Lake Maggiore.

The cups are recesses of a few centimeters diameter artificially obtained by man on flat or slightly steep rocky bases, usually placed in a dominant and panoramic position, as in the case of Alpe Prà.

Present all over the world, for some scholars they could be connected to places of worship and prehistoric tradition. There are many hypotheses on the meaning of the boulders, among which they were representations of constellations, maps of the territory or altar boulders for sacrifices.

The meaning of these cups is a continuous source of debate among scholars who give heterogeneous interpretations; as regards those present in Italy and in Val Grande, reference is made to the cult of water, as the cups collected rainwater to fertilize the earth.



The mysteries of the Brissago Islands

From the baroness Antoinette St. Legér, to the German financier Max Emden, to the current public property

The islands of Brissago are in the north of the lake, in front of Brissago (CH), in the region of the state border. Antoinette Bayer was born in Saint Petersburg in 1856, probably a daughter of Tsar Alexander I: in fact his mother Guglielma Bayer had free access to the court. At 16, she emigrated to Naples where she married for the first time. A second marriage follows with a certain Jaeger. In 1881 he married Richard Fleming, officer of the British army; they move to the shores of Lake Maggiore.

With the death of her husband's uncle, Baron St. Léger, she received a conspicuous legacy that allowed her to purchase the Island of Rabbits for Fr.20,000.- (as the islands of Brissago were then called). The deed of purchase dates back to 7 July 1885. Immediately the transformation of the Isola Grande into a park began, which was endowed with rare plants, like the eucalyptus of Australia, several palms, as is demonstrated today by the beautiful exemplar of *Phoenix canariensis*.

Antoinette frequents Franz Liszt and the music circles, then the Troubetzkoi (artists with the villa in Ghiffa), the Verbanese painter Daniele Ranzoni and the Locarnese artist Filippo Franzoni. On the island there were also poets, among them Rainer M. Rilke and Luigi Menapace who dedicated to Saint Leger some lines in his book "Sole d'Ascona" (8 Sun of Ascona), of 1957. She spends her life among literary salons and concerts, with dense exchanges of letters in all languages, in Ascona knows many artists and cultural figures, including the Russian Marianne von Werefkin, and she is an inspirer of the Irish writer James Joyce.

Because of bankrupt investments in mines and institutions, the Baroness was forced to sell the property in 1927, bought by the German of Hamburg Max Emden. She retired first to Moscow and later returned to Ticino to try to recover some of her assets, unfortunately without success, but spending part of her estate. Now in poverty, the "predators" admitted her to the San Donato nursing home in Intragna, where she died on January 24, 1948. Her mortal remains were transferred to the Great Island in 1972 and buried under a New Zealand bush.

In the eighties, the antiquarian Monza of Viganello showed to the undersigned an incredible collection of works and furnishings that belonged to the baroness St.Legér: the antiquarian said they came from an unidentified notable from Locarno.

The second life of the islands

Max Emden, financier, doctor of chemistry and mineralogy, owner of shops in Germany, who had bought the islands from Antoinette for Fr.350.000.-, built the current building, sparing neither the construction of the baroness nor the church of San Pancrazio. From 1927 to 1940 on the islands reigned another atmosphere, that of the neo-rich post-war Germany.

After his death in a Locarnese clinic, Emden was buried in the cemetery of Ronco s / Ascona. As happened previously for the Baroness St.Legér, also in this case part of the furniture was stolen, but also important works of art that were found in the villa were stolen. The son of Emden, Hans Erich persecuted as a Jew, in 1940 fled from Germany and took refuge in Chile. Switzerland would have refused him a residence permit. After the Second World War Hans Erich Emden returned to the Brissago Islands, but found the villa virtually empty and the works of art had disappeared. Hans Erich then offered the property to the highest bidder. Some personalities committed themselves to preventing the sale to certain speculators, who would make it a gambling house and a dancing club. Thus the Islands became half owned by the canton; for the rest they were divided between the municipalities of Ascona, Ronco s / Ascona, Brissago, the Swiss League for the protection of nature and that for the protection of natural heritage.

Hans Erich Emden did not tell his son Juan Carlos about the family history. The latter became aware of it after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, following an indemnity for a property expropriated at the time of the war. By chance, Juan Carlos Emden, in addition to the sale of the islands, became aware of a painting that belonged to his grandfather Max, which ended up in unclear circumstances in the Bührlé collection: Monet's "Poppy Field in Vétheuil": it was in the villas of the Isole di Brissago. Emil Bührlé bought Monet in 1941. The heirs of Emden want to know if the sale was regular or if the war, or other circumstances, "contributed" to change hands: the painting, in June 1940, on the death of Max Emden, was still in the

villa on the islands of Brissago. How did Monet come into Bührlé's hands? German lawyer Markus Stötzl, of Marburg, believes that the transfer "took place under suspicious circumstances and never cleared up".
Jean Olaniszyn



The decapitated knight

The **church of San Biagio** is the oldest religious building in Cittiglio; from the structural point of view it looks like a single-aisle chapel, with the altar to the west and the bell tower aligned to the façade (where there is the only entrance).

In the eighth century AD on the hill was erected a first small church, of extremely reduced dimensions. It was essentially a private chapel belonging to the noble family of Sanbiagio.

Around the year 1000 the primitive church was demolished and rebuilt: the nave was lengthened and the floor raised. Also in this period the bell tower was built.

In 2006, due to the need to create a ventilation cavity, they began to intervene on the floor of the church: so began an excavation work, funded by the Friends of San Biagio.

The floor in use until that year had been laid in the 1970s: after removing this surface, we proceeded to the actual excavation, which brought to light three more ancient floors, one superimposed on the other. In particular, one of the terracotta tiles dating back to 1630, one of the 1200 in red mortar and another of the year 1000 in mortar.

Twenty-one burials were also re-emerged, both simple burials and "stable" niches made of stone slabs. In particular, the skeleton of an adolescent was found in the anthropomorphic stone locom number 19, while the skeleton of an adult male was found in the sacellum 13, died as a result of **decapitation** and presenting various fractures due to sword blows (from this tomb also re-emerged a vitreous oil lamp, bronze nails and fragments of a clay vase).

They cut off his head. The crime was brutal, but only today begins to investigate. Perhaps he was a messenger from the podestà of Como, or a local nobleman, or a captain of fortune from the duchy of Milan, or a saintly preacher who sought shelter in the caves overlooking Lake Maggiore. That night, in a street in Cittiglio, this is certain, the skull of a knight was split by a blade, probably an iron sword, and divided by the body. His burial was found in a 2006 excavation.

The man was perhaps a medieval knight and he found himself facing the killer who hit him in the face. He fell to the ground and received at least two more shots from different angles. The side cut on the skull stems from an attempt to defend itself when, by now on the ground, the victim was succumbing. In other words, we are dealing with a killer of 1300.

This individual was probably a member of the De Citillio family, whose members used to be buried in the atrium of the ancient church of San Biagio and Sant'Andrea. The suspicion is that in the area that night, a massacre may have been committed. The clue? The skeleton of a **woman with an arrow in her chest**, not far. Killed, like the decapitated knight.



The mystery of the skeletons of the crypt of Azzio in Valcuvia (VA)

On the outskirts of Azzio there is the **church of Sant'Antonio di Padova**, which was annexed to the convent of Santa Maria degli Angeli, of the reformed Friars Minor, built in 1608, expanding and transforming a previous church dedicated to Sant'Eusebio, which served as a vicarial church directly dependent on the collegiate church of San Lorenzo di Canonica.

Adjacent to the church stood the convent whose structure is still recognizable, despite numerous and substantial changes even recently. Today there are still parts of the ambulatory of the two cloisters, the kitchen, the refectory, some cells and other rooms, all now privately owned, except for the church.

The discovery took place in 2012 during some work inside the church of the convent of the village.

The aim was to install a floor heating system, but during the excavations was discovered a crypt, or rather a hypogeic chamber (**underground construction** of historical and anthropological interest, built entirely by man or as a readjustment of natural cavities).

Thus 16 niches were found in Azzio, 12 of which were occupied by skeletons of friars belonging to the Order of Friars Minor Franciscans.

The extraordinary thing is **the way in which these friars were buried**: seated on a sort of stone seat and then walled up. I say that this is an extraordinary thing for northern Italy, because at the time, we assume that the crypt dates back to 1600, this ritual was common in the south of the country within the religious orders. There are traces of it in Naples, Sicily and Ischia.

But there is another peculiarity in this great discovery. Unlike what was discovered in Azzio, in Naples these seats, called *colatoi* or *cantarelle*, had a central hole inside the seat. This hole, according to the custom, was used to pour the biological sewage during the putrefaction phase of the body and to facilitate its drying. This phase lasted from 8 to 12 months, the time necessary for the bodies to dehydrate naturally. In Sicily, on the other hand, the watering cans were horizontal in order to obtain the mummification of the body.

Now, similar cases in northern Italy are more unique than rare. In Valenza Po, in the province of Alessandria, skeletons of some nuns have been found, inside an underground of the Church of the Annunziata, buried seated and walled as if they were placed inside a sort of sarcophagus. A burial of this type was also found in Cuvio.

Inside the crypt of Azzio, three skulls were found above an altar, a typical custom of the south of the country, and freeing the debris of the walls was discovered a common ossuary: probably, the monks walled the dead brothers and, at the end of the putrefaction phase, broke the wall, threw the bones in the ossuary, and then reuse the space to wall up the new deceased of the order.



The mystery of the funeral drape of the "Sun King" in a church of Craveggia in Val d' Ossola

It was September 1715 when - after seven years of authoritarian rule - the French people celebrated the death of the Sun King by profaning the chapel of the basilica of Saint Denis in Paris where the coffin of the sovereign had been reassembled. However, it remains a mystery why a century later the funeral cloth of Louis XIV was bought by the parish of a village in the Vigezzo valley, where it is still jealously preserved. In the church of Craveggia - a village in the Ossola that has just over 700 inhabitants - there is also the wedding veil that belonged to Marie Antoinette, as well as paintings and other valuable works from the palace of Versailles.

How the **funeral drape of the Sun King or the wedding mantle of Queen Marie Antoinette** arrived in the Vigezzo valley still feeds a lot of curiosity. The two precious objects are only a part of the "treasure" contained in the church of Saints James and Christopher of Craveggia, built in 1409 and enlarged in 1714 when a family from Rome brought the bones of St. Faustino in the religious building decorated with many paintings by Giuseppe Mattia Borghis. Since then, donations and bequests have enriched the town, which once had 1,600 inhabitants and is now 715. The Gallanty family, originally from the valley but emigrated to Paris, bought the funeral cloth of Louis XIV: it is handmade with six gobelins medallions depicting scenes of the Passion and Resurrection.

The reason for this choice is hidden in the papers of the parish archives, still to be studied: however, to attest the authenticity of the cloth there is the certificate of purchase of the wedding cloak of Marie Antoinette, twenty meters of heavy silk "operated", we only know that it was brought by emigrants.

More uncertain is the path that brought the wedding mantle of Marie Antoinette to the Vigezzo valley: twenty metres long, in heavy "operated" silk, it was then reused to make sacred vestments, because the revolutionaries - in contempt of the queen and her excesses - had ruined it.

For centuries the Vigezzo valley has been the land of chimney sweeps, master woodworkers and perfumers, who moved in search of fortune abroad, particularly in France and Germany.

Legend has it that **a child from Viguzzo who was cleaning the chimneys of the Louvre** in 1612 fainted a conspiracy against Louis XIII, obtaining in exchange for loyalty protection for all Ossola emigrants, who from then on were able to exploit privileged conditions to trade. Although far from home - and often with more money in their pockets than when they left - they did not forget their homeland. This is how the objects that make up the treasure today arrived in Craveggia, kept in the church of Santi Giacomo e Cristoforo, enlarged in 1714, when a family from Rome had **the bones of San Faustino** brought to the valley.

A parishioner, Liliana Poggini, has been taking care of that heritage for years and organizes guided tours with the Municipality.



Domo Valtravaglia: the mystery of the twin churches

Those who arrive in the main square of Domo, even by car, immediately feel that they are in a **unique place**, because they find themselves surrounded by buildings of an **unusual solemnity in a country place**.

The main church, dedicated to Santa Maria Assunta, has a beautiful very high Romanesque bell tower, and itself has very high bays and an important facade. In front of it, separated from the road, stands the Baptistery dedicated to St. John the Baptist: you can recognize it immediately because it has a central plan and is octagonal in shape and has Latin inscriptions. Not far away, there is another church, not immediately recognizable as such because the main entrance, which overlooks the street, is now closed by a wall and the long side has doors and windows like a normal house, but you understand that it is a church from the inscription that leaks on the facade: Church of Santo Stefano.

The reason is soon said: in the Middle Ages **Domo was the seat of a parish church**, which was later (1137) transferred to Brezzo di Bedero. The parish church was a main church where baptisms were celebrated, that's why the Baptistery was built nearby.

The presence of two churches and of the Baptistery attests to the importance of Domo in ancient times: even the dedication corresponds to that of the major religious centers, with a church dedicated to the Madonna and one to a martyr, while the Baptistery is always dedicated to St. John the Baptist.

What is now a much remodeled building, for historians remains a **very important trace of the transition of architecture from early medieval to Romanesque**, with a central plan construction, but with an apse to the east: the octagonal apse is quite rare, other examples are found in Castelseprio and Lenno in the province of Como. Early Middle Ages means **IX-X century and Carolingian age**: Carolingian decorations are found in the facade, with a decorative motif that occurs along the entire perimeter characterized by large arches, blind and paired, resting on elongated shelves. Scholars have found similar decorations in the Alpine churches, for example in San Vittore in Mesolcina.

It is true that the openings are larger than those found in Switzerland, but this is because they were reworked and enlarged in the nineteenth century.

In the Church of Santo Stefano, which has now become a home, are preserved valuable frescoes of the sixteenth century, perfectly preserved thanks to the recent restoration, with scenes of the Crucifixion and, in the vault, with the Evangelists and the Fathers of the Church.

The Church of Santa Maria Assunta underwent a profound remodelling in the 18th century, which is why only part of the lower part of the Romanesque bell tower is preserved, characterised by a large base (perhaps in the past it was a defence tower) and large corner pilasters, blind arches in the central part and small single lancet windows. The belfry was rebuilt in 1686 and in fact shows windows of much larger proportions.



The Three Mysteries of Grantola: A well of unknown origin, walls that are lost in the mists of time and a mysterious fresco.

Years ago, in the course of work on the paving in the old town centre, what would seem to be a well came to light, about 1.5 metres in diameter and about 9 metres deep, with the inside lined with bricks and with **"strange" graffiti** drawn on the walls of the bottom. A well for the supply of water? A natural tunnel then exploited for other purposes? an 'escape' tunnel to pass through the walls of the village? Waiting for certain answers, it has been covered with shatterproof glass and is visible to walkers.

The **'medieval' walls** - so called because they always existed by heart of villagers - but no one knows by whom they were erected, when and why.

They could be the remains of a city wall to protect the village, perhaps a stretch of the walls of some smaller castle (they existed in Bedero, Roggiano, Brissago, Mesenzana) of the tenth to eleventh centuries, or more simply the walls of the seventeenth-century Palazzo De Nicola, renovated in 1862 and equipped with two towers (the ancient castle?) with property straddling the stream Grantorella.

Old people remember that this palace enjoyed beautiful gardens sloping down to the stream and through a bridge - swept away by the flood of August 1900 that hit the area- connected to other gardens on the opposite bank ending in a background walled and severely 'ruined' by the same flood of the Grantorella. Since time immemorial, on a facade of the village there is **a fresco depicting a castle**: who is the author? where was the painted castle? It remains a mystery. Like the others of Grantola....



The mystery of the church of S. Michele All'Alpe, between Bisantium and Ireland

San Michele is a tiny church in a mountain pasture of Valtravaglia, where the homonymous festival takes place every year, between August and September, and where you must stop at any time of the year.

From the outside you will be struck by the perfection of its oriented apse, but if you are lucky enough to see it from the inside you will understand why the faithful are very fond of it.

It tells of the mystery that hovers over the area assuming a possible presence of Irish monks in these places, supported both by the type of engravings on the boulder erratic

Celtic cross or Irish cross on erratic rock and the presence of a certain iconography in the nearby Romanesque church (St. Michael was one of the first saints of Christianity, venerated by Lombard warriors, as it was written here in reference to the church of Voltorre). In this Romanesque church (other Romanesque churches in Valtravaglia can be found here), which has undergone several interventions over the centuries, were found frescoes of the thousand years with a "Byzantine" and archaic flavor, one of which depicts a curious S. Ambrogio without beard.

The church currently has a single nave ending in an apse facing east, with a cross-shaped ceiling and outside walls in pebbles and stones well aligned with a herringbone pattern. The sacristy and the bell tower date back to later times.

Only in recent times, in 2000, has the roof been redone in beola and were brought to light the ancient frescoes that had been covered with plaster. The frescoes have a variable date between the year one thousand and the fourteenth century. On the left wall stands a votive **Madonna, flanked by Sant'Antonio Abate and San Bernardo**, which dates back to the sixteenth century and is the work of the painter Guglielmo da Montegrino, also active in the nearby rectory of Brezzo di Bedero (the votive Madonnas are always pretty and refined ... have you seen those of Santo Stefano a Bizzozero?). More interesting is the fresco always on the left wall but closer to the altar where you can recognize St. Michael the Archangel, two other angels and a bidder who bears the words "Dominus cusstos". On the counter-façade stands out another winged archangel with St. Ambrose, depicted beardless and with pronounced ears, according to an iconography that is directly related to that present in the stories of St. Ambrose represented in the Ambrosian basilica of Milan and more precisely in the apse mosaic and the tiles of the golden altar of Volvinio. Later in the years, in other places, St. Ambrose was instead represented with a beard, tiara and bishop's vestments.



Church of San Michele all'Alpe di Porto Valtravaglia/San Michele in Porto Valtravaglia – facade/ San Michele in Porto Valtravaglia/ San Michele in Porto Valtravaglia – apse/ Celtic cross or Irish cross on an erratic rock/San Michele in Porto Valtravaglia-Madonna votiva / San Michele in Porto Valtravaglia-offering/ San Michele in Porto Valtravaglia-Arcangelo/San Michele in Porto Valtravaglia - Sant'Ambrogio / San Michele / Church of San Michele al Monte /

Here is what you can read in the presentation panel of the Church of San Michele all'Alpe



San Michele in Porto Valtravaglia - educational panel
San Michele, **Lombard traces**

In the fourth century, by virtue of the apostolic work of St. Patrick, St. Brendan and St. Bridget, Ireland became a breeding ground for austere Christians, righteous and animate, so in the following centuries, when in Italy the people, subject to the interests of powerful Roman families, suffered blackmail and multiplied both the deviances and heresies, the **Irish missionaries** decided to "re-christianize" Europe. It was the so-called Irish "diaspora" in Europe. These Irish were all monks of a hard asceticism that was inspired by one of the fathers of the Church: St. Anthony the Abbot. Because they had different traditions, customs and rituals of a local nature, the Irish missionaries brought with them the purity of the Gospel, there are many saints belonging to the Irish diaspora who came to Italy. In 610 one of them, **St. Columbanus**, forced to flee from France with his followers, came to Milan and under the protection of the Lombard king Agilulfo, formed a large number of hermitages where he settled his monks and from which later developed important ecclesiastical centers. **The Longobards** (Lombards) were a Germanic population that arrived in Hungary after long migrations. In 569 their king Alboin led them to Italy, being an excellent leader, with a flash war conquered the Veneto and Lombardy. By 580 the Lombards had occupied much of Italy and formed a solid state. The elective king was the supreme authority, and Egyptians always consulted with the assembly of free men (Arimanni). The Longobard kingdom was made up of provinces divided into Fare in turn divided into Arimannias, which were composed of family groups linked to cultivated land, forests and pastures: the "Gau". Then there were the dukedoms based in the main cities called "Cives". The king appointed the "Gastaldi", judges also in charge of tax collection. For the Lombards, the Alpe San Michele was a Gau d'alpeggio (pasture) composed of rustic hut farms. Probably one of the monks of San Colombano settled here, first in a nearby cave where years ago some ceramics and instruments of the VI-VII century A.D. were found. Then with the help of the locals began to build a chapel. Some "herringbone" points left in the masonry testify to the Lombard workers, while the Celtic cross with which the Rock of St. Michael was exorcised at that time suggests the Irish presence. Thirty years ago an ancient burial was found against the northern wall of the church: could it have belonged to one of the original monks?

St Michael, archangel warrior armed with a sword, fierce fighter against the devil and according to ancient traditions judge of the souls of the dead, adored by both Catholics and Arians, was the patron saint of the Lombard race. The dedication is a counterproof to the antiquity of the religious building. Let us try to understand the reasons for the religious settlement: the presence on site of men of Aryan or pagan religion and the desire to convert them to the Catholic faith, may be the origin of the church. In the tenth century it became an oratory where he was called to celebrate an ordained priest complete, for specific compensation. At that time the alp and its inhabitants passed to the Archbishop of Milan, lord of the castle of Travaglia, later there was the presence of the monastery of San Pietro in Ciel d'Oro in Pavia. The religious or lay Dominus who had jurisdiction, had the obligation to care for the soul of his servants and therefore had to make available the officiant for the church. In the thirteenth century the church was at the center of rustic lawn funds, meticulously protected from extraneous abuse and regulated for the use of tenants from here it drew a "benefit" with which to keep a permanent custodian of the church: a fresco of the twelfth century is dedicated to the patron MICHAEL by DOMINICUS CUSSTOS, depicted in a deed of homage. This **Dominic was a Custos (guardian) monk or converse**, a person of some rank if he could afford the cost of the fresco. Later Saint Michael ended up returning to the parish of Domo. It must have had a particular importance highlighted by the uniqueness of an alpine church that possessed an unusual vaulted roof and a rich apparatus of frescoes continuously enriched until 1500. The church was the place of the sacred, not only for religious services but made sensitive to the mentality of the time, by frescoed images, votive waxes, lamps lit. Here ancient fears were relieved by lightning, bears and wolves in the woods, the violence of robbers, the fear of impending scourges, the daily anxiety of danger for people and animals on this hard and harsh land from which every possible fruit was drawn with difficulty. This protection was guaranteed by another fresco bearing the image of Saint Bernard of Menton, protector from the risks of the wild mountain, who holds a devil in chains. In 1569 it was noticed the degraded state of the building and its profane use as a refuge for shepherds and animals, even risked burning when it was used as a coal depot. The church remained in a state of neglect until 1698.

Leonardo da Vinci in Varese?

At the Museo Baroffio del Sacro Monte in Varese there is a particular canvas: an antependium, that is a figurative work obtained by embroidering an image on a padded fabric, dating back to the middle of the fifteenth century. The main enigma that concerns him is due to the presence, on it, of a reproduction of the famous painting by Leonardo Da Vinci entitled "**The Virgin of the Rocks**". This work was made by Leonardo in two versions, the first of which was never publicly exhibited until 1625. How, then, could the author of the antependium of Sacro Monte (also unknown) reproduce a work that technically no one at the time could have known? Mysterious clues on the antependium, such as two enigmatic pairs of embroidered initials, would make it possible to reconstruct a story rich in twists and turns, which, if confirmed, could also reveal shocking truths about the work and beliefs of Leonardo Da Vinci.

Celtic Tumulus

The Celtic mounds are the most interesting and enigmatic archaeological sites of Varese. They are the **cromlechs of Golasecca**, Celtic mounds surrounded by stones that, according to recent studies, hide in their arrangements and in their unexpected proportions and surprising links with the stars and sidereal movements. According to the discipline of **archaeoastronomy**, cromlechs would take into account in their structure calculations of considerable complexity, especially if we consider the time of their realization, which took place from the end of the eighth century BC. How could the populations of that period have the knowledge to create similar works? And, above all, what secret bond with the stars led them to create them?

A fake at the Louvre, Mona Lisa is in Val Veddasca!

It was 1911 when La Gioconda (Mona Lisa), exhibited at the Louvre in Paris among many masterpieces, suddenly **disappeared** into thin air. For two years the police, in the general dismay, set off on the trail of the painting, without much luck. On the story were written "rivers of words", formulated various hypotheses about the protagonists and the motive that led a simple man like Vincenzo Peruggia to realize the most famous theft in the world. Vincenzo Peruggia (October 8, 1881 - October 8, 1925) was born in Dumenza, very close to Lake Maggiore. Peruggia perpetrated what has been described as **the greatest art of the 20th century**. The former Louvre worker hid inside the museum Sunday, August 20, knowing the museum would be closed the following day. But, according to Peruggia's interrogation in Florence after his arrest, he entered the museum on Monday, August 21 around 7 am, through the door where the other Louvre workers were entering. He said he wore one of the white smocks that museum employees customarily wore and was indistinguishable from the other workers. When the Salon Carré, where the Mona Lisa hung, was empty, he lifted the painting off the four iron pegs that secured the wall. There, he removed the protective case and frame. Some people report that he concealed the painting (which Leonardo painted on wood) under his smock. But Peruggia was only 5 ft 3 in (160 cm), and the Mona Lisa measures approx. 21 in × 30 in (53 cm × 77 cm), so it would not fit under a smock worn by someone his

size. Instead, he said he took off his smock and wrapped it around the painting, and left the Louvre through the same door he had entered. Peruggia hid the painting in his apartment in Paris. Supposedly, when he was able to search his apartment and question him, he accepted his excuse that he had been working at different locations on the day of theft.

After **keeping the painting hidden in a trunk in his apartment for two years**, Peruggia returned to Italy with it. He kept it in his apartment in Florence, Italy, and finally caught up with Alfred Geri, the owner of an art gallery in Florence. Geri's story conflicts with Peruggia's, but it was clear that Peruggia expected a reward to return painting to what he regarded as his "homeland". Geri called in Giovanni Poggi, director of the Uffizi Gallery, who authenticated the painting. Poggi and Geri, after taking the painting for "safekeeping", informed the police, who arrested Peruggia at his hotel. In 1913, the painting was exhibited all over Italy with banner headlines the return and the return to the Louvre in 1913. When the painting was famous, the notorious it received the artwork became one of the best known in the world. **Peruggia was released after a short time** and served in the Italian army during World War I. He later married, had one daughter, Celestina, returned to France, and continued to work as a painter decorator using his birth name Pietro Peruggia.

He died on October 8, 1925 (his 44th birthday) in the town of Saint-Maur-des-Fossés, France. **His death was not widely reported** by the media; obituaries appeared mistakenly only when another Vincenzo Peruggia died in Haute-Savoie in 1947.

There are currently two predominantly theories regarding the subject of the Mona Lisa: 1) **Patriotism** Peruggia said he did it for a patriotic reason: he wanted to bring the painting back for display in Italy "after it was stolen by Napoleon". Although perhaps sincere in his motive, Vincenzo may not have known that Leonardo da Vinci took this painting as a gift for Francis I when he moved to France to become a painter in his court during the 16th century, 250 years before Napoleon's birth. Experts have questioned the 'patriotism' motive on the grounds that—if 'patriotism' was the true motive—Peruggia would have donated the painting to an Italian museum, rather than have attempted to profit from its sale. The question of money is also confirmed by letters that Peruggia sent to his father after the theft. On December 22, 1911, four months after the theft, he wrote that Paris was where "I will make my fortune and that his (fortune) will arrive in one shot." The following year (1912), he wrote: "I am making a vow for you to live long and enjoy the prize that your son is about to realize for you and for all our family." Put on trial, the court agreed, to some extent, that Peruggia committed his crime for patriotic reasons and gave him a lenient sentence. He was sent to jail for one year and 15 days, but was hailed as a great patriot in Italy and served only seven months in jail. 2) **Criminal conspiracy**: Another theory emerged later. The theft may have been encouraged or masterminded by Eduardo de Valfierno, a con-man who had commissioned the French art forger Yves Chaudron to make copies of the painting so he could sell them as the missing original. The copies would have gone up in value if the original were stolen. This theory is based entirely on a 1932 article by former Hearst journalist Karl Decker in The Saturday Evening Post. Decker claimed to have known "Valfierno" and heard the story from him in 1913, promising not to print it until he learned of Valfierno's death. There are many people who have intertwined in this story: supporting the official rumors of the investigations of the time or the folk tales handed down from generation to generation in the Val Veddasca, the homeland of Peruggia.

Graziano Ballinari is originally from Valveddasca, the valley behind Maccagno that reaches Switzerland. He is the last heir of these testimonies, handed down over the last century with great pride by the inhabitants of the area. His words about Leonardo's work: "The work is in the Veddasca valley, the Mona Lisa never moved from there. Today, exactly one hundred years away, I can reveal to you what my father and Teresa Mei wife of Vincenzo Lancellotti told me and confirmed many, many years ago: **La Gioconda is hidden in a church in the valley, not before nor after Graglio** (little village of Valveddasca). It is hidden so well that it seems in jail among the stones and saints who greeted those who came and went from afar".

But Graziano Ballinari is not the only one to support this thesis over the years. Although there are few journalists who have given credit to an art historian, Stefano Vinceti, having listened to his truth he has conducted a careful study which lasted three years and has therefore published the book: "Theft of the Mona Lisa. A fake at the Louvre?" The book reveals new elements of the story, confirming many of the legendary **rumors handed down by the inhabitants of the valley** and rediscovering further details neglected in previous studies. Details never published by anyone. The figure of the Marquis Eduardo de Valfierno, the instigator of the theft who, with the help of the Lancellotti brothers employed as workers at the Louvre, kept Peruggia together. In practice **the painting was replaced** and now it is shown that of the painter Salai: Gian Giacomo Caprotti da Oreno, better known as Salai (1480 – before 10 March 1524), was a pupil of Leonardo. A group of Italian researchers has claimed that Salai painting was the model for the Mona Lisa, noting the similarity in some of the facial features, particularly the nose and mouth, to **those in which Salai is thought to have been the model**. These claims have been disputed by the Louvre. It is intriguing that the letters which form "Mona Lisa" can be rearranged to form "**Mon Salai**". The mysterious end of Peruggia himself, the numerous accomplices, the stories of close relatives and the voices of the witnesses of the time would lead - it seems - to a single conclusion:

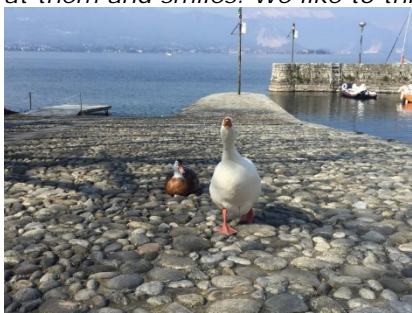
The Mona Lisa in the Louvre would be a fake!

The beautiful story of Guendalina, Olmo and the new friend

We do not know if this is a mystery of Lake Maggiore but it is certainly a beautiful story and it is not a fairy tale but it really happened! Make yourself comfortable because what we are about to tell you is really a beautiful fairy tale, one to tell the children in the evening, before going to sleep. There was **a duck and a goose** that were always together on the Cerro lakeside: they had made a nice friendship! They always went around in pairs and the goose, **Olmo or Gastone**, so the inhabitants of Cerro had baptized him, defended his friend **Guendalina** quacking and threatening open wings.

How this strange couple had formed is a mystery. Some say they came alone and others that they escaped from a villa. Some say that the goose saved the duck from a fox and they never left again, anyway in the village they were used to seeing them always together and for everybody they were the example of a true and deep friendship. And here's what happened: the duck died suddenly. Those who live in Cerro say they heard Olmo the goose crying and despairing for a few days. Then the despair turned into a sort of "depression": the goose did not let anyone approach him. Then the turning point. A lady reluctantly decided to bring her goose, which she kept in the garden, to the lake. The neighbors could not stand the animal's squawking and so she left her free, at the lake in Cerro. It was not "love" at first sight: Olmo was skeptical and surly. Slowly, however, the other goose has succeeded in gaining his trust **and they are now always walking together**.

Friends do not "replace" each other, but new encounters may hold surprises. I wonder if Guendalina looks at them and smiles. We like to think so.



Guendalina and Olmo



the new friends