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## **PLACES OF WORSHIP AND OF ARTISTIC INTEREST IN THE MONFERRATO AREA AND AROUND THE CAFFÈ RISTORANTE DEL PESO**

### **SYNAGOGUES IN PIEDMONT**

“The Roman catholic, apostolic religion is the only State religion. All other existing faiths are tolerated in accordance with the Law”. This is article number 1 of the Statuto Albertino (Albertino Statute) sanctioning equal rights to the Jewish community in the Piedmontese region for the first time: it was the year 1848. The presence of the Jewish community in Piedmont underwent stages of alternating prosperity, and its presence on the territory dates as far back as the beginning of the 15th century. This is proven by the many synagogues – authentic jewels of art and culture - present on the territory.

The Mole Antonelliana is the grandiose project commissioned by the Jewish community in Torino to Alessandro Antonelli in 1848. It was never actually occupied by a synagogue, but it is now the symbol of the city. Torino’s current house of worship, designed by Enrico Petiti, was created in 1884 in the San Salvario district. The synagogue, designed in a Moorish style, has later seen a small temple added in 1974. Examples of the baroque style in Piedmont are present in this synagogue: the lacquered Tevah in light blue and gold and the Aron supported by elegant Corinthian columns contained between vaulted ceilings and unfinished walls in brick.

Main evidence of the Jewish community in Piedmont is visible in the Monferrato area in Asti, Alessandria and above all Casale, where the synagogue built in 1595 celebrates the prestige of the local Jewish community. The Jewish inscription “This is the doorway to heaven” dominates the heaven painted on the ceiling almost to seal the wealth of wooden decorations and rococo stucco. Aside from the house of worship, visitors can also tour the Museum of Jewish Art and History as well as the Museo dei Lumi (Lamp Museum) that hosts a unique collection of contemporary Cahanukkiots created by world famous artists.

## THE SYNAGOGUE OF CASALE MONFERRATO

The Sinagoga (Synagogue), built in the ghetto on Vicolo Salomone Olper in 1595, is a monument of great historical and artistic interest to the Jewish Community in Piedmont. From the exterior, the building does not appear particularly art-worthy, but inside, the wealth and variety of wooden ornaments and stucco works is surprising. The Arco Santo (Holy Arch) - where the law is preserved in precious rolls - is bordered at the ends by two large stucco works representing the cities of Jerusalem and Hebron. The construction of the sculpted and gilded wooden pulpit dates back to the 18th century and the enlargement of the matronaeum (women's gallery) dates to the following century. A heavenly arch is painted on the Synagogue's vault where, in gilded Hebrew characters, it recites: "This is Heaven's Gate". A permanent exhibit with works of great worth and artistic merit along with very important historical documents has been installed in the matronaeum on the first and second floor of the Synagogue.



### History

The Synagogue of Casale Monferrato, which was built in 1595, is particularly known for its exquisite Baroque interior with walls and ceiling embellished with elaborate painting, carving and gilding. It is located in Vicolo Salmone Olper, an alleyway in the Jewish quarter of Casale Monferrato, which, in the eighteenth century, became the city's ghetto. The plain building houses a clandestine synagogue, giving no indication of its purpose as a Jewish house of worship.



As in most early modern European synagogues, the synagogue was entered not directly from the street, but via a courtyard: both for reasons of security and to comply with laws requiring that the sound of Jewish worship not be audible by Christians.

Originally, its plan was a simple, rectangular room oriented in northernly and southernly direction. The synagogue was later expanded in the 1720s, when the ghetto was established, so as to accommodate the new Jewish population of the area. In 1823, the pavement was converted to marble and, in 1866, the main room was again expanded and a first floor was built for the matroneum. Today, the room consists of a large rectangular space with 14 windows. While the exterior of the synagogue is unadorned, the interiors are richly decorated with paintings and original baroque furnishings.

In the years to follow, the Jewish population declined, and the synagogue with it. In 1969, the region put into place an accurate restoration, and the synagogue was nominated as a National Monument, and is still listed as such today.

### The Jewish Art and History Museum

The Jewish Art and History Museum is also known as the Museum of the Silvers ('Museo degli Argenti') and was designed by Giulio Bourbon. It is located in part in the former women's gallery of the synagogue, on the first floor. On display are precious silver ceremonial objects and embroidered textiles, as well artefacts related to Jewish festivals and domestic life, such as Rimonims and Atarots. Located on the second floor is the library, with its ancient manuscripts and prayer books.

## THE ABBEY OF LUCEDIO



This Cistercian Abbey, located in the province of Vercelli, has a history spanning nine centuries and is now placed inside a farm that is spread over an area of five hectares, within a regional park. Lucedio was founded in 1123 by Cistercian monks on the grounds of the Marquis Ranieri di Monferrato. The monks reclaimed the territory and were the first in Italy to introduce, at the beginning of

'400, the cultivation of rice. As time went by, thanks to its strategic geographic position along the Via Francigena, the Abbey became a prosperous centre of economic and political power: three were the Popes that visited Lucedio.

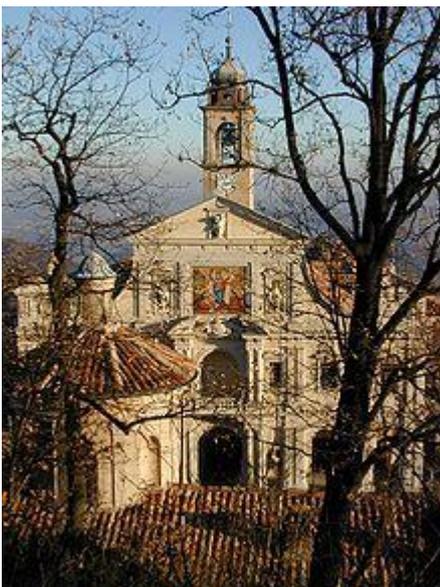
Throughout the years, several noble Italian families contended the estate: first, it went to the Gonzaga family, then to the House of Savoy and, in the early nineteenth century, it was annexed to the properties of Napoleon. It was later purchased by John Marquis Gozani of St. George, ancestor of the owner Countess Rosetta Clara Cavalli d'Olivola Salvadori di Wiesenhoff.



## IL SACRO MONTE DI CREA

### History

The Sacro Monte di Crea is a Roman Catholic sanctuary in the comune of Serralunga di Crea, Piedmont. The sanctuary is not actually located on a mountain, but rather on the highest hill of the Basso Monferrato, and this may have earned it its name. The edifice is situated on one of the highest hills of the Monferrato area (455m. above sea level) in the province of Alessandria. Its special location enhances the religious building with an exceptional panoramic view over the surrounding hills and the alpine mountain chain.



The Sacra can be reached via a steeply ascending route which winds through a wooded natural park, whose flora has been catalogued by the Casalese photographer and polymath Francesco Negri.

Construction of the sanctuary began in 1589, around an existing sanctuary dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Although the creation of this sanctuary is traditionally attributed to Saint Eusebius of Vercelli, around 350 AD, there is evidence that the edifice was built on the initiative of the Prior of Crea, Costantino Massino, who designed the enlargement of the pre-existing Marian sanctuary, providing also for the construction of a series of chapels dedicated to the mysteries of the life and to the triumph of the Madonna.

Eusebius is also said to have installed the wooden statue of the Madonna with child, which is still venerated in the sanctuary. However, the Madonna existing today dates back to the 18th century, and little is known of its origins.

Among the first chapels built, there are those of the Nativity of Mary and of the Presentation of Mary in the Temple. The Sacred Mount of Crea includes twenty-three chapels, built in two different construction phases, one in the 16th and 17th centuries, and the other in the 19th century. The oldest part is distinguished by complex groups sculptures in polychrome terracotta inserted in frescoed environments; these were decorated by artists like Moncalvo, Prestinari and Wespini. The nineteenth century work, that replaced the chapels that had been lost, reveals a simpler style of statues, except for the chapel of the Climb to Calvary -



Salita al Calvario -, in which Leonardo Bistolfi worked and produced a composition of great emotional intensity.



The chapels, except for the first two dedicated to Saint Eusebius, are centred on different stages of the life of the Virgin (initially on the mysteries of the Rosary), following a path that culminates in the chapel of the Coronation of Mary - Incoronazione di Maria -, better known as “Il Paradiso”. The Chapel of Paradise, with over three hundred statues, is the most complex of the Sacred Mount. The subject is treated with great richness.

As time passed, the initial scheme of the monumental layout was altered on a number of occasions and, in 1820, significant restoration work began after the chapel’s partial destruction.

### **Mysteries of the Rosary**

The chapels dedicated to the Mysteries of the Rosary are positioned around a one thousand year old Marian sanctuary. The original project was to construct 15 chapels dedicated to the mysteries of the Rosary. At present, however, there are 23 chapels and 5 hermitages, along with other shrines dedicated to the martyrdom of St. Eusebius and the life and glory of Mary.

The interior of the complex consists of three naves with pointed arches and vaults, and preserves important works. Among these, the Madonna and Child with Saints, frescoes with stories of St. Margaret of Antioch from the 15th century, the image of the Virgin, the extensive collection of ex-votos, the Via Crucis and Ambos of L. Bagna.



After a period of neglect following the Napoleonic suppression, the chapels were intensively restored and renovated in the course of the nineteenth century. This restoration work continued until the early twentieth century, and was performed by Bistolfi, Brilla, Maggi, Latino, Morgari, Cabra and Rini Caironi. Currently, the Sanctuary is administered by the Curia of the town of Casale.

### **The natural park**

In 1980 a regional law establishes Crea’s Natural Park, including it among the Sacred Mountains of Piedmont. The natural park consists of 34 hectares and is today protected by the Piedmontese region.