

THE BASILICA OF SAN ZENO



The Basilica of San Zeno is without any doubt one of the most beautiful and better preserved examples of Romanesque architecture in the whole of Northern Italy. What strikes the visitor most is the warm colours of the façade, due to the alternated use of tufa stone and bricks.

The original nucleus of the complex has been identified in the church and convent that rose on the Roman and later an early Christian burial ground near the *Via Gallica*. The church and convent had been built on the spot where the Saint had been buried, in order to preserve his relics and honor his memory. Saint Zeno, born in Africa, 8th Bishop of Verona, converted the whole town to Christianity. We still have 92 of his Sermons, the result of rich preaching and great pastoral wisdom.

The early buildings underwent some changes in the 6th century, and some historians think the chapel of San Benedetto, still to be seen in the cloister, to be a part of this early church.

The church soon became too small, due to the ever growing worship of the Saint. For this reason, the Frankish King Pépin (Charles the Great's son), the Bishop Ratoldo and the Archideacon Pacifico decided to build a larger church and a monastery. The 8th of december 806 the new basilica was consecrated in the presence of King Pépin.

On May 21st 807 St. Zeno's relics were transfered into the new church, carried by the two hermits Saint Benigno and Saint Caro, once again in the presence of the King. In 963, after the devastation brought by the Hungarians, the Emperor Otto I and the Bishop Raterio rebuilt the basilica. This church was consecrated in 983 by Saint Adalberto, who carried out his pastoral activity in north-western Europe. It had three naves and three apses, a crypt, and was as wide as the present one, but shorter.



At the end of the 11th century new works to enlarge and renew the church were started: almost all the present basilica dates back to this period.

An earthquake in 1117 interrupted the renovation and destroyed much of what had been done till then: the cloister the upper part of the bell tower and part of the monastery collapsed. The works were resumed soon after and lasted till 1138: evidence of this is the 1178 stone tablet embedded in the western wall near the façade. The church was lengthened and completed with the façade and the porch by Maestro Nicolò. The bell tower was restored up until the second row of triforate windows in 1120 (stone tablet in the southern wall of the tower) and completed in 1178, while the cloister was restored by Abbot Gaudio in 1123 (it was raised in 1293 and restored in 1313). Between 1217 and 1225 Maestro Brioloto and Adamino da S. Giorgio raised the façade and added the rose window. In 1387 Abbot Ottonello De' Pasti ordered the rebuilding of the apse and the construction of the coffered wooden ceiling, shaped like a ship's keel. As a consequence of these works the walls of the central nave were also raised. In 1870-71 the large sixteenth-century stairway that connected the upper church to the part reserved to the congregation was pulled down, and two lateral stairways were built in its place, together with the central one that leads to the crypt. In the same years the two small apses, up until then used as store rooms, were reopened.

In 1931 the presbytery underwent restoration works and the altarpiece by Andrea Mantegna found a better placement. In recent years the altar and the pulpit have been restored with ancient material. The monastery of San Zeno was shut down by the Republic of Venice

in 1770. The basilica became a parish church in 1806.

THE BASILICA

The façade, ideally enclosed on the left by the tower of the early monastery (13th century) and on the right by the slender bell tower (12th century), is suggestive in its



colors, harmonious in its perfect architectural linee, sober and graceful in its decoration: it shows the influence of Lombard-Emilian architecture in the Veneto.

The eye of the visitor is immediately captured by the great engraved **rose window** (called “the wheel of fortune”) by Brioloto (1217-1225).



1. Porch by Maestro Nicolò (1138). Simple and elegant architectural structure, resting on two styloforus lions. The style of the scuptural decorations in the form of telamons (columns in the form of a male figure), months, prophets, zoomorphous and vegetal elements is mature and essential. A polychrome

lunette portrays *Saint Zeno receiving the homage of the citizens* and a frieze depicts scenes from the Saint’s life.

The **reliefs** on the right, by Maestro Nicolò and his studio (start of the 12th century), portray scenes from the Old Testament and the Legend of Theoderic. The **reliefs** on the left, by Maestro Guglielmo and his studio (start of the 12th century) portray scenes from the New Testament and duels between knights and foot soldiers.

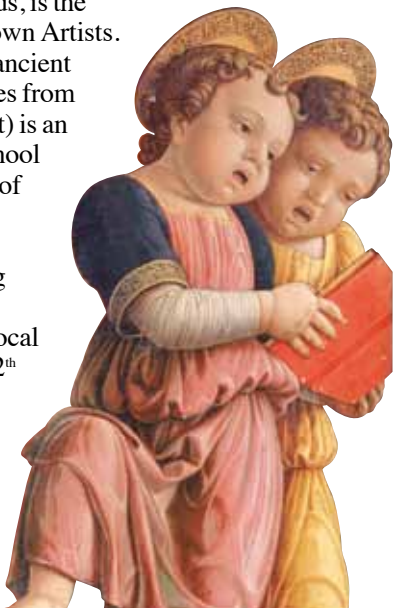
Bronze doors. This real masterpiece, obtained assembling doors of different periods, is the work of different unknown Artists.

The author of the most ancient panels, portraying scenes from the New Testament (left) is an artist of the German School (end of 11th - beginning of 12th century).

The author of the most recent panels portraying scenes from the Old Testament (right), is a local Artist (second half of 12th century).

2. Stational Cross.

This is attributed to Lorenzo Veneziano (first half of 14th century).





Baptismal font. Monolith sculpted by Maestro Brioloto during the construction works of 1217/1225.

3. Renaissance Altar (1515-35). Altar-piece depicts *Madonna with Child among St. Anne, St. Zeno, St. Sebastian and St. Christopher*, by F. Torbido (1520). Fastigium with *Allegories*, attributed to Battista del Moro (post. 1538).

4. Frescos (14th-15th century). Votive paintings of different Artists and time. On the left pillar-strip, *Virgin enthroned with Child*, named “White Madonna”: a refined fresco by the Giotto school. Imposing *St. Christopher*, the patron saint of pilgrims (12th century). On the right, *Scenes from the life of St. Zeno*.

5. Altar: adaptation of parts of a Romanesque porch demolished in the 13th century. On the wall are frescos by an unknown Artist (14th-15th century).

6. Frescos (13th-14th century). Votive panels by unknown Artists. Very important for the Veronese painting: *St. George and the Princess, The Baptism of Christ, The Resurrection of Lazarus, The transport of Saint Zeno's relics*.

7. Most Holy Sacrament Altar.

The present arrangement dates back to the nineteenth century. The right apse, with the altar, is one of the most ancient parts of the basilica (10th century).

8. Main chapel. Built in Gothic style between 1386 and 1398 by Giovanni and Nicolò da Ferrara.

The frescos of the triumphal arch and the apse have been attributed to Martino da Verona (end of 14th century).

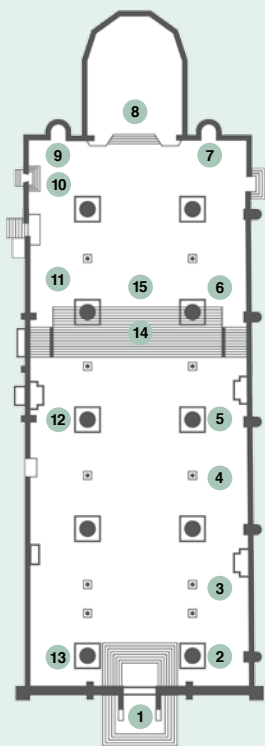
Wooden altar-piece *Maestà della Vergine* by Andrea Mantegna (1457-1459), a masterpiece of North Italian Renaissance painting. On the predella there are copies of the original panels stolen by Napoleon.

Altar. The top rests on the sarcophagus of bishops Lucillo and Lupicino and hermit Crescenziano (12th cent.). The pulpit presents an *Annunciation* in soft stone with traces of polychromy by Giovanni di Rigino (end of 14th cent.). Both the altar and the pulpit are modern readaptations.

9. San Zen che ride (Laughing St. Zeno). Polychrome statue by an unknown Artist (13th cent.). This statue of the Patron Saint, was once placed in a high position, probably above the keystone of the Romanesque triumphal arch. The floor level of the left apse documents the different phases of the construction.

10. Crucifixion. Important fresco attributed to Altichiero, a painter of the Giotto school of the second half the fourteenth century.

VISIT OF THE INTERIOR



11. Frescos on different layers

(12th-14th cent.). Votive panels by unknown Artists. Very important stes the *Christ enthroned between St. John the Baptist, the Mother of God, Archangels and Saints*. On the right wall of the central nave, a large fresco depicts *Abbot Cappelli and his Monks venerating the Virgin*, by the school of Altichiero (second half of 14th cent.).

12. Baroque altar (1621). In the niche, *Pieta* in painted soft stone. At both sides of the altar are votive frescos by unknown Artists.



Above the door that leads to the cloister, a panel depicts the *Saint Bishop administering Baptism* (14th cent.).

13. Porphyry basin. Monolith of Roman origin, originally in a thermal complex (2nd cent. B.C.).

14. Crypt. What we see today, a real forest of columns, is the result of the rearrangement of the tenth-century crypt done between the end of the 12th and the beginning of the 13th century. The venerated body of St. Zeno, the Patron Saint of Verona, is preserved in the urn in the apse.

15. Iconostasis (nineteenth-century readaptation). Marble statues of Christ and the Apostles, probably of German School (beginning of the 13th cent.).

LE CHIESE STORICHE di VERONA

HISTORICAL CHURCHES IN VERONA



San Zeno, Duomo, Santa Anastasia, San Fermo



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