

Basilica of San Nazaro in Brolo

Since the early Middle Ages, Corso di Porta Romana, being the primary avenue of access to the city as well as lying along the axis of Via Romea (also known as the Via Francigena) that was travelled by pilgrims bound for Rome and Jerusalem, has been lined with churches and monasteries.

One of the most important and ancient of these is the Basilica of San Nazaro Maggiore. Standing on a [UT1] Latin cross plan, this single-naved basilica with its ribbed-vault ceiling was founded by Saint Ambrose between 382 and 386, and was initially dedicated to the Apostles, whose relics were placed here together with those of the martyred Saint Nazaro.

Leonardo da Vinci may have enjoyed the privilege of seeing two different versions of the basilica, which was rebuilt and enlarged several times, including during his time in the city. Leonardo would have seen the original paleo-Christian and Romanesque basilica fronted by a large, richly decorated portico, very similar to that of the Basilica of Sant'Ambrogio. He would also have seen the second version of the basilica, the one familiar to us today, with the elegant and austere Trivulzio Chapel forming a large vestibule in front of the façade.

Commissioned in 1512 by the condottiero Gian Giacomo Trivulzio and based on a design by Bramantino, the vestibule-chapel is a monumental parallelepiped construction surmounted by a dome under which, inside deep niches, lie the sarcophagi where the military commander and his family's mortal remains were once placed.

One of the many marvels of the basilica is the Chapel of Saint Catherine. Designed by Antonio da Lonate in 1540, it was inspired by the architectural example of Brunelleschi and Bramante, especially its dome, illuminated by a surrounding ring of oculi. The fresco, painted by Bernardino Lanino, shows the Martyrdom of Saint Catherine of Alexandria.

Piazza San Nazaro in Brolo (Corso di Porta Romana)

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