

The city



Biella is located at the foot of the Biellese Alps at the mouth of three streams: the **Oropa**, **Cervo** and **Elvo** Streams, at an altitude of 420 meters above sea level with a population of about 45,000 inhabitants. This area has been inhabited since ancient times and the archaeological findings from the Bronze Age and the Roman Necropolis, which are kept at the **Museum of Territory**, confirm the ancient origins of Biella. The first recorded information about ancient **Bugella** (Biella) dates back to a document of 826. The medieval village of **Piazzo**, set on top of a hill, dates back to 1160 when Bishop **Ugucione** started to fortify the hill to consolidate the secular influence of the Church. In 1379 the city and its destiny was put under the dominion of **Savoy**. The city flourished thanks to the establishment of industries which were already significant in the 17th Century. This success continued through the 18th and 19th Century with an actual industrial revolution transforming it into one of the major wool manufacturing centers of the world.

1 The **San Gerolamo Monastery**, founded by **Blessed Giovanni Gromo** in 1512 on the hill towards **Chiavazza**, is a wonderful example of Renaissance architecture in the Biellese area. It consists of a cloister and two orders of arcades with a church having only one nave (originally in the form of a Latin cross). A wooden choir and large pictorial decorations of the "School of Lombardy" are preserved inside the church. In 1864 the building was bought by the Sella family.

The **Maurizio Sella** Factory of wool factories, which is an archaeological finding, rises on constructions which formerly belonged to the Mondella paper mill (XVI Century). It was then transformed into a silk spinning mill by the **Congregation of the Sanctuary of Oropa** (1695) and once again modified in the 18th Century until a wool mill was established in 1838. Inside the building there is the house of **Quintino Sella** and today part of the complex is dedicated to the Sella Foundation.

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3 The Church dedicated to the **Holy Trinity** dates back to 1626 and is situated behind the Cathedral, but the facade was rebuilt in 1956. The Church has one nave decorated with baroque stuccoes by **B. Guelpa**, frescoes by **Vincenzo Constantino** (1640) and **Anselmo Allasina** and a precious shrine on the main altar, the work of **Giovanni Antonio Vaglio** (1682).

4 The **Baptistry**, the most important monument in the city, bears witness to the conversion of the city to Christianity. It was partly built with Roman remains. The characteristic bas-relief set in the lunette of the front door dates back to the II Century and represents "Hercules, the child and a cherub". The structure is characterized by four semicircular apses on four sides of a central square. A crypt was planned at the end of the 18th Century for the graves of the Bishops of the city.

5 The **Bell Tower of Santo Stefano** is what remains of the ancient Pieve where the Christian center of Biella developed. The ancient Romanesque church, dedicated to the patron saint of the city, consisted of a complex of religious buildings beside the belfry belonging to the "Capitolo" which was demolished in 1872 and replaced by the present rectory. The nine storey bell tower is 52,60m. high and is made lighter by a hundred single and double lancet windows.

6 The **Porta della Torrazza** or the Door to Oropa, built in 1780, replaces an ancient medieval door. It commemorates the visit of **King Vittorio Amedeo II** and of **Queen Maria Antonia Ferdinanda of Spain** to Biella and the Oropa Sanctuary. The door has the shape of an arch and is made of bricks and originally it bore the Savoy coat of arms which was cut away during the French Revolution.

7 The **Fountain of Moses** is a work of **Giuseppe Bottinelli**. The statue was placed in the square in front of the Cathedral in 1885.

8 The **House on wooden beams** in Piazzo represents one of the last examples of this kind of architecture, which was popular in medieval Europe. It was built of wood and plastered bricks with a straw roof which caught fire easily.

9 The medieval **Palace of the Princes "Dal Pozzo Della Cisterna"** has been changed many times. The facade with the stone portal and balcony was added at the end of the 16th Century and the stairs have been added recently. Frames and "terracotta" decorate the right side of the building and the pointed arches are medieval. The Renaissance Roman busts jut out of the broken tympanums of the second floor. The interior of the Palace is decorated with roman and mythological frescoes and a monumental XVII Century fireplace.

10 The **Piazzo Arcades**. **Piazza Cisterna** which takes its name from the palace is surrounded by characteristic medieval arcades, built in two spans with stone capitals and "terracotta" decorations.

11 The **Church of S. Giacomo** is the oldest medieval building preserved in the area of Piazzo. The Church was first mentioned in a document of 1180, but it is not possible to understand what remains of the original church. The modern building was consecrated by

Bishop **Ugo di Sessa** in 1227 and has been subsequently modified. The belfry was added later on but it was already mentioned in two documents at the end of the thirteenth century. The arcade was added in the 17th Century. Inside the church the 16th Century burial grounds were put under the floor and the stuccoes covering the medieval structure date back to 1862. Many works are preserved inside the church such as: the **carved Choir** (1697/1698), the **15th Century triptych of Daniele de Bosis** (with the **Virgin Mary and Child**, Saints **Gottardo** and **Giacomo with its donor Giacomo dal Pozzo**) and the **baroque Baptistry**.

12 The ancient medieval Door of the city, the **Porta di Ghiara**, was built when the Bishops of Ghibelline Vercelli ran away to the Guelph Biella. On its left side there are the remains of a battlement.

13 The medieval **Porta di Andorno** takes its name from its position. Originally the door had a defensive function. Above the arch there is a preserved portion of a fresco "The exposition of the Holy Shroud".

14 The elegant **Octagonal Tower** built next to the **Ferrero Palace of the Princes of Masserano**, dates back to the XV Century. The palace was rebuilt many times in the past because it was used for different purposes. In the second half of the 19th Century it was a spa, then it became private property. It was also used as a military hospital and later as barracks.

15 The **Funicular**, designed by **Vaccarino**, was built in 1885 on the site where the **Antoniani Monastery** once stood. Initially it was driven by hydraulic power and only later adapted to work electrically. It is supported by 28 pillars, the tallest of which is 9 meters.

16 Near **Palazzo Ferrero** rose the **Church and the convent of Saint Domenico**, which was built on the remains of the **Castle of the Bishop of Ugucione**. Probably the history of the village of Piazzo started from this castle.

17 The **House of the Holy Shroud** takes its name from the subject of the fresco set on the arcade of the front door. The worship of the Holy Shroud was kept alive by the presence of the **Confraternity of the Holy Shroud**, which had a church near **Lamarmora Palace**.

18 The **Varale Tannery**. This building is of interest for the industrial history of the area. The tannery was built by **Antonio Varale** in 1733 bearing witness to the early process of industrialization of the city. In 1871, following the industrial revolution, the tannery was transformed into a factory producing transmission belts for local industries.

19 The **House of Masserano**. The building is located in **Via Rocchetta** and dates back to the XV century. The facade of the house is rich in "terracotta" with interesting frescoes, among which the portrayal of the wild man with a club.

20 The **Church and the Cloister of Saint Sebastiano**. This is an example of renaissance lombard architecture which was started in 1500, on the initiative of **Sebastiano Bartolomeo** (treasurer of duchy of Milan) and **Andrea Ferrero**, and was terminated in 1551. The Church was renovated in 1885. The interior is in the form of a latin cross with a barrel vault and decorated lacunars. Inside a chapel of the left nave, there is a fresco of the XVI Century portraying the crucifixion with the city of Biella in the background. Since december 2001 the Cloister is seat of **Museum of the Territory**.

21 **Santa Maria in Piano** later became the **Cathedral**. This building was started in 1402 on the site of X Century church dedicated to **Santa Maria Maggiore**. In 1772 it was selected as the Cathedral and the name of **Santo Stefano** was added. In 1826 the Gothic arcade, the work of **Maradono**, was constructed. The interior of the church is divided into three naves. In different parts of the Church we can find the remains of the frescoes of the XV Century. Among the best preserved are the "Madonna con Bambino in Trono" (Madonna with the child on the throne) and the "Cristo della domenica" (the Sunday Christ) damaged by many tools.

22 The fountain representing a bear, the animal symbol of Biella, is set in the oldest park of the city. It was made in 1875 and dedicated to the Biellese botanist **Maurizio Zumaglini** (1804-1865).

23 The monument, unveiled in 1886, is dedicated to **General Alfonso La Marmora** (statesman and Prime Minister) who is buried in the Basilica of S. Sebastiano.

- 1 S. Gerolamo Monastery
- 2 Maurizio Sella Factory
- 3 Ss Trinità Church
- 4 Baptistry
- 5 S. Stefano Bell Tower
- 6 Porta della Torrazza
- 7 Fountain of Moses (Piazza Duomo)
- 8 House on wooden beams (XV Century)
- 9 Cisterna Palace
- 10 Arcades of Piazzo
- 11 S. Giacomo Church
- 12 Porta di Ghiara
- 13 Porta di Andorno
- 14 Ferrero Palace
- 15 Funicular (1885)
- 16 S. Domenico Ex Monastery
- 17 House of The Holy Shroud
- 18 Varale Tannery
- 19 Masserano House
- 20 S. Sebastiano Church and Cloister (1500)
- 21 S. Maria in Piano, later XV Century Cathedral
- 22 Fountain of the bear (Giuseppe Maffei)
- 23 Alfonso La Marmora Statue (1886)

