

MANTUA

Mantua is an ancient town: it has Etruscan origins but flourished in the age of the Communes and, above all, under the long rule of the Gonzaga family (1328-1707). The Communal period and the short rule of the Bonacolsi family left important buildings, such as Palazzo Bonacolsi, Palazzo del Podestà, Palazzo della Ragione, the San Lorenzo rotunda and the church of Santa Maria del Gradaro.

The Ducal Palace is the main sign of the Gonzaga's rule. It is one of Italy's largest palaces, counting about 500 rooms and several squares, courtyards and gardens. Its wide range of architectural styles is exemplified by the San Giorgio castle, the Domus Nova (designed by Luca Fancelli) and the basilica of Santa Barbara (by G.B. Bertani). There are also magnificent fresco cycles in Mantegna's Camera degli Sposi (Room of the Bride and Groom), Pisanello's Old Court and Giulio Romano's Troy Rooms. Not to miss are the famous tapestries based on Raphael's cartoons.

The second residence of the Gonzaga family in Mantua is Palazzo Te, a magnificent building designed and decorated by Giulio Romano between 1525 and 1535. Its most famous frescoes illustrate the Fall of the Giants and the Wedding Feast of Cupid and Psyche.

In late 15th century, Leon Battista Alberti designed the impressive cathedral of Sant'Andrea and San Sebastiano, whose different style and the renovations by Giulio Romano are well worth inspecting.

Under Empress Maria Theresa, Mantua acquired a number of major buildings, including the Bishop's Palace, the Palazzo d'Arco and, above all, the Bibiena Theatre.

