San Giovanni Battista

Category: Catholic Church

business description: The ancient parish church probably stood on the exact site of the current church as early as the 10th or 11th century, as evidenced by the numerous burials discovered in the first half of the 20th century during renovations of the retaining wall of the square and the Romanesque bell tower (square and with a broad base unlike any other in the valley). Beginning in the 16th century, provosts belonging to the noble Guelph Fieschi family began rebuilding and expanding the old parish church, which was now in precarious condition. The apse with a polygonal rectory remains the oldest part, as attested by the plaque dated 1520 placed inside the left lateral body, which constituted the old sacristy. The church was then extended between 1630 and 1650, when the current façade was completed, while the bell tower in its current form was completed in 1690. The façade has a double pitch, divided into three sections by pilasters, with a mixtilinear opening above the modern image of St. John the Baptist, created over an older image already present in the 17th century. Until half a century ago, as can be seen in an old photo, the façade and bell tower featured extremely rich pictorial decoration, dominated on the sides by two large monochrome figures of saints surmounted by angels on the pediment, in the center of which, above the lobed window, was a frieze decorated with phytomorphic elements. The entire painting was structured differently from the current one, with fine decorative elements complementing the figurative sections. The bell tower, painted in the classic Genoese yellow and pink, also followed the same lines, with a belfry adorned with stucco and an octagonal skylight-shaped dome topped with a crucifix flanked by a metal angel. Attached to the left side of the church is a beautiful portico with exposed stone arches, perhaps intended to provide shelter for the faithful. Popular parlance calls it an "ossuary," probably because it was built over the cemetery that surrounded the ancient parish church. From the square in front of the church, the gaze converges on the center of the lower façade, where one can admire a beautiful, finely carved blond walnut entrance door, in the French style of the late 18th century. At the rear, visible by walking around the church through the alleys of the historic center, is a semi-cloister with Renaissance arcades on two levels with segmental arches (the northern one with three arches and the eastern one with two), projecting onto the courtyard leading to the rectory, which is located next to the church and resembles a small palace. Inside the rectory, a beautiful 17th-century sandstone staircase leads to the "cubiculum," the bedroom of the feudal provosts. This remains intact, with a large, monolobed, molded arch marking the entrance, supported by semi-columns flanked by semi-pillars. The arch is capped at its summit by an elegant oval clypeus, framed by stucco volutes, which may have contained the papal coat of arms. Walled above the ancient entrance to the rectory, a Latin epigraph, unfortunately destroyed during renovations, carved in sandstone and corroded on the first and last two lines, declared the fiefdom of Albera to the Holy Roman Church and the bishop of Tortona, following the transfer of the monastic assets of the Abbey of Vendersi to the secular clergy by will of Pope Innocent III (1198-1216). Above the epigraph, another stone, this one still preserved but not on display, showed two crossed keys engraved on it (symbol of the dominion of St. Peter or of the Roman Church) crowned by a triangle symbolizing the Holy Trinity or, according to others, representing a stylised mitre topped by a cross (symbol of the dominion of the bishops of Tortona).

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Photos



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