

## **The Church of Santa Maria delle Grazie**

The Church rises out of the village, on the ancient road that connected Soncino to Cremona, on the place of an ancient chapel of the XV century, now visible partly in the second chapel on the left.

### **Historical background**

The construction of the Church was executed by the Carmelite monks from 1501 to the end of the second decade of the XVI century. Initially, the construction was financed thanks to the donations of the noble families of Soncino and, from 1527, thanks to the duke Francesco II Sforza and, then, to the marquis Massimiliano Stampa. The painter Francesco Scanzi was called for the side chapels, Giulio Campi for the presbytery and the apse and the brothers Carminati from Lodi for the counter-façade, the vault and the second chapel on the left. During the course of its history, the Church lived a series of events: the theft of the sacred furniture by the bishop of Cremona, Ignazio Maria Fragneschi, the Napoleonic camping at the end of the XVIII century and its use as a store for weapons, an infirmary and a barn. In the second half of the XIX century the Soncino countess Costanza Cerioli, become sister with the name of Paola Elisabetta, bought the convent next to the Church for the amount of £ 16.000 and the Church acquired again its previous function of place of worship.

### **Architectural structure**

The church has got a simple hut front with a gateway made up with Rezzato stone with two coats of arms of the Stampa family, surmounted by a sculpture group, portraying the “Madonna delle Grazie”, and by a rose window. On the sides there are the traces of two giant figures which had to represent San Rocco and San Cristoforo, protectors of pilgrims and travellers. The inside is projected in solemn forms with a single nave with a barrel vault divided into five sectors which correspond to the five chapels on each side. Under the vault of the nave, throughout the perimeter of the church, there is a big frieze of polychrome terracotta, with winged sphinxes and busts of carmelite friars, made up by Giovanni Antonio Pezzoni, an artist from Soncino.

### **Pictorial decoration**

The inside, completely frescoed, is an example of Lombard mannerism. The most representative hand is that of Giulio Campi, one of the most required artists of that

time, author of the Assumption of the Virgin, on the triumphal arch, and of the four puttos of the presbytery. In the apse there is also the funeral monument of the marquis Massimiliano Stampa, executed by the d'Oggiono workshop, and the cenotaph of his son Francesco. The painter Francesco Scanzi decorated the side chapels. The frescoes of the last chapel on the right were lost and, in the XIX century, the chapel saw a repainting. A third atelier, that of Francesco Carminati with the help of his brother Bernardino, completed the decoration of the Church with the second chapel on the left, the lunettes with the prophets above the chapels, the vault and the counter-façade, with the great Universal Judgment.

On the ground there are deathly stones of the noble families of the time.

The tradition wants the presence of a secret underground passage that linked the Church to the Rocca Sforzesca, a military manor of the late XV century, along the walls of one of the most beautiful villages in Italy.