

Alessandro Antonelli

A new wind blowing in Novara in the 1800s

Introduction

This is an educational art trail devised by teachers and students from IPS Ravizza, Novara, as part of the Erasmus+ project GEOCACHING MINDS ON THE MOVE.

The trail is meant to help players to understand the main features of **neoclassical architecture** and to see the way architect Alessandro Antonelli's works helped turning Novara into a modern city

EDUCATIONAL TASK:

FOLLOW THE TRAIL AND TAKE NOTES OF YOUR REPLIES either on your cell phone or on a piece of paper or notebook.

There will be **5 points of interest** and **14 questions** to answer while touring and observing.

At the end of your tour you will be directed to an interactive webpage where you will be able to upload your replies (you can do it right on the spot or go back to it once you are at home). If your answers are correct you can take a screenshot of the final page and bring it to your teacher.

In order to prove you have done the trail yourself, bring also a photo of you in front of each point of interest 😊.

If you are not a students and you would like to play for fun, you are very much welcomed to do it.

You can also post comments on our Facebook page: **Ravizza Geocaching**



Alessandro Antonelli

<http://geocachinggraviteam.weebly.com/neoclassicism-in-novara.html>

A new wind blowing in Novara in the 1800s

The following itinerary will show you the way the city of Novara changed in the second half of the XIX century, especially thanks to the vision of architect Alessandro Antonelli, who was a true innovator and lover of the highest Western art traditions

Itinerary

- 1 Barriera Albertina, the Toll Houses**
- 2 Casa Bossi**
- 3 San Gaudenzio's Dome (or "The Cupola")**
- 4 The Duomo**
- 5 The Guardhouse**

The itinerary is intended to be a proposal to visit the city, focusing on some 19th-century architectural interventions that have become parts of today's urban scenery. These interventions prove how much the local community wanted to look to the future and transform Novara into a modern city by using materials, building techniques and decorative elements that took inspiration from a glorious past.

In the 19th century Novara had a strong economic recovery accompanied by intense building activity. The city was affected by continuous urban and architectural renovation, which began in 1841 with the demolition of the Spanish walls and continued with many other interventions throughout the century. The city grew and needed to expand beyond the walls and some of the old town buildings needed to be renovated according to the requirements of a thriving and active city.

1. BARRIERA ALBERTINA, the Toll Houses

Coordinates: **45.446726, 8.616663**

On the 25th January 1836 the City Council decided to demolish the four city doors and substitute them with toll houses. At that point in time, the city was turning some of its military constructions into buildings that could play a commercial and economical role in a phase of great urban expansion.

The location that was picked was the western access to the city, an area around which most of the 19th-century renovations were carried out.

The project was designed by Novara-born engineer Antonio Antonelli, who tried to solve the problem of connecting the old city centre to the developing suburbs.





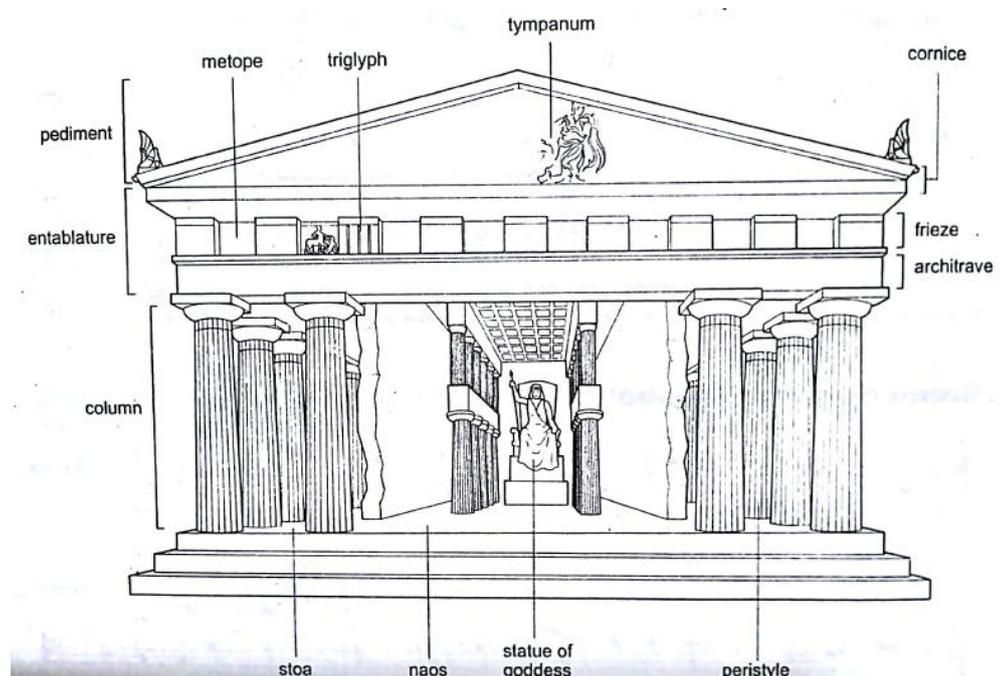
Two one-storey, square-plan twin buildings were built, and each of them had a specific purpose: the Northern one hosted the guards, while the other one was used to collect tolls. Both were built flanking the street that carriages used to cross the city centre.

The place was inaugurated in 1837 and it was dedicated to Charles Albert of Sardinia to show gratitude towards a king, who was responsible for the promotion of agriculture and commerce, and who also supported the local economy, thus giving the city a newfound prosperity. It was given the name “Barriera Albertina” (Albert’s Barrier).

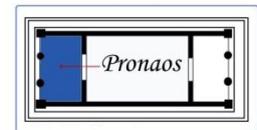
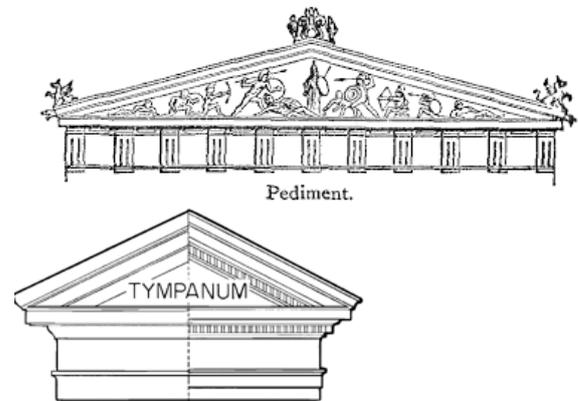
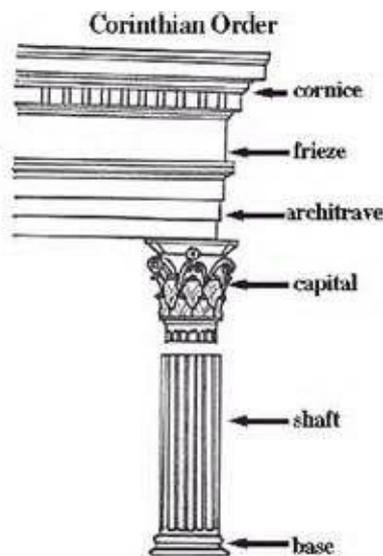
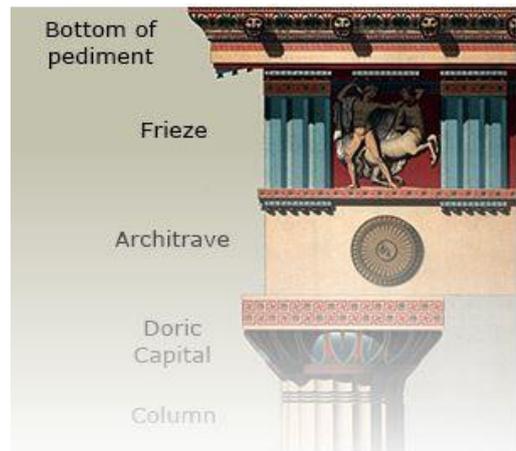
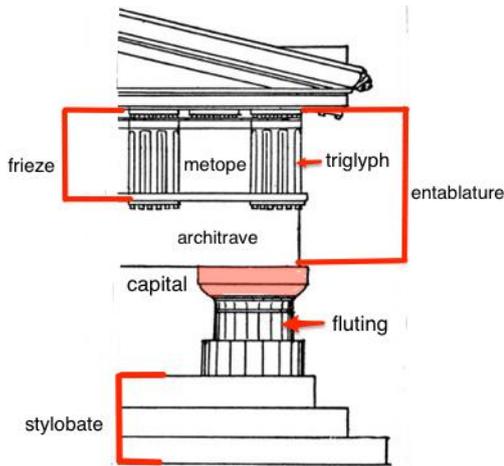
The two buildings are simple, essential, well-balanced in proportions and absolutely in tune with the Neoclassical taste.

1. This is a drawing of a **classical temple**, compare it with the Barriera Albertina’s buildings and mark which elements they have in common.

- Architrave
- Capitals
- Columns
- Cornice
- Entablature
- Frieze
- Metope
- Naos or cella
- Pediment
- Peristyle
- Statue of goddess
- Stoa
- Stylobate
- Triglyph
- Tympanum



Other useful images to understand elements in classical Greek architecture:



Some definitions

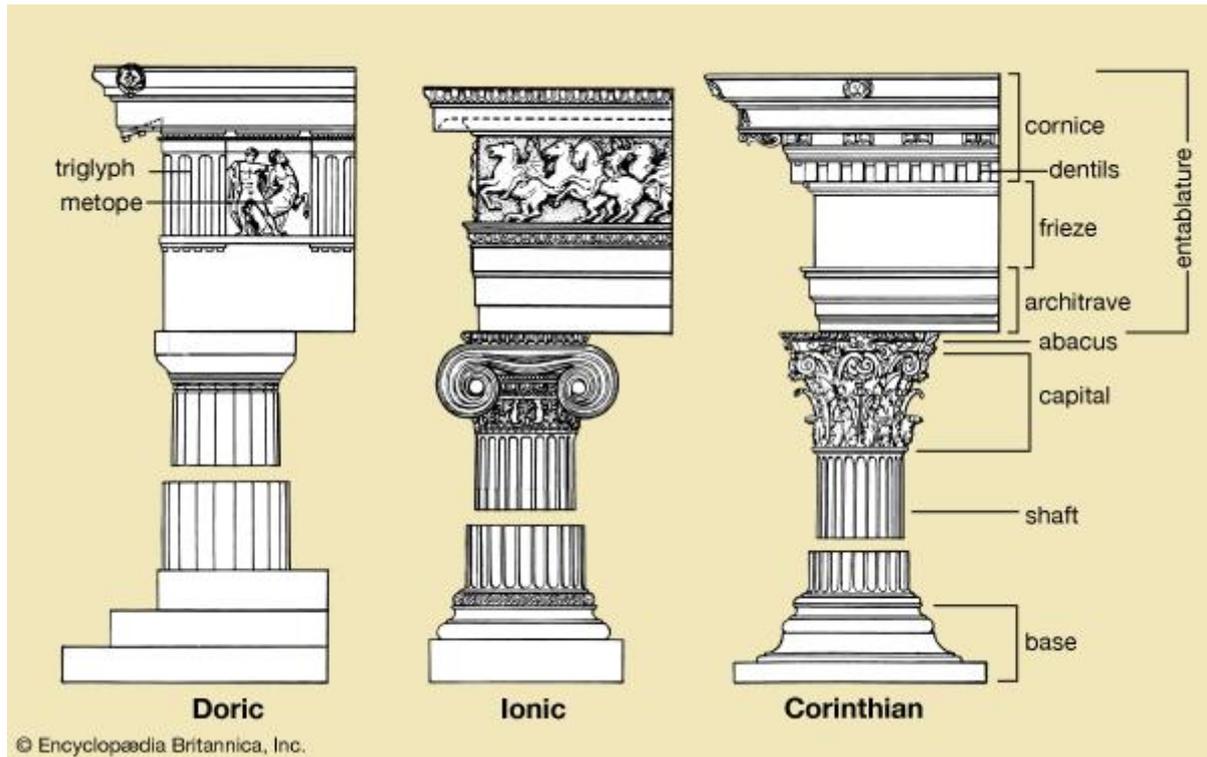
- Architrave Main weightbearing and weight-distributing element of entablature
- Cornice Projecting crowning member of the entablature framing the pediment
- Entablature The upper part of a classical building supported by columns or a colonnade, comprising the architrave, frieze, and cornice
- Frieze Molded horizontal projection that together with two sloping cornices forms a triangle that enframes the pediment
- Metope The square panel between the triglyphs in a Doric frieze, often sculpted in relief
- Naos or cella A room with no windows that usually housed the cult statue of the deity
- Pediment Triangular shape at the end of a building, formed by the ends of the sloping roof above the colonnade
- Peristyle External colonnade on all four sides
- Pronaos The space, or porch, in front of the cella, or naos, of an ancient Greek temple
- Stoa A covered walkway or portico, commonly for public use.
- Stylobate The stepped platform upon which colonnades of temple columns are placed
- Triglyph A stone block in a Doric frieze, having three vertical channels
- Tympanum A vertical recessed triangular space forming the centre of a pediment, typically decorated

Learn correct pronunciation at <https://quizlet.com/4519197/parts-of-greek-temples-flash-cards/>

See also: Greek Temple: Architecture, Construction & Parts:

<http://study.com/academy/lesson/greek-temple-architecture-construction-parts.html>

2. Now have a look at the **columns**. For sure you have recognised them as a typical element of a Greek temple. But which Greek style are they inspired to?



Sculptor Giuseppe Argenti embellished the two buildings with **allegorical sculptures**. In each tympanum you can see female statues, on one building they represent Novara's coat of arms and the other the royal family, thus reinforcing the bond between the king and the city.

3. On which building can you see Novara's coat of Arms?

On the façade of the buildings there are niches hosting **statues** that are the personifications of virtues such as Royal Charity, and Vigilance, plus Agriculture and Commerce.

Royal Charity is a lady wearing royal robes holding a pine branch and an olive branch, next to her sits an owl. (*the pine grows without damaging other trees, it's thus a symbol of benevolence and wisdom in economic planning; the olive tree is a symbol of peace; the owl can see in the dark*)

Gratitude is depicted as a young woman carrying a bunch of broad beans and petting a stork. In the plinth

Agriculture is depicted as Psyche, and she is leaning on a plough.

Commerce is symbolized by a young version of Mercury; the god is shown with curly hair, a winged hat and a bag. The bag is half hidden, since in business you must be discreet. The griffon next to him holds some coupon bonds to underline the importance of public debt in business and commerce.

4. Have a look at the buildings and identify the statues:

South-west:
.....

North-east:
.....



North-west:
.....

North-east:
.....

In the XIX there were other two statues placed on two pillars: Gratitude and Concordance. These statues were later removed and can now be found at the entrance of the city cemetery (Concordance is sitting and holding a torch and a pomegranate branch; Vigilance, also sitting, has an oil lamp on her lap and next to her chair sits a rooster).

Do not forget to look for the cache! You can then move on to the next step.

From the Barriera Albertina head North along the alley called Baluardo Quintino Sella. This alley was built on top of the Spanish walls and somewhere you can still see some parts of them.

Walk along the pedestrian and bike lane. About 500 metres on your right you will see a big villa with columns on the ground, first and second floor. That is **Casa Bossi**, a villa known by almost all the Novaresi.

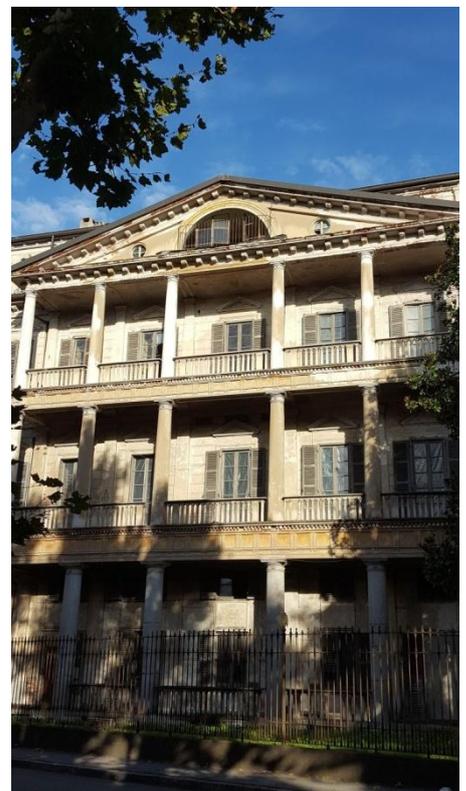
2. CASA BOSSI, once Known as Casa Desanti

Coordinates: N 45° 26.957 E 008° 37.071

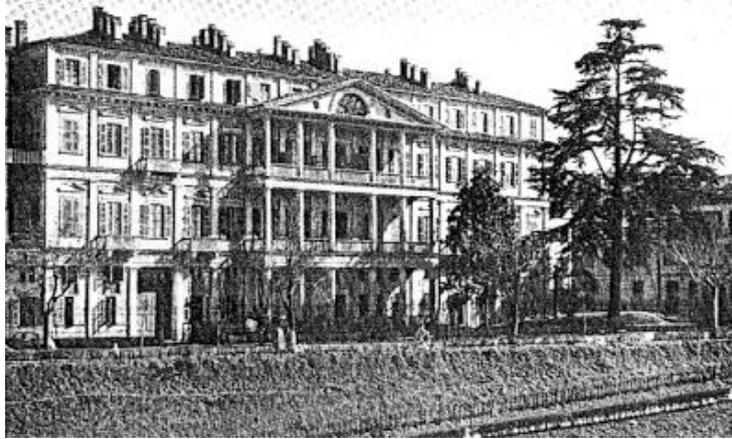
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https://www.geocaching.com/geocache/GC7CX8A_casa-bossi-the-beauty-behind-the-scars

In 1859, not long after he had acquired the Baroque building, Luigi Desanti contacted architect Alessandro



Antonelli and asked him to plan the restoration and enlargement of the house. Antonelli's design encompassed the preexisting construction, maintaining its residential rooms, transforming the attached servants' quarters and using part of the back gardens, with a stunning overall effect. The owner died only five years later, and didn't get to enjoy the villa he had commissioned.



In 1880 the villa was purchased by Carlo Bossi and from that moment on it acquired the new owner's last name.

The building is one of city's best examples of urban architecture: it stands in a privileged position, along the city's Western rim, along the tree-lined Baluardo, facing the Alps.

In the portions of the building that are reserved to the servants' quarters the materials used to build and decorate are less refined and expensive, but the overall quality remains, making the building a fine example of a new way to conceive house-building.

All spaces have a function and are connected in order to enhance the life quality of all the residents and their serving staff.

Observing the façade you can easily notice the influence of Greek architecture, especially with reference to the temple construction.

Antonelli was certainly inspired by ancient Greek art, but he used classical elements in his way, in order to obtain balance and harmony, while still focusing on usefulness and convenience.

5. Watch out: Antonelli used one single element on different scales, with similar yet not quite the same functions. What is it?

Window Column Chimney Arch Frieze Tree Statue

Do not forget to look for the cache! You can then move on to the next step.



Just round the corner from Casa Bossi you can see Saint Gaudenzio's Dome and Church. Take via Pier Lombardo and get closer.

3. SAINT GAUDENZIO'S DOME (or "the Cupola")

Coordinates: N 45° 26.923 E 008° 37.203

LOOK FOR THE CACHE HIDDEN NEAR HERE:

https://www.geocaching.com/geocache/GC23RT0_novara-basilica-di-san-gaudenzio

(also see short video: http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xigtqg_basilica-of-san-gaudenzio-great-attractions-novara-italy_travel#.UW7X56J92dA)

A few facts: the Cupola is 121 m high, it was made by architect Alessandro Antonelli, and it is reckoned as one of the highest brick dome in the world.

Works started at the beginning of 1844 and ended in 1887 when the statue of The Saviour (Il Salvatore) was placed at the summit of the dome. The bishop inaugurated the dome during the Patron Saint Celebrations.

The construction works lasted for over forty years , and the original idea of Antonelli underwent several changes and adjustments.

The first design dates back to 1841 and works began only three years later. of this original design only the arches were built at the base of the Dome.

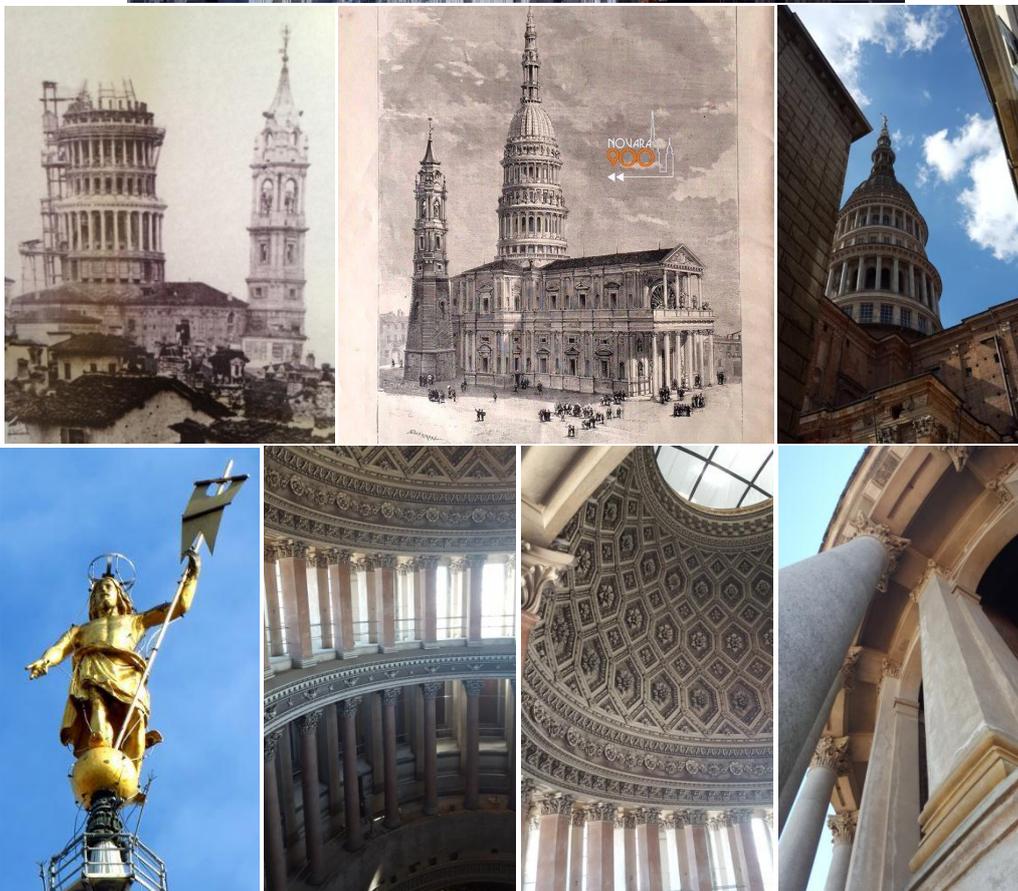
An interruption came with the First Italian War of Independence (1848-49) so the architect had time to improve his project, and when the works resumed in 1855 he presented a new design that included an extra crown of pilasters that would grant even more visibility to the monument.

The top of the dome was built between 1876 and 1878. In May 1878 a statue depicting Jesus the Savoir, made by Pietro Zucchi, was placed on top of the 121-meter structure.

Though not quite as popular as the Mole Antonelliana in Turin, the dome is a bold and outstanding structure that is one –of-a-kind in world architecture.

It is held by four couples of arches, and its appearance is based on “geometry of empty and full spaces”. The weight of the elements has been broken down into concentric circles reaching towards the sky.

It has been built using high quality local materials that Antonelli himself checked the bricks on a regular basis.



If you go and visit the Dome you can still see the incredibly big compass that was used to do the measurements – its ray is 11 m long!

The other world famous work by Antonelli is the Mole Antonelliana in Turin (finished in 1889).





How many designs???!?

The legend has it that when in 1841 Antonelli was commissioned the work to add a dome to the patron Saint's church, the architect had the whole project in his mind. Nevertheless he was perfectly aware that nobody would have supported his ideas in a small town like Novara. It was too risky and too expensive. So he decided to lock his drawings in a safe place in his studio, and presented the city council some more realistic drawings, in tune with his clients' expectations (*1st design*).

The work started and after a few years,

when the scaffold was dismantled, no change had been made, apparently. The Novaresi wondered where the dome was, and most of the investors asked where their money had gone.

Antonelli explained that he had used them to reinforce the structure of the building to hold the dome that still had to be made, but for which he needed a second contract. People were not happy but they could not leave the church the way it was, so they granted him a second contract and when all the money was collected works started again (*2nd design*).

But even this time Antonelli had no intention of really making "that dome". So, when the scaffold was disassembled again, the dome was not finished and only an order of circular

columns stood above what was still an open space. The city authorities were really mad with him, but at that point they could not do much, as the church did not have a roof. So they ordered him to finish his work and signed a third contract (*3rd design*). Another ten years went by and a second order of columns was established. Only at this stage Antonelli took out his original drawings since money had finished again (!) and he needed a fourth contract (*4th design*). That was luckily the last one.

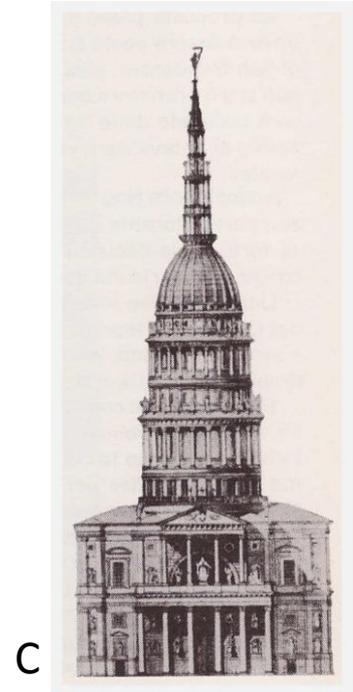
After forty years, in 1887, the dome was finished, and looked exactly the way you can admire it today. There were just a few details to be completed and, shortly before dying, Antonelli left the task to his son.

Today, thanks to the bold vision of a great architect and artist, people from Novara can be proud to have a very special city skyline.

According to some scholars, the famous Spanish architect **Antoni Gaudi** had read some works by Alessandro Antonelli and was quite interested in his daring building technique. For sure, the two architects shared the same interest in vertical constructions.

(see also our URBAN HIKING TRAIL: <http://geocachinggraviteam.weebly.com/urban-hiking.html>)

6. Have a look at the following pictures. According to what you have read, put them in chronological order:



7. Go to the front of the church and have a second look at the last picture (C) and compare it to what you see now in front of you now. Which difference(s) do you notice in the lower part?

- (now) The façade of the church has a bigger number of columns
- (now) The façade of the church looks wider, with a three-storey colonnade.
- (now) The façade of the church is totally different, which means it was not built according to the design

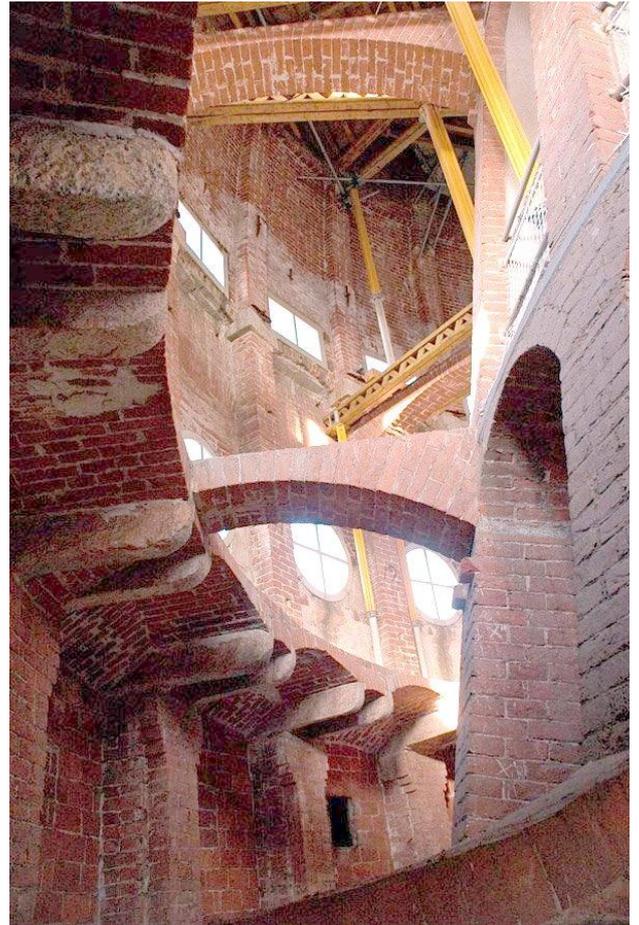
8. Have a look at the following drawing that gives you an insight on the way the dome was built. How many overlapping domes can you see?

9. Check the same drawing: do you notice elements that cannot be found on the dome today (these elements were in the final design but were never added).

From these simple observations of the building, you can notice how Antonelli managed to build an extremely bold and innovative structure, using traditional materials (like bricks, pebbles and stones), because they were available in the area around the city, and getting inspired by ancient construction techniques and classical architecture, which he exploited to the fullest of their structural possibilities.



← Picture to observe for questions 8 and 9



View of the brick structures supporting the dome

While other architects in Europe made experiments with cast iron structures (the Eiffel tower was built between 1887-89), Antonelli made one of the most incredible brick dome ever constructed.

Do not forget to look for the cache! You can then move on to the next step.

From the front of Saint Gaudenzio's Dome take via San Gaudenzio, go straight and keep going (past Corso Italia via San Gaudenzio becomes via Prina) up to the far end of the street; turn left into via Fratelli Rosselli and get to piazza della Repubblica (better known as piazza Duomo); you will find the Duomo on the right hand side of the square.

4. The DUOMO

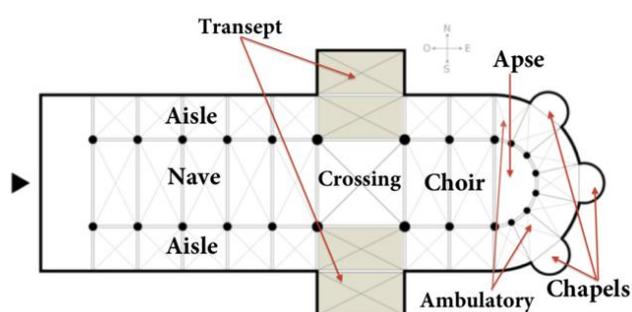
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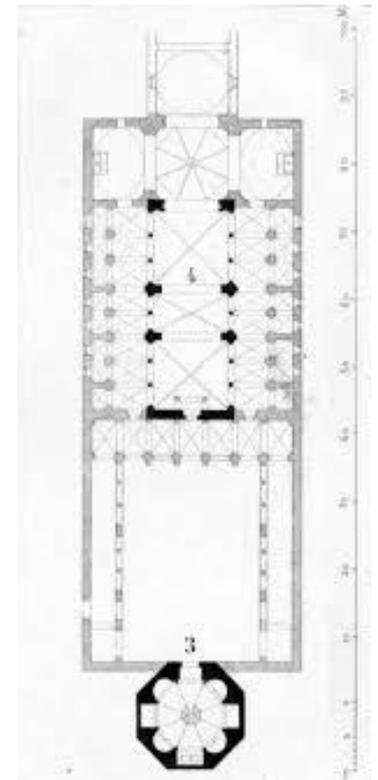
The Duomo of Novara, also known as St. Mary of the Assumption Cathedral, is an imposing Neoclassical building designed by Alessandro Antonelli and built in the second half of the 1800s.

It's located on the site of the old Romanesque cathedral, that had already been partially refashioned during the 18th century. Further renovations began in the 1830s during favorable economic times.

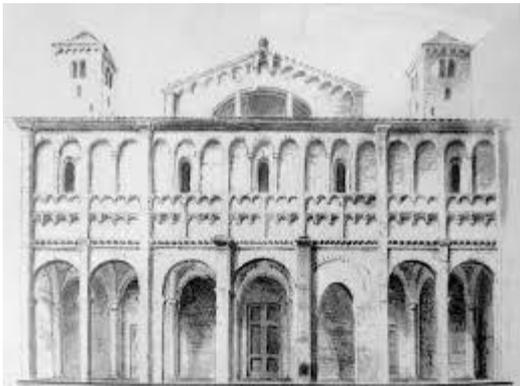
church parts and terms



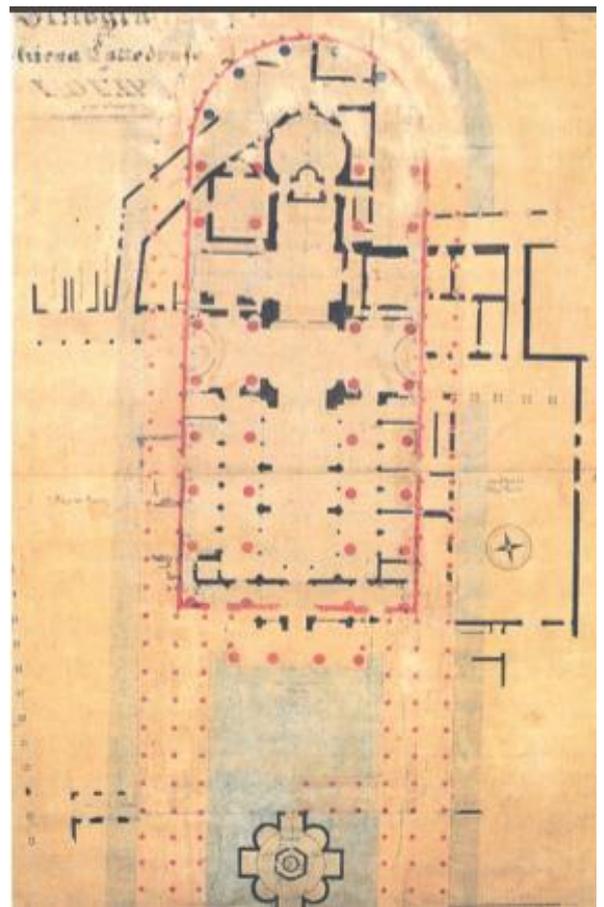
The building has three naves, divided by ochre-colored stucco columns. The altar was designed by architect Alessandro Antonelli, who at the time was only 34, and was built starting from 1832 and 1836; it's made of 377 blocks of marble coming from quarries located in Verona, Carrara and Varallo. The result was so impressive that Antonelli was granted the possibility to demolishing the old cathedral and its portico in order to build the new one.



Print showing the old Romanesque cathedral + Its facade and plan



The red lines mark Antonelli's new church

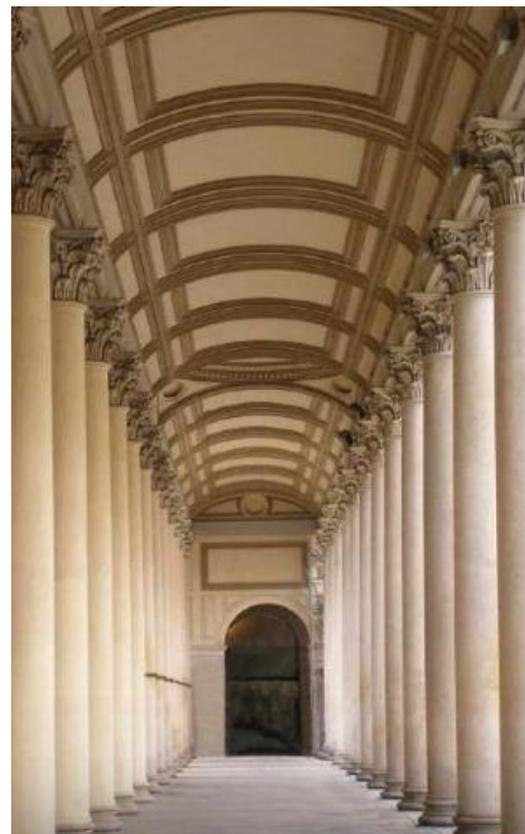


Demolition began in the late 1850s, and continued in the early 1860s. The only Medieval elements spared from destruction are a handful of religious ornaments, a few paintings, the **chapel** dedicated to **Saint Syrus** of Pavia, the body of the bell tower, and a portion of the floor mosaic.



Remains of a Romanesque mosaic on the Cathedral floor

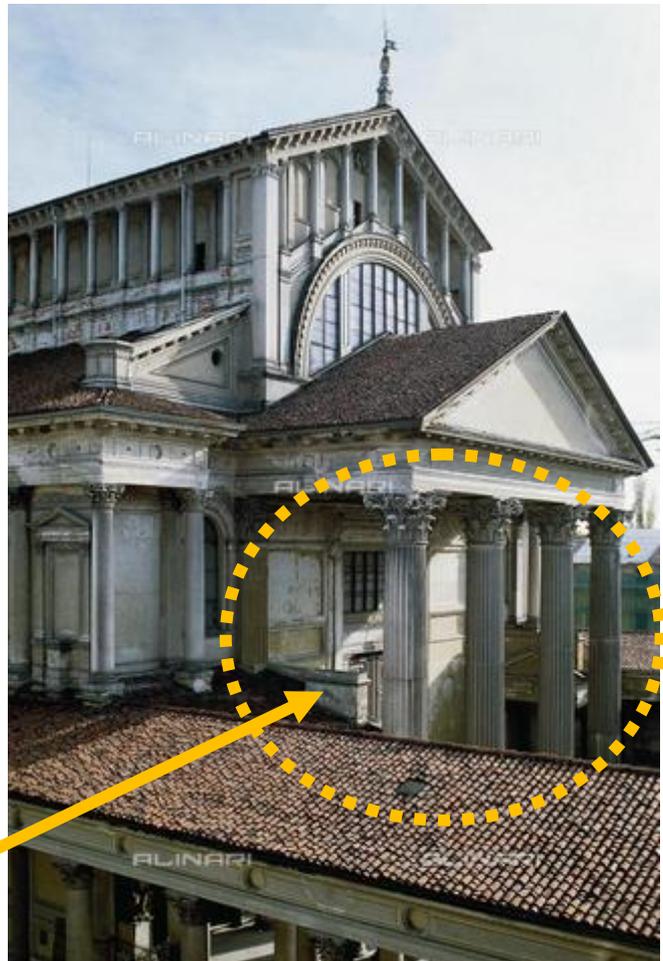
The new building has a colonnade overlooking the square, and the façade with four imposing fluted Corinthian columns that support the pediment. The altars flanking the naves were built during the 1880s according to Antonelli's design.



For the construction of the Duomo (as well as for the Cupola and Casa Bossi), architect Alessandro Antonelli used **bricks**, which are used with extreme skill by the designer, exploiting their high potential, but wisely hiding them from the eyes of the visitors.

Opposite the façade of the Cathedral you can admire the ancient Romanesque Baptistery, which survived the Neoclassical restorations.

10. Go back to the print showing the Duomo before Antonelli's intervention and compare it to the present building. Which element did Antonelli use to give the new building a sense of height, lightness and majesty altogether (also connecting the church to the square and its colonnade)?



11. Which element in the front part of the church has been inspired by Greek architecture?

Do not forget to look for the cache! You can then move on to the next step.

To the Western side of the piazza you can see the Guardhouse.

5. The GUARDHOUSE

Coordinates: 45.445930, 8.619149

The Guardhouse is an elegant building that during the 19th century hosted the troops that had the task of patrolling the city, and it was erected on the same spot of the old Spanish guardhouse. The three-storey building was meant to decorate the square and played an official role in such a crucial corner of the city.



Construction works started in 1835.

The frieze that decorates the facade depicts the peace treaty between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines that was signed in Novara on the 20th December 1310. At the heart of the composition is Emperor Henry VII, who acted as a mediator between the two parties.

The upper portion of the building is crowned by a female statue personifying Novara; in her left hand she is holding a cornucopia; her right arm is leaning on the city's coat of arms.

12. Observe the frieze. Can you recognize the emperor? Which elements indicate his importance and status?

13. Which decorative elements point at the military function of the building (military theme)?

14. Which element is a clear reference to the city of Novara?

Do not forget to look for the cache!

Well done, now go to <http://geocachingraviteam.weebly.com/neoclassicim---test.html> and upload your replies (you can do it right now or go back to it once you are at home). If your answers are correct you can take a screenshot of the final page and bring it to your teacher.

In order to prove you have done the trail yourself, bring also a photo of you in front of each point of interest 😊.

If you are not a student and you would like to play for fun, you are very much welcomed to do it.

You can also post comments on our Facebook page: **Ravizza Geocaching**



Thank you for playing, see you next time !

Raviteam IPS Ravizza, Novara