

A peaceful place where you have no cares in the world. No troubles, no stress, just you and the silence; island of San Giulio along the monks' path on a divine journey of luminous introspection, of self awareness, religious and symbiotic harmony, with an ambience of total peace."

Signs along the monks' path

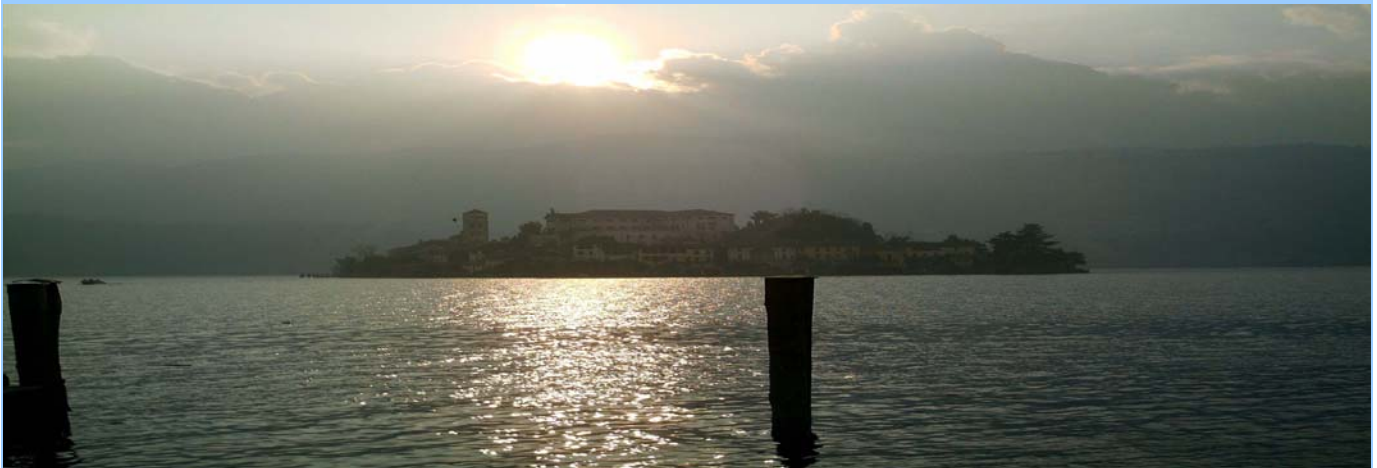
- 1. Listen to Silence*
- 2. Listen to the Water, the Wind and Your Footsteps*
- 3. Accept and Understand the Silence*
- 4. Take All the Silence Offers*
- 5. Silence Is the Language of Love*
- 6. Silence Is the Peace of the Ego*
- 7. Silence Is Music and Harmony*
- 8. Silence Is Truth and Prayer*
- 9. In Silence Meet the Master*
- 10. In Silence Breathe God*
- 11. Every Journey Starts From Close By*
- 12. The Walls Are in Your Mind*
- 13. Open Your Being*
- 14. Every Moment Is This Moment, Now, Here*
- 15. Abandon Your Ego and Mine*
- 16. Accept, Grow, Mature*
- 17. Be Simple, Be Your True Self*
- 18. The Wise Make Mistakes and Smile*
- 19. Understand Who You Are and Be That Being, Then You Are Everything*
- 20. When You Are Fully Aware, Your Journey Is Over*

HISTORICAL INFORMATION



Longobard period

During the Longobard invasions (late 6th century) the episcopal power was replaced for a time by that of the lords and stewards set up by the invaders. The island of S. Giulio was chosen as the seat of the Dukes of Novara. It was here too that King Agilulfo had Duke Mimulfo beheaded (588) for failing to resist the Frankish invasion. It is likely that the Longobards yielded to the Bishops of Novara, who were certainly back in power under the Carolingians. From the 6th century on the strategic defence system of the entire region was under construction: castles and wall-fortifications, some on late-Roman foundations, were built on the island of S. Giulio, at Orta, at Carcegna, Buccione, Lortallo, Gozzano, Soriso, etc. The island of S. Giulio was one of the key positions of the doomed first Italian feudal kingdom: in 957 under Berengarius II, who surrendered to the son of Otto I of Saxony, and again in 962 under Villa, Berengarius' wife, who strengthened the island's fortification and valiantly fought against Otto's iron grip. Otto was so impressed by her courage that he saved the queen's life.



Otto I

An important document dating from the same year, 962, gives proof of the Bishop of Novara's jurisdiction over the island. On 25th July Otto I published a charter in Orta restoring to the Bishop of Novara the island which had been wrongfully taken from him by Berengarius II; he also gave land in the upper Novara district to the canons of the basilica of S. Giulio, and to the basilica itself he gave a precious silver eagle which was later plundered. In 969 Otto I conferred the title of City Count on the Bishop of Novara, thus creating a precedent for the similar recognition on the part of Henry II of Saxony in 1013 (it was Henry II who defeated Arduino, the feudal king of Italy, who had annexed the Riviera di San Giulio). Later concessions from Conrad II (1028), Henry IV and F. Barbarossa (1155) granted de jure power to the bishops of Novara not only over the island but also over the coasts of the lake and the adjoining hill country.

1100 - 1400

The victory of the Communes over Barbarossa in 1183 resulted in the bishops of Novara losing the title of City Counts as well as, for a short period, their sway over Orta, which became part of the Commune of Novara; but in 1219 the Commune itself fell in with the wish of Frederick II and formally restored the Orta region to its former overlords. Apart from a few unfortunate interludes (in 1275, in 1324 and, as we shall see, during the first half of the 16th century) the sway of the bishops of Novara over the Riviera di San Giulio lasted until 1817 - that is, for about 900 years from the publication of Otto's charter. Their rule does not appear to have been very oppressive, either in authority or fiscal matters; there was a tendency to mingle the interests of the bishops and curia with those of his subjects, and these in their turn

frequently showed that they preferred the bishop to other more oppressive form of authority. The bishop was responsible for making, enforcing and defending the laws. In the Riviera he was represented by the lord of some castle (who employed the services of a capitan and a segeant) whose duty it was to command the local army and to constitute the first appeal in law-suits; there was also a governor who exercised civil powers. The bishop had a residence at Gozzano and another on the island of S. Giulio.

1500

In the first half of the 16th century, between 1520 and 1530, the region around Lake Orta faced a number of several crises. These were the last years of the Sforza regime in Milan: in 1522 Francis I Sforza took advantage of a vacancy in the see of Novara and annexed the whole area. In 1524 Orta was sacked by Captain Anchise Visconti's troops in the service of the Sforzas: a heavy tax was imposed, but to no avail, until the wealthiest citizens of Orta were taken ostage and only restored to liberty after the payment of a ransom.



In 1525 more hostages were taken and more ransoms demanded in exchange for their freedom. On 1st January 1528 Captain Bonifacio Visconti, who had been named Count of the Riviera di San Giulio by Charles Bourbon, deputizing for the Emperor Charles V, ordered the collection of further taxes: the population hesitated, and then, on 31st January, the feast of St. Julius, marched against the Visconti. The Visconti, helped by allied soldiers, beat off the opposition and proceeded to punish Orta mercilessly. Early in February 1529 the Neapolitan Cesare Maggio, colonel of Charles V's army, ordered the payment of 4.000 gold crowns by the people of the Riviera who, following the advice of their bishop, Arcimboldo, withdrew from their lands and massed themselves on the island of S. Giulio, preparing for revolt. The signal for the beginning of the revolt was given, as agreed, by the bells of the tower of Buccione (still existing). Giacomo Giovanetti (1840) brought a legend to light according to which the person who sounded the alarm was a heroic woman of the Riviera, named Maria Canavesa, who, together with her little son, payed for her courageous deed with her life. The rebellion was led, according to the legend, by an enormous and extremely brave son of the people called Sappa, a native of Armeno; for a time it was successful - this is historical, but the interlude was brief, for in May of the same year, 1529, Viscontino di Massino (who had previously helped Bonifacio Visconti) attacked again and so harrassed the inhabitants of the Riviera di San Giulio that they finally arose in fury and in the course of a battle near Miasino killed their persecutor and drove out his followers. This dramatic series of events ended finally late in 1529 with Charles V's recognition of the rights of Arcimboldo, bishop of Novara, over the peoples of the Riviera di San Giulio.



1600

So began a comparatively peaceful period which lasted about two centuries, from the late 16th century to the middle of the 18th century, the period of greatest activity in the lake Orta region and that which witnessed the replacement of the Milanese government by that of the Spaniards (1535 - 1714). The peace was disturbed at the level of diplomacy by continual and never-solved controversy between the Spanish Senate and tax authorities on the one hand and the bishop of Novara on the other over certain political and tributary rights.

The 17th century witnessed no events of particular importance in the region, except for the reaction of the people to the inordinately heavy taxes demanded by the bishop Gian Pietro Volpi.

French troops at war with the Spanish overran the Orta countryside in 1636, sacking Gozzano, Bugnate, Pogno and burning Auzate, Soriso, Gargallo, etc. Later, in 1658, Giovanni Borromeo tried to occupy the Riviera di San Giulio with a corps of German troops. When Austria succeeded Spain in Milanese region (1715 - 1796) this had little effect upon the Riviera, except for a gradual improvement in the standard of living. The question of jurisdiction so long disputed between the Spaniards and the bishop of Novara was vitually ignored by the Austrians.

Later

Meanwhile the house of Savoy was inciting the people of the region to rise up against their bishop in the hope that this would enable it to annex the Riviera: in 1750 there was considerable roting against Sanseverino, bishop of Novara, and bit by bit the Savoiards succeeded in gaining their ends. First in 1767 a convention was signed which asserted that: King Charles Emanuel III and his descendents possess supreme dominion over the Riviera di San Giulio, Orta, Gozzano and all the lands of Soriso. The bishop of Novara retained the title of Princes of S. Giulio and Orta, as well as temporal dominion over the Riviera. Secondly, in September of the same year, there took place the ceremony of swearing loyalty to the King of Sardinia by the population which in its turn was to enjoy special privileges.



Much later came the convention of 18th July 1817, in which the whole territory was included in the State of Piedmont, ruled at that time by Victor Emanuel I. The bishop of Novara gave up all his feudal rights, keeping no more than the castle and palaces of Gozzano and the island of S. Giulio.

ISLAND OF ST. GIULIO

According to the legend, the Island of St. Giulio was dominated by a big serpent that destroyed everything. But when St. Giulio, that had the power to command over the waves, the storms, the wild animals and the human beings, arrived near the lake, waving his hand he chased away the dangerous menacing animal.

He reached the Island journeying over the water on his cloak guided by his staff. The big reptile disappeared and St. Giulio, tired and near to his death, thought that the island was the right place to build his hundredth and last church dedicated to the Holy Apostles. The Island of San Giulio is today a place of great mysticism. Here was born on 962 William of Volpiano, during the siege to Queen Willa by Emperor Otto, King Berengario II's wife, who had taken the Island from the Bishop of Novara. The big central building was a Castle. The island was the governor's seat that represented the bishop. On 1842 it was destroyed to build on it a seminary. Now there is a Benedictin monastery that helps giving more mystic power to a place that is by nature immersed in the silence.

Between 1593 and 1615, a decisive role in the continuation of the project was played by the Bishop of Novara, Carlo Bescapè; he was concerned that the complex should be a strictly organised centre of devotion, in line with the ideas which had inspired the Council of Trento, and more particularly with the interpretation of the Counter-Reformation given by Carlo Borromeo in the diocese of Milan.



For example, he took pains to ensure that the episodes of the life of St. Francis of Assisi - the chosen theme of the devotional itinerary - were correctly illustrated, and to encourage the faithful in devotion and the elevation of the spirit, inspecting every stage of the work in progress and giving precise instructions as to the scenes to be represented inside each chapel. Furthermore, he set up a body, the fabbriciera, a kind of committee of works, to administer the funds which were donated or willed towards the completion of the project. The overall plan

of work, including the choice of the site of each chapel and the lay-out of the paths and the vegetation, was made by the Capuchin architect Cleto of Castelletto Ticino, who worked in close collaboration with Bishop Bescapè. The first chapels were thus executed with small, intimate groups of terracotta figures representing simple people, and decorated with frescoes whose key characteristic was their descriptive tone, intended as a clear, easily understandable way of recounting to the faithful the story of the Saint who had modelled his life on Christ's.



The Basilica of San Giulio was originally founded by St. Giulio in 390. During the siege of Otto 1st (956 - 962) the church was seriously damaged and only the central apse was saved. After year 962 the canons

had the privilege on the territory of the Island signed by Otto the Great, so they dedicated themselves to the reconstruction of the church. The tower was added during the 11th - 12th century.

In the Basilica the frescoes were certainly begun very early, and re-done at various times. Of the datables

the oldest frescoes are aged 1421. But the greatest work of art in the Basilica is the ambo. The pulpit is carved out of grey-green serpentine from the Oira quarry. The sculptures represent the Evangelists. The figure sculpted among the eagle and the lion is probably Guglielmo of Volpiano.

The elegant houses on the lake were the canon's residences: In 1763 each of them was called after a Saint to recognise them easily. During the month of June, in Villa Tallone takes place the Festival of Ancient Music, now at its 15th edition. This prestigious event is organized by the Association "Amici della Musica" of Novara. During the Sundays of September take place the Piano Concerts of the "Settembre musicale di San Giulio".

