

Telgate from yesterday to today

From *VICUS* to *CASTRUM*

Telgate was able to overcome the difficult years of the long and bloody war between the Goths and the Byzantines and survived the destruction of the Lombards in 569 AD.

One of the first baptismal churches of the plain of Bergamo was founded here around 5th-6th century AD. The economic life took place especially in the *curtes*, Latin for medieval manors. The villages were formed by small settlements with a few huts aligned along the centuriation.

From the 7th century onwards all the villages had at least a parish surrounded by a cemetery.

SETTLEMENTS and LAND from the 5th to the 10th CENTURIES

The first written documents report that there were at least four ancient settlements of predial origin like Telgate or of high-medieval origin.

Telgate, the *fundus* Tallicate, the agricultural settlement of the colonist Tallicus, had most probably already been turned into a real village thanks to the *mutationes*, way stations along the Roman road Bergamo-Brescia used to service vehicles and animals. In 1097 it became a *castrum*, in the first years of the next century it was called *villa* and next *commune*.

Telgate had a church with a baptistery (*pieve*) and two congregations: Saint Faustino and Saint Pietro in Vilico.

WATERCOURSES

The territory of Telgate is crossed from north to south by two streams: the Tirna and the Rillo. Two further major watercourses flow about 4 km away from the city center: the Cherio in the west and the Oglio in the east.

The Tirna rises in the hills between Chiuduno and Grumello and flows at the same distance from the Cherio and Oglio. The Rillo rises in the hills above Grumello, on top of the valley of Boldesico, and receives the waters of the stream Gambone. It flows almost straight towards Palosco, where the Oglio flows into it.

The name Rillo derives from the Latin word *riolus* meaning stream. Before the adjustment of its riverbed its floods caused a wide swampy area in the zone where the Gaverina farmstead is currently located.

ROAD NETWORK

The territory of Telgate was crossed by a dense grid of roads that linked the town to the nearby centers. Roads, namely paths to get closer to places and to connect places with each other, are a strong identity element for a territory. Moving places apart or connecting them, road networks have conditioned political and economic dynamics, and historical evolution. Historic paths are a sign of the organization wanted by the communities living in the area or a print of the local management by the centers of power: they established territorial hierarchies.

Stone bridges built in ancient times point at sites that in specific ages played an important role in the organization of a part of the territory. They were strategic elements to the point to be provided with structures for military control. Built in privileged places and in convergence areas, sensitive elements to the economic and demographic needs, they often survived the civilizations and the needs that had determined their realizations; isolation has often made the survival of such structures easier.

THE ROUTE OF THE ROMAN ROAD

This route is described in itinerary sources, such as the *Itinerarium Burdigalense* (4th century AD). Along this route, sources provide evidence of a *mutatio* at Tellegatae and one at Tetellus; according to other sources there was a *mansio* at Tellegatae and one in Leuceris.

The Roman route was probably traced over an older path heading from Bergamo to Seriate: it crossed the river Serio and carried on to Carobbio degli Angeli, from where the road headed to Telgate. Then running towards the stream Rillo as far as the crossroads with the current road Telgate-Palazzolo, it crossed the embankment of the current irrigation ditch Conta to meet the current road Palazzolo-Grumello. Finally, passing through two farms, it crossed the railroad, then kept on straight as far as the present road Palazzolo-Cividino, leaving the town of Cividino on the left.

ENCASTELLATION

After the defeat of Desiderio, Italy became part of the Holy Roman Empire. The circular form of the Telgate Castle, still clearly identifiable in the 1800s real estate registries, is very similar to the nearby Ghisalba Castle. The defense works built around the church reinforced the ones that existed from the *curtis*, namely a ditch surrounding the embankment. Traces of the ditch are still visible nowadays. The first certain news about the existence of the castle dates back to the first decades of the 11th century.

In communal times housing formed an agglomeration of hundreds of citizens, the so-called *villa*. In the following centuries further fortified structures were built on the most fertile part of the territory.

ORIGIN AND FUNCTION OF THE *PIEVE*

Destroyed medieval churches.

The complex of the *pieve* of San Giovanni before the reconstruction in the 1700s was formed by the church, the baptistry, the cemetery, the archpriest's home and the home of the five canons. Probably between the 9th and 11th centuries all these buildings were surrounded by a ditch and an embankment. The church of San Giovanni Battista is *caput plebis*, it was big, raw and old with three altars.

Burials weren't well sealed and stank, the floor was constantly disarranged due to the diggings for new graves.

In 1703 the church was completely destroyed to be replaced by another building erected in 1777 and still present.

CHURCHES

San Pietro in Valico: it was built along the road to Palazzolo. The church and the lands around it were property of the Benedictine monastery of Vallalta.

San Vitale: the church, not existing nowadays, was built along the road to Palazzolo, within the borders of Telgate. Another church named after San Vitale was in Palosco, outside the territory of Telgate.

San Faustino: this ancient oratory, not existing today, was located just north-west of the town center, in the fields still called San Faustino.

THE ORIGIN OF THE TOWN OF TELGATE

Between the 12th and the 13th centuries, most of the centers in rural areas developed into towns emancipating from their lords. Telgate probably achieved its autonomy later than other towns around Bergamo. The town was originally organized as a town of noblemen. A document from the Bergamo Town Archives dated 18th April 1220 reports of a convention made by the landowners of

Telgate for the election of six representatives in charge of providing regulations for the use of the waters of the stream Tirna for irrigation. These regulations were supposed to respect the rules of the town.

The castle was ceded to Bergamo by the Marenzi family.

BORDERS

Telgate was united to the town of Grumello but it got its independence back a few years later. In 1392 the borders with the towns of Chiuduno, Grumello and Palosco were redefined. Town borders updating started at the Petra Morgana. Towards the middle of the 12th century serious contrasts between Bergamo, Brescia and Cremona came up due to border matters. In 1156 a real war broke out against Brescia and on 10th March Brescia's army caused carnage. On 21st March a peace treaty was signed and Bergamo had to give the castles back to Brescia.

The discord between the two cities made the emperor Frederick I from Swabia, nicknamed Barbarossa, take a part in it. He came down to Italy trying to subdue the Italian towns, but he was defeated in Legnano in 1176. Years of relative peace followed in the province of Bergamo and in 1183 with the peace of Costance the towns got their independence. In 1191 the war between Bergamo and Brescia broke out again and it ended in 1198 with a treaty.

CIVIL WARS AND THE RULE OF THE VISCONTI

In the province of Bergamo the civil war between Guelphs and Ghibellines continued unabated causing a lot of casualties and ruins marking the beginning of economic and demographic decline. After a brief period of Guelph domination, Bergamo got back in the hands of the Ghibellines.

In 1268 during the government of the high official (*podestà*) Torrianni, Bergamo supported Milan against Brescia that had risen up against their official, occupying Palazzolo Castle.

On that occasion the territory of Telgate got involved into military operations too. Even more violent civil fights broke out.

The presence of some 14th century tower houses in the town center belonging to the most well-known families, the Marenzi, Vavassori and Agosti, provides documentary evidence for the insecurity of the times. In 1404 captain Pandolfo Malatesta got the *signoria* of Brescia and tried to extend his dominance to the territory of Bergamo as well.

Finally, on 8th July 1408, the Suardi who were ruling Bergamo on behalf of the Visconti, sold the town along with all its territories to Malatesta in exchange for 30,000 ducats.

In 1419 the new Duke of Milan Filippo Maria Visconti was able to win back the territories of Brescia and Bergamo, but violent civil wars continued under his rule as well.

The Guelphs, by then at clear disadvantage, supported by the ducal rule, asked for the help of Venice. This is how another long and bloody war between the two bordering powers started. There was a demographic decline caused by continuous belligerency, frequent famines and plagues.

UNDER THE RULE OF THE MOST SERENE REPUBLIC OF VENICE

In 1428 the Venetian army occupied Bergamo. A lot of counter-attacks by Milan followed, keeping our territory in a constant state of war over decades with disastrous consequences for the population. The wars were followed by famines and epidemics, in 1447 the town had the church of Saint Giuliano built as a leper hospital for women hit by the terrible disease, it was located in the open countryside a little set back from the road.

The area experienced a period of peace between 1450-1475.

In 1482 a war between Ferrara and Venezia broke out; military operations took place and in these same years the town of Bergamo tried to reactivate the old Roman road called Bergomum-Brixia

from Cividino to Telgate to transport timber from the Camonica Valley into town.

In 1494 another war broke out against the French king Charles VIII. The conflict continued until 1498 under the reign of king Louis XII; all the Italian states took part in the war that led to the French occupation of northern Italy.

During the first phases of the war the stronghold of Palazzolo was controlled by Venice. Around the middle of the 16th century, pastoral visits of the bishops started according to the dictates of the Council of Trent. At the end of the 16th century, Telgate counted 599 residents, in the first decades of the 17th century a large part of the lands of Telgate belonged to churches, monasteries and noblemen. This period of peace was disturbed by frequent episodes of violence, such as the assault and fire of the Marenzi's house in 1620, carried out by armed gangs of marauding outlaws.

There were then epidemics of plague and Telgate had 40 victims. During the war for the succession to the Spanish throne, Venice decided to be neutral; the fighting French, Spanish, German troops as well as the troops from Savoy penetrated the borders causing serious damages to Telgate, which had to host a German campsite.

During the second campaign in Italy, the First Consul Napoleon, after the victory of Marengo on 15th June 1800, started chasing the Austro-Russians who were retiring from Lombardy. The defeated Austrian army, to delay the French troops, destroyed bridges on the rivers Ticino, Adda and Oglio.

The revolutionary troops stopped in the countryside of Telgate and Palosco waiting for the Roman bridge in Palazzolo to be rebuilt. Napoleon spent one or more nights in the palace of the Counts Agosti in Telgate. In fact, this palace, surrounded by a high wall, was suitable to be defended and being close to the front, it was chosen as headquarters to store the army provisions. Napoleon found the palace empty because the counts had most likely run away. The main staircase is decorated with big frescoes celebrating the deeds of the counts and the victories that the German emperor gained against the French. The news about this forced stopover in Telgate is confirmed by Roncalli in his memories, where he states that he slept in the same bed Napoleon had slept in. After the brief period of Napoleonic rule, Telgate followed the events of Bergamo and of northern Italy under the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia.

There were big epidemics of cholera in 1849, 1855 and 1867, followed by migratory movements and the birth of the first industries.

THE DEFENCE OF THE CENTER

Although the urban network of Telgate has been radically modified by an intense industrialization, it has an ancient nucleus.

The high tower now used as a bell tower for the parish church was built in the first half of the 13th century. The church *satis ampla, rudis et vetusta* was one of the most ancient churches on the territory of Bergamo, founded in the 3rd century by Saint Apollinare.

The *castelletum* was a small private and protected landlord's fortification, while the *rocham circharum* hints at a defensive artifact placed in proximity of the town border. Along the main road there were fortified buildings designed for the defense of territories.

The existence of a functional public center along the important route Bergamo-Brescia definitely made the creation of one of the first churches in the diocese of Bergamo easier. In the mid-12th century the two lay *signorie* of Telgate were still functioning. Between 1221 and 1222 the by now undisputed authority of the town institutions was able to force the *dominus loci* of Telgate to recognize the prerogatives and public *potestas*.

In 1387 the property of the castle was transferred from the Martinengo to the Marenzi.

With the arrival of the Venetian rule the castle of Telgate was permanently handed back to its previous owners.

TELGATE IN AN OLD MAP

The map was made by the notary Vincenzo Agazzi in 1791. It is very precious because it represents buildings that have now disappeared or have been widely changed.

They are represented in plan view: the old church, the oratory of the white *disciplinati* (lay members of a congregation), the cemetery area, a few gardens, the tower, the castle and the enclosed church of Ghisalba.

In 1791 the ancient church was replaced by the building that can still be seen in Telgate today.