



1:80000 scale. Map created on Inkatlas.com. Copyright OpenStreetMap contributors (openstreetmap.org), OpenTopoMap (CC-BY-SA), 2021.

The numbering of the church refers to the **General Map of the Romanesque Hills Route**.

#### How to get to and visit the church of San Giovanni:

Loc. Valle Ochera (cascina Bari), Berzano di San Pietro (AT).

GPS Coordinates: Lat. 45.109187 | Long 7.948458

Cars should be left in the camper area before proceeding on foot alongside the cemetery towards cascina Baudina. After 600 metres, turn left and climb up through the woods for another 200 metres.

Open the first Sunday of each month in the period from April to October, supervised by the volunteers.

Informations: +39 3491591705 +39 0119920610

Info Comune: [www.comune.berzanosanpietro.at.it](http://www.comune.berzanosanpietro.at.it)

#### Local attractions in and around Berzano:

- Berzano village and parish church of SS. Pietro e Paolo;
- Former church of San Pietro and panoramic point;
- Forest of orchids and badlands;
- Abbey of Vezzolano, Albugnano;
- Old Town "ël Lö", Casalborgone;
- Church of San Siro, Casalborgone.

#### Local events and shows:

- Carnival party with the Pro Loco;
- Easter Monday market;
- Patron Saint's Festival of Santi Pietro e Paolo:
  - religious celebration, end of June;
  - tasting of typical products, first Sunday in August.



*tourism in the heart of Piedmont*

Social Promotion Association

#### Information point and contacts:

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[www.vezzolano.it](http://www.vezzolano.it)

Facebook: [turismo InCollina](https://www.facebook.com/turismoInCollina)

Instagram: [reteromanicadicollina](https://www.instagram.com/reteromanicadicollina)



#### The Romanesque Hills Route

promotes knowledge and use of the romanese heritage of the local areas between the river Po and Monferrato.

With the collaboration of:



With the support of:

Municipalities and Parishes of Albugnano, Andezeno, Aramengo, Berzano di San Pietro, Brusasco, Buttigliera d'Asti, Casalborgone, Castagneto Po, Castell'Alfero, Castelnuovo Don Bosco, Cavagnolo, Cerreto d'Asti, Cocconato, Cortazzone, Lauriano, Marentino, Mombello di Torino, Montafia, Montechiaro d'Asti, Montemagno, Montiglio Monferrato, Moransengo-Tonengo, Portacomaro, San Sebastiano da Po, Tigliole.



# Church of San Giovanni Battista

Berzano di San Pietro

19



Abbeys and churches between the river Po and Monferrato

Rev01, marzo 2025

Texts and photos by Associazione InCollina © 2020

Translation: Wall Street English, Chieri (TO)

### Description of the local area

The church stands alone on the top of a hill at a height of 370 m asl, at the confluence of the Ochera Valley with the Gervasio Valley. It is surrounded by woods of oak trees, hornbeams and cherries, with gorse and wild orchids around the edges. It is a little over 2 km from the village of Berzano, in the direction of Casalborgone, near the present day cemetery. In the past it was reached by climbing the Ochera Valley by a steep, grassy track, leading to the churchyard. Nowadays, in the summer months, the woods are so close that San Giovanni is barely visible through the thick vegetation. Once you reach the top of the hill, though, the church appears, on the side of its apse, in all its simple, solitary beauty. The foliage of the large trees frame the distant Alps, the scattered farmhouses, crops in the fields, the ravines of the orchid wood and the church of San Pietro, in a series of rugged and wooded hillsides. The church is included in the regional footpath network and in the "PoMonf - anello dei boschi del Romanico" (local Romanesque woods circuit), within an area of major naturalist value, perfect for lovers of walking tours.



### Historical details

During the whole of the middle ages and beyond, there were two parish churches in Berzano, both acting also as cemeteries: San Giovanni and San Pietro Apostolo, the latter situated on the highest hill in the village, but nowadays deconsecrated. As early as the XIIIth century, though, inhabitants started to settle in a single fortified centre half way along the road, which from then on became the village of Berzano. The first document mentioning San Giovanni, written in the name of "de Romaneto de Breçano", dates back to 1291, when the fortified village of Berzano was handed from the municipality of Chieri to the Marquis of Monferrato. Berzano, until it passed in 1803 to the diocese of Turin, was included in the diocese of Ivrea, for which it represented the extreme southern limit beyond the Po river "ultra Padum". The Romaneti ecclesiastic community appears in 1368 in the book 'Liber decimarum' of the diocese of Ivrea. In 1714 the building appeared to be a "church with no architecture, made of a roof with beams and not vaults" for the

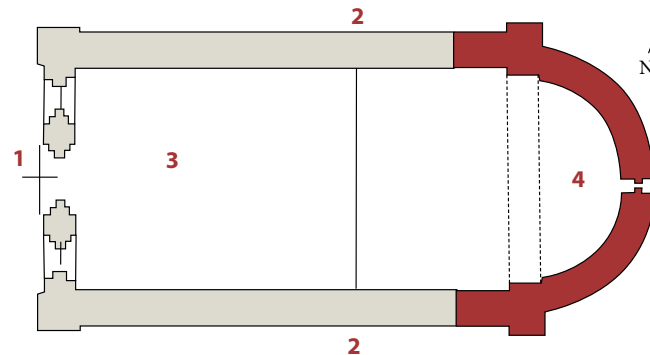


parish priest Giuseppe Comoglio, who mentioned the existence on the dome of the apse of "some painted figures of saints". In 1771, the building was in such an unstable condition that it was forbidden to worship there. After reopening in 1782, it acted as a cemetery church until 1819. As a parish and cemetery church in the village of Romaneto, it probably represented the only building in stone, surrounded by the wooden houses of the peasants. Even after the old village had been abandoned for the safer Berzanese "villanova" dwellings, the inhabitants maintained their habit of burying their dead there. The local place name of "Romanetum" was eradicated, though. Only a few farmhouses remained and finally, in the mid-1900s, the countryside was also abandoned and the church was left to itself in the surrounding woods, the only survivor of a vanished world. Every year, on the festival day of San Giovanni, the inhabitants of the local hills gather for the Holy Mass.

### Description

The building, facing east/north-east, consists of a single rectangular nave with a semi-circular apse, which is the only remaining Romanesque element. The hanging arches carved from monoliths, the absence of elaborate decorations, the exclusive use of sandstone without brick alternations and the consequent lack of bichromicity suggest an original date not beyond the end of the XIIIth century

**1. The façade** in brickwork, retouched in the 1700s and underlying the bell chamber, features a central doorway with a pointed arch and two rectangular splayed windows.



**2. The exterior walls** are both in brickwork: the north wall with various resumptums of masonry; the south wall a window with pointed arch and the clear signs of a filled in door and window. Below the outside cornice of the apse, two rows of stones enclose a 'sawtooth' patterned decoration with bricks. Below that there are hanging arches resting on plain shelves.

**3. The interior** features black and white hexagonal floor tiling, with floral and Greek motifs. Ex voto paintings of popular devotion hang on the walls.

**4. The nave** narrows into the apse, which consists of a wall in exposed tuff stone and a semi-dome painted pale-blue, replacing frescoes that have been lost. The central span and right side span feature splayed single pane windows. San Giovanni represents another example of those not rare cases of mediaeval churches that have kept intact only the part of the apse, as, for example, S. Pietro in Albugnano, S. Eusebio in Castelnuovo, S. Michele in Tonengo or S. Lorenzo in Mombello, all included in the **circuit**.

The reason for this is structural, inasmuch as the apses were low and massive and therefore less likely to collapse. A second explanation, rather singular, is that it was decided (in this case in the 1700s) to do over the church completely, starting from the façade, with over ambitious ideas.

At times, half way through the work, the funds ran out, so that the original apses, which were more hidden and easier to overlook, ended up surviving the changes in style and the ambitions of those ordering the work.



### Interesting fact

A memoir written in 1671 by the parish priest of Berzano, don Giovanni Lupo Viariso, tells of a hermit who lived in San Giovanni for the purpose of providing some services at the church, namely "washin' and sweepin' up that church every Sat'day of the year". In 1685, the parish priest reported the rebuilding of a "house with its cellar beneath and adjacent to the church of San Gio(anni) Batt(ist)a". The height above ground of the filled in door on the south wall makes it plausible that there was a cellar and a dwelling adjacent to the side more exposed to the sun, once used by the hermit. Who was he though? A pious figure? Or a marginalised vagabond who was granted refuge?