



ANGERA CIVIC ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM



WHERE
THE PAST
BECOMES
PRESENT



Città di Angera

WELCOME TO THE HISTORY OF ANGERA!

Dear visitor, welcome to the museum!

Housed in the 15th century Praetorian palace (Open-Air Museum Site 1), the museum is divided into several sections where visitors can discover the history of Angera and its surroundings, from prehistoric times to the end of the Roman era.

Section I: Prehistoric Angera



Although human beings have been evolving for about two-and-a-half million years, the history of the area around Angera spans the last 14,000 years.

During the last glaciation (Würm) the Alpine foothills were covered by a thick ice sheet; the low temperatures and impossibility of finding food meant that *Homo sapiens* did not live in these areas – although about 200,000 years ago he had already populated the European plains, hunting, gathering plant foods and developing (throughout the millennia) his technological abilities and spiritual needs. The progressive melting of the glaciers led to the creation of the Alpine lakes, including Lake Maggiore, the one near which Angera developed.




Angera's Cave, the "Wolf's Lair"

The earliest evidence of the presence of humans near Angera was found during excavations and investigations in the natural cave known as the "Wolf's Lair" (*Tana del Lupo*), situated in the south-western face of the hill on which the castle stands. The oldest objects found there date to the final phase of the Palaeolithic (the "Old Stone Age"), i.e. to about 12,000 – 10,000 BC, known in Italian territory as the Final Epigravettian. (**Display case 1**)

Artefacts in flint, rock crystal and other forms of quartz, including scrapers for working wood and hides, burins, blades and backed points, were in everyday use. At this time humans did not live permanently in the Angera zone, but occupied it seasonally, following the movements of the prey they hunted using traps and spears – which could be hurled fast and efficiently using spear-throwers. However, their maximum range was only 30 m. In addition to hunting and gathering, there were also tasty fish and mollusks to be found in rivers and lakes. The areas near these were thus ideal for habitation, as demonstrated by finds from Angera and throughout the Varese area.



Stone tools from the "Wolf's Lair"

 The current geological epoch, the Holocene – during which the climate has been similar to the present – began in the 10th millennium BC. This marked the start of the Mesolithic, the "Middle Stone Age"; the widespread growth of woods and forests was accompanied by the spread of small mammals, together with an increase in human settlements in the Alpine foothills and around the lakes.

More advanced technologies that allowed improved exploitation of natural resources were developed: an increasing number of flakes and microliths were extracted from flint cores, and these small pointed items were used as tips for arrows and harpoons. The invention of the bow, which launches arrows at high speed so that they can travel for distances of more than 100 m, was a significant improvement for prehistoric hunters.

Thanks to the discovery of arrowheads and numerous depictions in rock paintings and engravings we understand what these deadly weapons were like; their design over the millennia shows ingenuity, making use of the materials available, such as wood, tendons or gut, and later flax fibres.

(Display case 2)



Tanged arrowhead

The Neolithic or "New Stone Age" was a crucial period in human history, marking the transition from a subsistence economy based on hunting, fishing and gathering to agricultural production involving animal raising and crop cultivation that allowed nomadism to be replaced by a sedentary lifestyle. While the first cities were already taking shape in the Near East, scattered human settlements multiplied in our territory, such as the one which gave birth to the Isolino Virginia - Lake Varese Culture. Agricultural production and the consequent need to store ever-increasing quantities of foodstuffs made it necessary to produce suitable containers. Nomads used containers made of vegetable fibres, gourds, and animal skins or bladders, which were light and resistant but not able to keep the contents dry. In the Neolithic, observation of the effects of fire on the properties of clay led to the invention of pottery vases, heavy and unsuitable for transport, but particularly useful - in settlements that were now permanent - for cooking and storing food and containing liquids. In the Neolithic a new technique for working stone was introduced: no longer only by chipping, but also by means of careful grinding, which allowed the creation of sharp, resistant stone blades. Finds from Baranzini locality and the area now occupied by Angera's cemetery include fragments of pottery containers and a polished greenstone axe - of which some replicas have been made, together with handles. **(Display cases 3 and 4)**

Between 3400 and 2200 BC, while Mediterranean populations developed writing, navigation and the engineering skills necessary to construct large buildings such as the pyramids, in the Alpine foothills in Europe the exploitation of animal products such as milk and wool began. The wheel, carts and ploughs arrived, and copper objects started to be produced: in Europe this period corresponds to the Copper Age, Chalcolithic, or Eneolithic. Excavation in the *Tana del Lupo* cave brought to light a small but highly significant potsherd, which demonstrates the presence here of the Bell-Beaker Culture. The name refers to



the inverted-bell shape of a vessel type that was widespread in Europe during the third millennium BC.

These vases have a distinctive decoration made with combs, cords or shells.

(Display case 5)

Bell-Beaker sherd

THE TACTILE TABLE

The **Tactile Table**, created by Marco Maioli, an experimental archaeologist and expert in prehistoric technologies from Angera, enables visitors to touch typical prehistoric raw materials employed by Angera's first inhabitants. You can get to grips with how they were worked, and the intermediate and final products made with them.



Although Iron Age and Bronze Age sites are known elsewhere in the province of Varese and the Lake Maggiore area, remains that definitely date to these epochs have not yet been found in Angera. The next section, therefore, represents a leap in time of over 2000 years, during which the Golasecca Culture developed in this area; from the 4th century BC it was occupied by the Insubri, a Celtic population who settled in part of western Lombardy.

Section II: Roman Angera. The residential area

The appearance of the territory around Angera and the changes it has undergone over the centuries have been revealed by the use of the latest techniques for studying landscape and human activities, together with careful research on old maps. Detailed plans have been prepared to show the location of archaeological remains in the stratigraphy underlying the modern town, and the ancient roads that indicate Angera's importance in Roman times.



Reconstruction of Angera and its surroundings in Roman times

Medieval Angera was known as *Staciona* or *Stazzona* (from the Latin *Statio*, a place to stay or drop anchor) and must have been an important stopping-point for land and water traffic; it was one of three major ports on the lake and among the most significant trading towns in northern Italy. Angera, the terminal of the *Mediolanum-Verbannus* road that connected Milan and Lake Maggiore, was located at the base of Lake Maggiore and not far from the River Ticino, a major junction between routes that connected the Po Valley with the area north of the Alps by means of the San Gottardo, San Bernardino and Spluga passes. Goods went northwards through pre-Alpine territory on boats that, via rivers and lakes, took them to below the main passes; here they were transferred onto wagons on which they crossed the Alps. Beyond there were rivers, lakes and paths, including those linked to the Rhone and the Rhine, which guaranteed distribution in Europe. The itineraries were used in both directions, and from pre-Roman times enabled relevant cultural, as well as material, exchange. Late Celtic potsherds and vessels of Gallic and Hispanic production have been found in the vicinity of Angera. The connection between the rivers Ticino and Po facilitated the use of Angera stone in the monumental buildings of *Mediolanum*, together with the exportation of timber from local woodland and its use in the shipyards of the upper Adriatic; at the same time pottery from the Lomello area and blue glass from Aquileia reached dining rooms on Lake Maggiore.

(Display cases 6 and 7)

The ancient town was located roughly where Angera stands today. The current name, known only since the 12th century, perhaps comes from *ad glaream Verbani*, "near the gravelly shore of (Lake) Verbanus" or from the Latin word *angulus*, in the form *angularis*, *angularia*, in reference to the shape of the inlet where the town lies - particularly suitable for the construction of a lake port. It has also been suggested that Angera derives from *Ghiera* (*Gera* in dialect), from the Germanic *Wehr*, or "protection, barrier", in reference to the contraction of the inhabited area in the Middle Ages, when it began to depend on defences which were progressively enlarged by the bishops of Milan, leading up to the construction of the castle by the Viscontis. The presence in the area of Roman-era worked marble and structures has been known since the Renaissance. Fortuitous discoveries in the late 19th century were followed by numerous excavation campaigns conducted in the 1970s and 80s by the Lombardy Archaeological Heritage Superintendency and Milan University. Further investigations carried out in various parts of the town in 2005 and 2006 on behalf

of the Superintendency led to the identification of houses, roads and a well, increasing our knowledge of the Roman settlement. **(Display case 8)**

The oldest finds are of the 2nd – 1st century BC settlement, a time when the Roman empire was expanding towards the lands north of the Alps, with the consequent growth in importance of the towns and villages at the foot of the Alps.

In the early 2nd century BC the Romans definitively defeated the Insubri; the subsequent Romanization of the conquered territories involved the establishment of municipalities and villages and the extension of citizenship rights. In 89 BC Pompey granted Latin Rights to the inhabitants of Cisalpine Gaul, and in 49 BC Caesar granted Roman citizenship to all the Gauls who lived north of the Po and in the Alps. After this, those who lived around Angera also enjoyed *Plenus Ius* (full rights): they were registered on electoral and enrolment lists, benefited from certain tax exemptions – and could take an active part in the political life of the community, be appointed to important positions and aspire to a seat in Rome. Between 35 and 15 BC Augustus also established a more effective occupation of the Alpine zone, giving better control over routes between Gaul and the Rhine and Danube areas. He then divided Italy into *Regiones*; the territory north of the Po around Bergamo, Lodi and Milan, up to Piedmont and Valle d'Aosta, became part of *Regio XI*, which also included Angera.



2005 excavations in Viale della Repubblica; eastern domus and courtyard with tank

The buildings of the oldest phase of Roman Angera have left few traces; they were probably made of perishable material, with clay-covered reed (wattle-and-daub) walls and beaten-earth floors.

Some town-houses (or domus) were in use from the 1st century BC to the 5th century AD; these have complex stratigraphy, showing numerous overlapping rebuilds over the centuries. House foundations and part of the standing walls were made of Angera stone; the floors were composed of beaten earth, cocciopesto laid over a layer of pebbles, or slabs of Serizzo stone (gneiss). Excavations in the area next the cemetery uncovered evidence of the occupation phases of a building which also contained a kiln and a settling tank for craft activities related to pottery production. **(Display case 9)**

The end of the Roman era seems to have marked the decline of the town centre, in around the 5th - 6th century AD. For Angera, the Early Middle Ages were a period of instability and political and economic crisis: the town was well-placed on routes across the Alps, and consequently suffered a series of invasions by Germanic populations. This resulted in the abandonment of many dwellings - demonstrated in particular by the discovery of various buried hoards, left by their owners in the (vain) hope of being able to return to recover their belongings.

(Display case 9b)



As of Tiberius with Divus Augustus

Section III: information on ancient diets from archaeological research

Numerous finds on display in Angera Museum shed light on the fascinating topic of ancient nutrition. An example is the skeleton of a cow, previously slaughtered, that was crushed by the collapse of a wall of a house destroyed by a fire in about the 5th century AD; in this tragic event, the bronze cauldron to be used for cooking the meat was also squashed. These finds indicate that boiling meat with herbs and vegetables was frequent in Roman times; in fact, especially old cattle (whose meat was tough) - and which had exhausted their potential for milk production and agricultural work - were slaughtered. They were unearthed in an excavation conducted in 2006 in Via della Repubblica, Angera, in the area of the former church of San Vittore.

(Open-Air Museum Site 11)

More recently, a pottery jar used to contain foodstuffs was discovered during an excavation conducted in 2012 in the municipality of Cislago in advance of the construction of the Lombardy Pedemontana motorway. The jar was discovered in one of the small cellars or silos below the floor level of the villa and was still full of wheat, rye and chestnuts, a mixture probably intended for the preparation of bread. **(Display case 8)**



Excavations carried out in the 1970s in the Angera Roman cemetery yielded several ancient carbonized bread rolls, used in Roman times as funerary offerings. Laboratory analysis revealed that

the bread was made from coarse stone-ground spelt and whole-wheat flour; it had been leavened with brewer's yeast, as recounted by Pliny the Elder. Different shapes were produced, of which at least three were found in Angera: *panis quadratus*, a circular loaf divided into four by an incised cross; a beautiful, fragrant braid, about 15 cm long; and a *tazina* ("bowl" in dialect), which looks like a doughnut without a hole and was excellent as a cup for eating soups.

Today in Angera it is possible to savor the taste of this two-thousand-year bread thanks to a project promoted by the Municipality of Angera - Department of Culture for the enhancement of local artisan excellence: with a recipe based on the use of ancient ingredients prepared by Chef Claudio Mei Tomasi and from the baker Claudio Giombelli the ancient sandwiches "come back to life" and are today a product protected and regulated by the *De.Co* brand (*Municipal Denomination of Origin*), proposed in the bakeries and restaurants of the city.



Grave goods from Tomb III-64, discovered in 1976, including an ancient bread roll. II century AD.



MABA

Dig Puzzle, Past & Present, Feely Dominoes...

This isn't a magic formula, but a few of the games you can try out at **Angera Civic Archaeological Museum (MABA - Museo Archeologico dei Bambini - Angera)**, a corner of the museum dedicated to children and their families.

MABA welcomes you with a table, chairs and comfortable, colourful cushions - take a seat! You'll find an archaeological library for children with texts in various languages (Braille, Italian, English, French, German) and lots of games which show that things long ago were not so different from how they are now. To see the display cases better and find out how people lived in Angera in the past, use the convenient steps. Would you like to know how a strangely shaped object was used in the past?



No problem - with illustrated cards, you can compare it to the objects we use today for the same purpose.

Before leaving, use the Archaeo-me materials to make a nice souvenir inspired by finds in the museum - to take home or give away - or be immortalized in an "archaeological photo", wearing a helmet and armour!

Play and learning at MABA



Section IV: Roman Angera. Cults and burial grounds

After Milan and Cremona, Angera is the Lombardy town where the largest number of inscriptions has been found, mainly of a religious or funerary nature.

These attest to the presence of various cults including those of Jupiter, Heracles, Isis, Silvanus, Mercury and Mithras.

At the *Wolf's Lair* cave the worship of the *Matronae* was practised: these were mother goddesses who protected the eternal cycle of birth, death and return to life; they were also known as *Fatae*, goddesses of human fate, i.e. destiny. **(Display case 10)**

The matrons' cult is recorded in the reliefs on an altar from Angera now kept in Varese, at the Archaeological Museum in Villa Mirabello: four goddesses are shown holding hands and with arms entwined, under a sacred oak tree, performing an ancient dance associated with symbolic rituals linked to life, death and regeneration.

Of particular importance are the discoveries of scattered burials since the late 19th century, and of a large graveyard that once stood on the site of the modern cemetery, about 1.5 km east of the present town and on one of the main roads into Angera.

Excavations conducted in the 1970s, in addition to digs carried out in 2004 and 2005 by the Superintendency, have unearthed several hundred burials: cremations, held directly in the grave or elsewhere; inhumations in wooden coffins, stone casks, or casks with pitched roofs "alla cappuccina". The ancient burial ground was in use at least from the 1st century BC to the 5th century AD. However, most of the tombs identified date to the 2nd century AD. The most frequent funerary practice is that of direct cremation: the body was placed on a pyre above a wooden bed sometimes decorated with applied ornamentation, and burned at the burial site; grave goods – broken before the tomb was backfilled and thus deliberately defunctionalized – were also placed in the cut.

The archaeological excavations brought to light numerous objects destined to accompany the deceased in the afterlife: fine and common tablewares (depending on the wealth of the dead person), terra sigillata or black-glazed ware, thin-walled ware with impressed decorations, drinking vessels with relief decoration, glass and pottery *unguentaria*, coins, lamps and dress accessories such as necklaces, rings and bracelets.



*An unguentarium
from Angera's
Roman cemetery*

Both outstanding and more typical grave goods are on display in the museum, illustrating the taste and style of a community in which people liked to surround themselves with objects that were simple but refined. The study of these finds has furnished evidence of ancient Angera's vital role as a commercial and transalpine trading centre.



Grave goods from Tomb R11

The burial grounds have yielded objects made north of the Alps and others that came from the Adriatic coast along the rivers Po and Ticino.
(Display cases 11, 12, 13)



One find bears witness to the complex and subtle relationship between the Roman world and its Celtic forerunner. It is a late Celtic bronze pendant found in a burial dating to the early decades

of the 1st century AD, one of the oldest in the Roman cemetery of Angera. The pendant predates the other grave goods and the period of the dead person's life, indicating the continued use of this piece of Celtic jewellery in Roman times: it was probably handed down from generation to generation as a family heirloom. This fascinating jewel – precious, ancient and unique – has also inspired contemporary design: as part of a recent project promoted by Angera Council's Culture Department to encourage artisan excellence, young gemologist and jewellery designer Carola Caputo created a jewellery set inspired by the Celtic pendant kept in the Civic Archaeological Museum, combining ultramodern techniques (such as 3D printing) and others typical of traditional craftsmanship (such as lost-wax casting). This jewellery line has obtained the De.Co. certificate.



The celtic pendant and the De.Co jewel inspired by it

Section V: the Pigorini Violini Ceruti Collection

The Pigorini Violini Ceruti Collection was the first group of archaeological finds to become council property.

Most of these objects came from 19th-century excavations of Angera's Roman cemetery, and for several generations, they belonged to a local private collection.

It was inherited by Angera resident Ugo Violini, who in 2017 generously donated it to Angera Council, together with signed letters that document

the relationship between the donor and the collection's first owner, distinguished archaeologist and father of Italian prehistory Luigi Pigorini (1842-1925), who was the nephew of Angera doctor Luigi Pigorini.



The Pigorini Violini Ceruti collection

Lapidarium – the stones tell their story

The museum worked-stone collection is housed under a marvellous portico in Angera stone columns bearing capitals with coats-of-arms.

It includes ancient inscriptions and religious and funerary monuments that bear witness to the cultural and social vivacity of the Roman vicus that was ancient Angera. Only a portion of the numerous finds of this type found in the town over the centuries are on display; unfortunately many had gone missing from the 16th century onwards when interest in antiques began to cause the disappearance of such artefacts.

OPEN-AIR MUSEUM

15.000 years of history in a fairytale landscape!

Did you enjoy your visit? Do you know that Angera territory is rich of historical and artistic sites, amazing landscapes, beaches, museums and romantic views? Keep on discovering Angera's history! Ask for a map of the Angera's Open-Air Museum at the Infopoint or at the Archaeological Museum. A junior map is also available, with a selection of sites identified by Angera schools pupils.

There are currently 50 historical, artistic and landscape monuments that belong to the Open-Air Museum; its display areas are under the open sky, in the town centre, periphery, and in nearby villages – crossed by ancient roads, in the bay of the lake, underground, through a doorway, in shady woods and verdant hills.

To find out more about Angera's history, the Open-Air Museum can be visited at any time: go to the website www.angera.it

and discover more about

the various sites and suggestions on the itineraries to follow.

Choose the route you prefer and set off to discover the most exciting places on foot or by bicycle.



Collection of worked stone in the museum portico

DISCOVER THE OPEN-AIR MUSEUM



The Boy of Angera, by Andrea RAVO Mattoni. Site no. 44



Rocca di Angera. Site no. 27



Isolino Partegora. Site no. 19



VISIT US!

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Information and booking:

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Tel. +39 320 4653416

Website: www.angera.it

FB: Civici Musei di Angera

Winter opening times:

Wednesday and Thursday 10:00-13:00

Sunday 14:30-18:30

Winter opening times (15th May - 14th September):

Thursday 10:00-13:00

Saturday and Sunday 14:30-18:30

Tourist Infopoint:

Piazza della Vittoria - Imbarcadero

infopoint@comune.angera.it

Tel. +39 0331 931915

How to get here:

By train: get off at Arona
and take the ferry for Angera

By car: A8 or A26 Milano-Gravellona T motorway;
exit at Sesto Calende and continue towards
Angera-Laveno on road SP 69



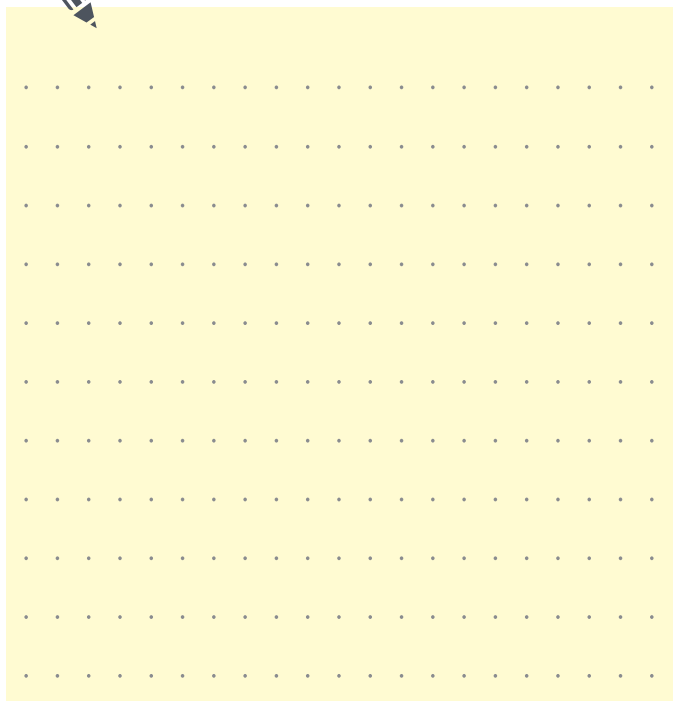
Captain House. Site no. 22




Also visit the unmissable Museum of Doll and Toys at the famous Rocca di Angera.

Website: www.isoleborromeo.it

Fb - Instagram @terreborromeo





Assessorato alla Cultura
Città di Angera



Civico Museo Archeologico



Regione Lombardia



Sistema
Museale



Soprintendenza Archeologia Belle
Arti e Paesaggio per le Province di
Como, Lecco, Monza e Brianza,
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