

VareseNews

When the lake belonged to us: these are the contents of the historical archive

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On the lake, people lived and people died; and there are those who grew to be men, surrounded by its waters, living to its beat. Today, that expanse of water is a distant thing, we look at it, we admire it, we go around it, but few, very few, of us see it with the eyes of those who make their living off it, of those who want to know what it holds beneath its surface.

“Once, we even rode into the lake, pedalling like mad on the saddle of a bicycle: the aim was to see which of us lake children could get the furthest, nearest the centre.” Amerigo Giorgetti is one of these children, who described his passion for the lake in passages hidden among the thousands of documents contained in the **historical archive of the Territorio dei laghi varesini**, which, today, can be found in the **Centro Internazionale Insubrico Cattaneo-Preti of Insubria University**.

This abundance of stories was at the centre of the research of three students from the “Daverio-Casula” High School, as they prepared for their diploma exams.

In the **seminar room of Villa Toeplitz, in Sant’Ambrogio**, **Alice Miccio, Irene Oblatore and Giulia Re Calegari** (the three students) spoke of the story of Giovanni del Galgino, who let out part of the lake, in return for a payment of fish by the noble Bossi di Azzate; this was in **1433, almost 200 years before the fishing rights were transferred to Milan (which was controlled by Spain)** and granted to the noble Milanese Biglia family.

And the story of Pedretto da Voltorre, who was reported because he had no fishing licence, but was saved thanks to the intervention by the Fathers of the Passion; this was in 1653. These stories demonstrate that the lake was a centre of great interest, above all economic and “geopolitical”, we would say today. And the stories of crimes, of murders once committed using an arquebus, such as **the death, on 17 November 1653, of the “Guard of the lakes”, Carlo Montalbetti, in a dispute, as chance would have it, over caught fish.**

Stories of a time gone by? Yes, but not entirely. It was still a time when the lake testified to a belonging that, starting in the final decades of the last century, has gradually been lost.

To preserve this memory for the benefit of the people of Varese, **there was also talk of Lacus Loci: Tiziana Zanetti** (for whom, the lake is part of her family, given that she is the niece of one of the four professional fishermen still in business) illustrated the work of a project, that has been heavily sponsored by Lombardy Region, to protect the memory of a culture (and, therefore, also of a sight) that is disappearing. A number of interviews were carried out with the fishermen in the “headquarters” in Cazzago Brabbia (after the demolition of the premises of the fishing cooperative in Calcinate); a collection was made of photographs and testimonies of fishing and stories of the lake, which will always remain the “foundation” of the immaterial culture of our places.

Returning to the archive, as Prof. Giorgetti has always remembered, it consists of **thousands of documents**, maps, texts and testimonies that can be consulted by anyone; it is an enormous scientific tool that constitutes the backbone of centuries of history, and stories, of the lake.

di [Translated by Prof. Rolf Cook](#)