

Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II
Scuola delle Scienze Umane e Sociali
Quaderni
32

LINGUE, SCRITTURE E SOCIETÀ NELL'ITALIA LONGOBARDA

Un percorso di sociolinguistica storica

a cura di Elisa D'Argenio, Roberto Delle Donne, Rosanna Sornicola



Federico II University Press



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Lingue, scritture e società nell'Italia longobarda : un percorso di sociolinguistica storica / a cura di Elisa D'Argenio, Roberto Delle Donne, Rosanna Sornicola. – Napoli : FedOAPress, 2025. – ill. ; 24 cm. – (Scuola di Scienze Umane e Sociali. Quaderni ; 32).

Accesso alla versione elettronica: <http://www.fedoabooks.unina.it>

ISBN: 978-88-6887-129-1

DOI: 10.6093/978-88-6887-129-1

Online ISSN della collana: 2499-4774

Il volume è pubblicato con il contributo del Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici dell'Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II – Fondi del progetto PRIN 2017 *Writing expertise as a dynamic sociolinguistic force: the emergence and development of Italian communities of discourse in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages and their impact on languages and societies* (prot. 2017WLBK3Z_004).

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Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II
Centro di Ateneo per le Biblioteche "Roberto Pettorino"
Piazza Bellini 59-60
80138 Napoli, Italy
<http://www.fedoapress.unina.it/>

Published in Italy

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Nihil asperum, nihil grave.
Monastic Life Experiences between Kingdom and Duchies

Gabriele Archetti*

Abstract: Following a complex period of initial tension, the Lombard world also became fascinated by monastic forms of life. Small and large foundations accompanied the mature phase of the kingdom; the protagonists were not only the royal court, but also the dukes and aristocratic families. A special role of attraction was played by Montecassino which, thanks to its link with the papacy, regular discipline, and the holy relics of father Benedict, became a model of reference and a center of attraction. However, very little remains from a material point of view of the numerous monasteries of the Lombard age. The study of modest building remains, archaeological data, and written sources allows for the extraction of important information, although far from offering a homogeneous and exhaustive picture. In any case, the construction of a monastery was the manifestation of religious needs, alongside which political, economic, productive, and territorial power advantages or ramifications were a secondary consequence. Their relevance is not denied, but a reinterpretation in a spiritual key is necessary to place their presence and diffusion in the correct historical configuration.

Keywords: Monks; Kingdom; Saint Benedict; Montecassino; Paul the Deacon.

1. *From Rules to the Rule*

«In those times, our most blessed father Benedict shone for the merits of his extraordinary life and apostolic virtues, first in the place called Subiaco, located forty miles from Rome, and then in the Castrum of Cassino called La Rocca»¹. Thus, Paul the Deacon, recalling what was expressed “with sweet discourse” by Gregory the Great in the *Dialogues*, introduces the “humble verses” dedicated to the holy abbot in the first book of the *Historia Langobardorum*, defining his condition as «exiled, poor, and weak»². He indeed wrote after the Franks conquered the Lombard kingdom, when the role of the abbey, which had become of strict “Roman observance”, was asserting itself as

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¹ Paolo Diacono (1991: 190-192) [= HL], I, 26.

² HL I, 26.

an ascetic point of reference for Christian Europe. A process in which the figure of Saint Benedict assumed the role of “guide to the path of heaven” for an increasing multitude of monks, as remembered in the final chapter of the *Regula Benedicti*³ [= RB].

From its first assertion in the East, the monastic movement had transformed significantly. The plurality of its forms, which had found space in the first centuries for original and not always convergent experiments – from those of Syro-Palestinian, African, Gallic, Iberian, and Italo-Slavic regions to the personalities of Martin of Tours, Paulinus of Nola, and Cassiodorus – were crystallizing around models that were more disciplined from a regulatory point of view. At the beginning of the fifth century, three major rules coexisted in the West. Those of Pachomius († 346) and Basil († 379), which focused on prayer, penance, and separation from the world; and that of Augustine († 430), which combined the values of communal life with a certain pastoral revival of cenobitic life⁴. This is well represented by the poems and epistles of Paulinus of Nola († 431), whose ascetic model is celebrated by Sulpicius Severus († circa 420) in *Vita Martini*⁵.

Between the fifth and seventh centuries, no less than thirty rules were in circulation⁶, including the Benedictine rule from the first half of the sixth century. These rules influenced each other, emphasizing or reviving certain aspects over others, through continuous adaptations and modifications based on the diversity of places, times, and abbots⁷. However, this does not prevent us from discerning the general direction and the common elements emerging in various communities. The aim was indeed to make the monastery a world apart, closed in on itself, self-sufficient, and regulated in its expressions. A center of prayer, ascetic perfection, work and, in some cases, also of culture.

The rule of Benedict fits into this context as one of the many *regulae* that, within the monastic tradition, had been formed on the example of eastern

³ *Ibidem*; San Benedetto (1996: 192) [= RB], 73, 8; moreover, *San Benedetto nel suo tempo* (1982).

⁴ For an overall perspective, at least the following references and the accompanying bibliography should be consulted – although the historiography is extensive, as demonstrated by the comprehensive overview provided in Andenna (2001b) and the partial updates by Salvestrini (2019: 307-361); Archetti (2021: 167-198); Archetti / Jurković (eds.) (2017); *Monachesimi d'Oriente e d'Occidente nell'alto Medioevo* (2017).

⁵ About this, Archetti (2023: 323-344, c.s.).

⁶ For a general overview, see Picasso (1987: 3-66); Archetti (2018: 425-440).

⁷ A good starting point, although now somewhat dated, to delve into the issues of pre-Benedictine monasticism, along with the topic of rules, is provided by the studies of Turbessi (1961a; 1961b; 1990); moreover, *Il monachesimo nell'alto Medioevo e la formazione della civiltà occidentale* (1957).

and western cenobiums. Thanks to its completeness, balance, clarity, and the wise guidance of the Roman Church, it had gradually won over many cenobiums, replacing older norms⁸. This did not happen immediately, as until the ninth century, the Benedictine rule was just one of those adopted and thus was included in the *corpora regularum*. These were codes from which abbots chose the observance for their monastery, taking inspiration from one or the other depending on community needs (*regula mixta*). The value and intrinsic strength of its normative dictates were decisive in obtaining papal support and earning the preference of rulers⁹. These prerogatives consisted in the ability to organize the cenobium, the balance of behavior discipline, and the wide discretion granted to the abbot (*discretio*) in face of the variety of subjects, places, and times.

The crucial turning point of this process was the rebirth of Montecassino at the beginning of the eighth century, after the Lombard destruction that took place around 581¹⁰. Paul the Deacon writes about this:

Petronax, a citizen of Brescia, driven by divine love, went to Rome and, on the encouragement of Gregorius, Pope of the Apostolic See, went to this rock of Cassino. Arriving at the sacred body of the blessed father Benedict, he began to reside there with some simple men who were already present. They elected the venerable Petronax as their superior. In a short time, with the help of divine mercy and through the intercession of the merits of the blessed father Benedict, and after nearly one hundred and ten years since the place had been deprived of any human habitation, Petronax, having become the father of many monks, nobles and common men, who flocked to him, began to live under the yoke of the holy rule and in the teaching of the blessed Benedict. Moreover, after restoring the buildings, he brought this holy cenobium to the conditions in which it is now seen. Subsequently, the first of the priests, the pontiff Zachary, a man dear to God, provided much assistance to the venerable Petronax, that is, books of sacred scripture and all the other things that a monastery requires. Moreover, with paternal piety, he granted the codex of the rule that the blessed father Benedict wrote with his holy hands¹¹.

The passage is too well-known to dwell on in detail. It is crucial only to note the connection established between north and south that will repeatedly return, and the intervention of the popes Gregory II (715-731) and

⁸ Cf. Picasso (1996: 13-49); and, in general, the collection of essays by the same scholar, with regard to Picasso (2006: 13-68).

⁹ Cf. Spinelli (2006); *Monachesimi d'Oriente e d'Occidente nell'alto Medioevo* (2017).

¹⁰ Regarding the destruction of the Cassinese Abbey, traditionally dated to 577, recent clarifications have been provided by Di Muro (2018: 301-303). For a long-term perspective, the essay by Rennie (2021). For the context of early medieval Cassino, reference can be made to Avagliano (1987).

¹¹ HL VI, 40; echoed by the late medieval chronicler Giacomo Malvezzi, cf. Archetti (a cura di) (2016: 194, 208); moreover, Houben (1996: 180-182, 184); Dell'Omo (2006: 166-168).

Zachary (741-752) in guiding Petronax's decisions¹² and in supporting the new monastery. The papal benevolence met the support of the Lombards of the southern duchy, along with the refounding of the ascetic path "from the hermitage to the cenobium" typical of Benedictines. It was based on the observance of the *regula* as a «small discipline for beginners» (RB 73, 8) useful in achieving the «highest peaks of wisdom and virtue» (RB 73, 9). The *locus* and *consuetudo* became sources of attraction for numerous political and religious personalities of Christian society. A real "Anziehungspunkt" according to the historian Friedrich Prinz¹³, a monastic lifestyle model that, due to its geographical placement in the Duchy of Benevento, stood as a powerful interlocutor for the Lombards of the kingdom who «had it as a model of life» or found shelter there as a «hospitable refuge»¹⁴. Indeed, the regions of northern Europe formulated an image of Rome, or as it has been defined a sort of «Rome of the mind»¹⁵, which embraced the entire peninsula and its sacred places. In this process, the Cassino foundation embodied the very sources of cloistered asceticism, the greatest religious attraction, and the reference to look towards¹⁶.

2. Lombard Foundations between History and Historiography

With the process of integration between Catholicism, the Roman tradition, and the Lombard world, especially from the mid-7th century and more substantially in the following one, there occurred in Lombard territories «a phenomenon of intense monastic proliferation» as observed by Claudio Azzara¹⁷. This occurred through the initiatives of individuals of varying social rank, numerous dukes, and sovereigns. This was not an entirely new development, as it had already happened, for example, in the case of the monastery of Bobbio, established by Columbanus and supported by the court of Agilulf. Its most significant commencement, however, occurred with the Pavia institution of the New Monastery dedicated to Saint Agatha, in which

¹² For his character, reference is made to the proceedings of the celebratory conference held on the 13th centenary of the rebirth of the Cassinese archicenobium, in Dell'Omo (a cura di) (2019).

¹³ Prinz (1972: 216; 1983: 44).

¹⁴ Dell'Omo (2006: 176).

¹⁵ De Jong / Erhart (2000: 120-121); von Padberg (2000: 145-168).

¹⁶ Dell'Omo (2006: 170).

¹⁷ Azzara (2006: 65); moreover, D'Acunto (2015: 315-325); Archetti (2015: 631-680; 2017: 143-180; 2018: 425-440).

many virgins gathered, and King Perctarit «enriched with benefits and various adornments»¹⁸.

In the fifty-year span straddling the two centuries, new monasteries were successively established, or simply restored, throughout the kingdom and in the duchies by the aristocracy and kings. This was the case with the cenobiums along the Ticino, dedicated to Saint Agatha and Saint George, of San Pietro in Ciel d'Oro, of Santa Maria di Auroa in Milan, of Santo Stefano in Vimercate and then of the monasteries from Berceto to Farfa, from San Vincenzo al Volturno to San Pietro in Benevento and Santa Maria di Plumbariola, up to the revival of Montecassino.

From the mid-8th century, due to the international political context and the complex dialectic between the Franks and the Lombards, there was further growth of the cloistered centers: San Salvatore in Brescia, San Benedetto in Leno, Santa Maria in Nonantola, San Salvatore in Sirmione, Santa Maria in Sylvis in Sesto al Reghena, Santa Maria in Salt, San Pietro in Monteverdi, San Salvatore on Monte Amiata, San Frediano in Lucca, Sant'Eugenio near Siena, San Bartolomeo near Pistoia, and so on, to mention just a few among many. Many Lombards from the most eminent families retired in these retreats, both for males and females, which were generously endowed with goods and usually located in areas of economic and strategic interest. They were driven not only by spiritual urgencies but also by the conviction that such arrangements allowed «individuals and their lineages to exert a considerable influence on the territory, on society, and on political power itself, through the concentration and control of the wealth»¹⁹ of which they were holders.

These are elements that have now been firmly established and have recently been the subject of analysis and re-examination by scholars. To limit ourselves to a few historical references, consider the Essays accompanying the catalogue of the 2000 exhibition “The Future of the Lombards”²⁰, the proceedings of the 7th conference of historical studies published in 2006 on Benedictine Italy and Italic monasticism from the Lombard era to the Ottonian era²¹, the research on monasteries and social space coordinated by Michel Lauwers²², Federico

¹⁸ HL V, 34 (p. 64); moreover, Forzatti (2006: 295-320; 2014: 48-64, 67-70).

¹⁹ Azzara (2006: 69).

²⁰ Bertelli / Brogiolo (a cura di) (2000).

²¹ Spinelli (a cura di) (2006).

²² Lauwers (éd.) (2014).

Marazzi's volume on the *cities of the monks*²³, and the proceedings of the 64th Week of Spoleto Studies on *Eastern and Western Monasticism in the Early Middle Ages* (published in 2017), which revisited the theme of the historic 4th Week of Studies in 1956 fifty years later²⁴. Also noteworthy are the two volumes of contributions from the international conference in Zadar on *Living and Dying in the Cloister from the 5th to the 11th Century*, published by Brepols in the series *Hortus Artium Medievalium*, edited by the writer and Miljenko Jurkovic²⁵. For the territory of the South, one can refer to the 16th "Conference Proceedings" on *The Lombards of the Duchies of Spoleto and Benevento* (2003), the 2017 contributions from the conference on *Arechis II and the Duchy of Benevento*, edited by Marcello Rotili, and those in the process of being published under the title *From Duchy to Principality. The Lombards of the South* as part of the "Biennial of Studies on Southern Lombardy", promoted by the University of Sannio and numerous other research institutions²⁶, including Centro Studi Longobardi. The latter, in particular, is responsible for the international meetings on Desiderius (2013), Theodelinda (2015), Liutprand (2018) and the one in Cividale on the era of Grimoald (2024)²⁷ scheduled for 2024, while of great interest is also the work dedicated to Sicily in the early Middle Ages²⁸.

In this context, which can be enormously enriched in relation to individual foundations and the data that archaeology continues to significantly increase, it is important to focus on a few things. The first is of a regulatory nature, due to the prominence that monasticism began to acquire in Liutprand's legislation (713-744), compared to previous laws. This occurred in open countertrend with the legal tradition of the lineage and showed a different sensitivity to the issues of the Catholic faith, in receiving canonical provisions and supporting the development of cloisters. The provisions concerning the monastic theme relate to two main issues. The first aimed to favor the increase of monastic possessions through the institution of the *donatio pro anima*²⁹ (donation for

²³ Marazzi (2015).

²⁴ For the two meetings, see *Monachesimi d'Oriente e d'Occidente nell'alto Medioevo* (2017); *Il monachesimo nell'alto Medioevo e la formazione della civiltà occidentale* (1957) respectively.

²⁵ Cf. Archetti / Jurković (eds.) (2017), an international conference for which the title, *Living and dying in the cloister. Monastic life from the 5th to the 11th century*, explicits the perspective of the underlying historical inquiry.

²⁶ *I Longobardi dei ducati di Spoleto e Benevento* (2003); Rotili (2017); Rotili / Archetti (a cura di), c.s.

²⁷ Cf. respectively Archetti (a cura di) (2015; 2018; 2023); Archetti / Tilatti (a cura di), in press.

²⁸ In this regard, reference is made to the proceedings of the Catania conference held in 2019, in Archetti / Piazza (2023).

²⁹ These are chapters 19, 65, and 101, concerning the years 721, 725, and 728 of Liutprand's reign, in Azzara / Gasparri (a cura di) (2005: 152, 176, 198).

the soul). The second aimed to codify the legal status of women who had taken the veil without yet being consecrated, confirming the definitiveness of such a choice³⁰.

From the first year of his reign (713), in derogation of the legitimate succession quota, Liutprand established in chap. 6 the faculty for every Lombard to freely dispose of his goods at the point of death, and to leave them also to churches, *xenodochia* (hospices), and holy places *pro anima sua*, that is, for the eternal salvation of his soul³¹. With chap. 76 of the year 726, this possibility was strengthened by the fact that donations for the soul were exempt from the normal procedures of public affirmation of legacies in general, since they did not have to undergo the approval of the assembly of free men and therefore of the family group³². With chap. 101 of 728, on the other hand, it was stated that, since every Lombard woman had a third of her goods for the soul, the one who entered the monastery could keep the entire share for herself – which rose to half of the goods if she was childless – giving it to the monastery, which would have included it in the monastic patrimony after her death³³. All of this, on the one hand, confirms the royal will that donations to ecclesiastical institutions be guaranteed by law and the existence of genuinely religious feelings; on the other hand, it attests to the intention to support greater economic freedom and wider circulation of goods. This weakened the forms of parental transmission of assets which, consequently, had one less tool to control their permanence within family units.

Chap. 30 of 723 is also interesting. It established, with regard to a woman who took the veil, either voluntarily or because she was donated by relatives, but not yet consecrated by a priest, that her religious life was definitive. It then provided for the seizure of her property in case of a change of mind or, worse, immorality in behavior, along with appropriate disciplinary measures³⁴. Similar echoes can be found in the *capitula* of Arechis II about the *muliercule*, who, having become widows, secretly veiled themselves and, taking advantage of their religious condition, acted without moral restraints, openly indulging themselves³⁵.

³⁰ See chapters 30, 76, and 100, corresponding to the years 723, 726, and 728, in Azzara / Gasparri (a cura di) (2005: 158-160, 182, 198).

³¹ Cf. chap. 6, in *ivi* (140).

³² Cf. chap. 76, in *ivi* (182).

³³ Cf. chap. 101, in *ivi* (198).

³⁴ Cf. chap. 30, in *ivi* (158-160); De Jong / Erhart (2000: 113, 119-120).

³⁵ Cf. chap. 12, in Azzara / Gasparri (a cura di) (2005: 302); La Rocca (2000: 57).

In the more severe case of a nun's adultery, the chap. 76 of 726 set a fine of double the pecuniary penalty – compared to a married woman – as punishment for the transgressor, given the severity of the violation committed with a religious woman, and the royal confiscation of the woman's share of property³⁶. In chap. 100, however, it prohibited the forced monasticization of a widow within a year of her husband's death, to prevent usurpation and property damage by her confinement in the monastery; however, if it was the woman who wished to take the veil and embark on the monastic path to serve God, she could appeal to the king's clemency, who would benevolently decide on a case-by-case basis³⁷.

At the center of the sovereign's regulatory provisions, therefore, economic control of assets, the protection of young or widowed women, and their role in Lombard society were becoming prominent. With full Christianization, their status had greatly increased in common consideration.

3. *Memories of Famous Relics*

A second brief note concerns the site of Cassino, in relation to which Paul the Deacon, referring to the last quarter of the 7th century, gives firsthand news in the account of the *Historia Langobardorum*:

Approximately during this period, as the rock of Cassino, where the sacred body of the most blessed Benedict rests, had been in serious neglect for many years, some Franks who came from the region of the Cenomani or Orléans, simulating a desire to spend the night in prayer before the body of the saint, stole the bones of that venerable father and those of his sister Scholastica and took them to their homeland. Thus, two monasteries were built in honor of blessed Benedict and Saint Scholastica. But it is certain that that venerable mouth, sweeter than any nectar, and the eyes always turned to celestial things, and the other limbs, though made of ash, have remained among us³⁸.

This passage is highly debated in the historiographical tradition about the theft of the bodies of Benedict and Scholastica from their peaceful resting place on the Rocca of Montecassino. The story, the historical context, and the various positions are carefully set out by Migne in the 95th volume of *Patro-*

³⁶ Cf. chap. 76, in Azzara / Gasparri (a cura di) (2005: 182).

³⁷ Cf. chap. 100, in *ivi* (198).

³⁸ And the text of Paul continues: «Only the body of the Lord did not experience corruption; the bodies of all the other saints, who will be resurrected for eternal glory, are subject to corruption, except for those that, by divine miracle, are preserved incorruptible», HL VI, 2, p. 486.

logia Latina, they were then taken up in the miscellaneous work of 1951 and summarized by Anselmo Lentini in the *Bibliotheca Sanctorum* and, more recently, Amalia Galdi has offered a framework³⁹.

Now, despite the opposing interests in claiming the authenticity of the relics preserved in their abbeys, supported relentlessly by the monks of Fleury and Montecassino, it does not seem that the fact has disturbed the historian of the Lombards. Indeed, if we look closely, Paul the Deacon, with the expression «where the sacred body rests (*ubi sacrum corpus requiescit*)»⁴⁰, had no doubts about the presence at Montecassino of the remains of the holy patriarch. He had already written in the first book «he came from Subiaco to this place where he now rests (*a Sublacu in hunc ubi requiescit*)»⁴¹ and again in the sixth concerning Petronax who, having climbed the mountain at the Pope's invitation, began to dwell «near the sacred body of the blessed father Benedict (*ad sacrum corpus beati Benedicti patris perveniens*)»⁴². While the context of the story is clear, the reasons for the narrative are less so, whose textual uncertainties were highlighted by Georg Waitz in the edition of the Pauline *Historia* for the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* in 1878⁴³.

Certainly, on the one hand, Paul the Deacon offers some elements in favor of the claims of the monks of Fleury by recalling the circumstances of the secretive theft, reinterpreted in light of a context in which political fortunes had turned in favor of Charlemagne, who became king of the Franks and Lombards. Nonetheless, on the other hand, he seems to suggest that not the mortal bones, not the deceased body contained the spiritual legacy of Benedict, but his words (*os venerabile*) and his wise guidance towards heaven (*oculos semper caelestia contuentes*). Indeed, it was these that constituted the true “uncorrupted” heritage preserved by the community of Montecassino on the mountain. A polemical interpretation against the world of the Franks appears possible, as does a certain acquiescence towards the new rulers. This idea, however, is immediately dismantled by the repeated use of the term *requiescit* referring to the burial of Benedict, an expression that he could not have used if things were different.

³⁹ In this regard, as a commentary on HL VI, 2, see the footnote in *Patrologia cursus completus. Series latina* (1851: 622-625); also, *Il sepolcro di S. Benedetto* (1951); Lentini (1962: 1151-1154); Galdi (2016: 123-144).

⁴⁰ HL VI, 2, p. 486.

⁴¹ HL I, 26, p. 212.

⁴² HL VI, 40, p. 524.

⁴³ *Historia Langobardorum* (1878: 165 n. 3), VI, 2.

A source from a century later, incidentally, drawn up by a Leonine monk and containing a catalog of Lombard and Frankish kings, seems to argue in favor of this interpretation⁴⁴. It recounts that in 758, a group of eleven monks from Cassino, led by Abbot Ermoald, arrived in the plains of Brescia to establish a new monastery in a place called *Leones*, at the request of the Lombard king Desiderius. Shortly thereafter, the source continues

with the help of God, the most excellent king had a certain part of the body of the most blessed and eminent confessor Abbot Benedict transferred from the city of Benevento, from the castle of Cassino, and from the city of Rome he brought the bodies of the blessed martyrs Vitalis and Martial, which were placed in the monastery⁴⁵.

This information has never been disputed and rests on the centuries-old presence and continuous relic preservation in the Leonine abbey, and now, in the cathedral of Brescia, a part of the body of the holy patriarch.

From a forensic point of view, the issue is resolved. The investigations conducted on the remains, especially the one carried out after the destruction of the abbey by Allied bombings in 1944, revealed the presence of two intact bodies, concluding with a predictable outcome. The canonical exhumation and the medico-legal examinations performed in 1950 led to the identification, in the preserved urn, of a single male and one female body. Moreover, the male bone remains were found to be consistent with those in Brescia, traditionally identified as the arm of Saint Benedict (ulna and radius), as attested in a letter to the Cassinese abbot from the bishop of the Lombard diocese in the same year⁴⁶, an identification mentioned repeatedly, even by word of mouth, by Pope Montini.

4. *Traces of Lombard Foundations*

One last note concerns the architectural structures of the monasteries, especially those referable to the Lombard period, which Paul the Deacon frequently accounts, starting from the Liutprand era.

⁴⁴ See Waitz (1878: 503); for the account mentioned in the *Chronicon Brixianum* by the chronicler Malvezzi in the early 15th century, see Archetti (a cura di) (2016: 199, 202-207); Succurro (2015: 607-611).

⁴⁵ Waitz (1878: 503); Sandmann (1984: 80, 101-109); Houben (1996: 85 n. 38). On the cenoby foundation, see Sandmann (1984: 80, 101-118, 208-241); Azzara (2002: 21-32); Succurro (2015: 607-611); and, lastly, Archetti (2017: 143-180), with the relevant bibliography; as for the transfer of the relics, see Tomea (2001: 46-47).

⁴⁶ Lentini (1962: 1153-1154); also, see *Il sepolcro di S. Benedetto* (1951); Leccisotti (1953: 295-346); Galdi (2014).

This most glorious king built many basilicas in honor of Christ, in the various places where he used to live. He established the monastery of Blessed Peter, which is located outside the walls of Pavia and is called Ciel d'Oro. Also, on the top of Mount Bardone, he built a monastery called Berceto. On his land in the suburb of Corteolona, he built with splendid work a house of Christ in honor of Saint Anastasius the martyr and added a monastery. In the same way, he built many temples dedicated to God in each locality. Even in the palace, he had a chapel built for the Saviour; and, something that no one else had ever done, he established priests and clerics who would sing for him the divine offices every day⁴⁷.

However, of the foundations by this sovereign, like those mentioned and generally attributable to Lombard patronage – several dozens between the 7th and 8th centuries – very little remains from the point of view of building and material structures. Of these, as Gisella Cantino Wataghin noted a few years ago, «only decontextualized fragments remain»⁴⁸, on which it is complex to make a judgement.

Federico Marazzi's considerations are not different, in which he points out that even «archaeological traces» are not at all eloquent, and what remains of the monasteries mostly dates back to «much later periods»⁴⁹. This observation makes it impossible to understand how the Lombard cloistered foundations were structured. Even the female example of San Salvatore in Brescia, later Santa Giulia, often counted among the few examples of existing royal architecture and imprudently adopted as a formal comparison, does not escape the general case just mentioned. The studies by Francesca Stroppa on the Santa Giulia complex⁵⁰, full of innovations in the wake of a rich historiographical tradition, highlight how the history of restorations, excavations, and projects for the reuse of the ancient city monastery are indispensable for reinterpreting – where still possible – the fragments of the oldest structures. Such artifacts have been skillfully reinterpreted, decontextualized, and remodeled in a museographic key, not only between the 19th and 20th centuries but also in more recent years. The careful study of the sources, the cross-referencing of data, and reconstructive caution represent the main path to follow.

The monastic choice offered a plurality of religious experiences that, for the period under examination, could not be traced back to necessarily uniform

⁴⁷ HL VI, 58 (p. 544); De Jong / Erhart (2000: 108).

⁴⁸ Cantino Wataghin (2000: 129-141), cit., p. 131.

⁴⁹ Marazzi (2015: 171, 168-169).

⁵⁰ Stroppa (2018); but among the numerous contributions of the scholar, who has dedicated many years to the study of the Santa Giulia complex, see: Stroppa (2012; 2016: 265-282; 2017a: 123-139; 2017b: 181-206; 2017c: 371-398; 2021: 765-774; 2023a: c.s.; 2023b: c.s.).

models of life. Similarly, the architectural forms of the monasteries responded to the needs of individual communities and not to pre-established schemas, identified or constructed a posteriori by scholars and their current needs for certainties. Within this unity of intent in the variety of forms, many were the common characteristics, such as obedience, humility, silence, prayer, chanting, work, asceticism of food, etc. These elements, touching personal paths, appear in themselves mysterious and almost unfathomable. Indeed, they pertain to each individual's lived experience and spirituality, as the beginning of the Prologue of the Benedictine rule reminds us: *Obsculta, o fili, praecepta magistri et inclina aurem cordis tui* (Listen, son, to the teachings of the master and open the ear of your heart). Nothing too austere or burdensome (*nihil asperum, nihil grave*), however, awaited those who put themselves at the service of the Lord (RB Prologue 45-46).

Forgetting this does not serve historical research well and prevents the deep essence of monasticism from being understood, which goes beyond things, structures, and even individual religious choices.

It has been written, finally, that the foundation of monasteries in the early Middle Ages served to root the authority of the parental group and power aggregations within a sacred context⁵¹. The economic and patrimonial ties between the founder and the monastic community have also been highlighted, as well as the possibility of finding shelter and an honorable exit after a political defeat or to avoid military commitments preferring the quiet of the cloister. Furthermore, the positive effects on the productive revival of rural contexts, the safeguarding of personal and family wealth, the establishment of economic complexes on fiscal assets and their service to public structures, and so on, have been recognized. These are all reasons that find repeated and various justifications in the history of monasticism and in that of individual abbeys.

However, founding a church or a monastery in the Lombard era and, in the Middle Ages in general, first and foremost responded to spiritual needs, without which such institutions would have had no reason to exist⁵². In both small and large abbeys, the earthly reality was united with the heavenly one. The quiet of the cloister assured its inhabitants a safe transition in the perilous sea of earthly life, and the "cities of the monks" to borrow the beautiful title

⁵¹ See, for example, the contribution from La Rocca (2006: 119-120).

⁵² See Archetti (2016: 259-278).

of a well-known volume⁵³, represented the heavenly Jerusalem towards which everyone was journeying to reach “the highest peaks of wisdom and virtue” (RB 73, 9). It is, in essence, the anticipation of a common destiny.

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⁵³ Marazzi (2015).

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