

Monasteries in the middle? Local elites and monastic landscapes in Carolingian Lombardy*

by Francesco Veronese

Whereas recent research on monasteries, their properties, and their social networks in Carolingian Italy mostly focused on some very rich and well-documented institutions, the available charters offer glimpses of a much richer monastic landscape. A number of local monasteries of very different condition in terms of political, social and economic power punctuated this landscape as players in the networks of relationships and power balances running through it. Though sparse and frequently scarce, the sources allow to a certain extent to appreciate their presence and activities and the development of their patrimonies and social positioning over time. Resuming a recent definition formulated by Steffen Patzold and Carine van Rhijn for local priests as “men in the middle”, this paper provides a definition for these institutions as “monasteries in the middle”, thus highlighting their role and functions as intermediaries between different social players and groups. The examination of three case-studies located in Carolingian Lombardy on the grounds of the ninth century evidence provides an initial framework for testing the suitability of this definition, as well as the opportunities it opens for better appreciating and understanding the complexity of the local contexts in which these monasteries operated.

Middle Ages; ninth century; Lombardy; Milan; Pavia; Brescia; monasteries; social networks; charters.

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Abbreviations

- CDL = *Codex Diplomaticus Langobardiae*, ed. G. Porro Lambertenghi, Torino 1873 (*Historia patriae monumenta*, 13).
- ChLA², LX = *Chartae Latinae Antiquiores. Facsimile-edition of the Latin Charters*, 2nd series, ed. G. Cavallo, G. Nicolaj, part LX, Italy XXXII, Verona 2, publ. F. Santoni, Dietikon-Zürich 2002.
- ChLA², XCIV = *Chartae Latinae Antiquiores. Facsimile-edition of the Latin Charters*, 2nd series, ed. G. Cavallo, G. Nicolaj, part XCIV, Italy LXVI, Milano 1, publ. M. Modesti, Dietikon-Zürich 2015.
- ChLA², XCV = *Chartae Latinae Antiquiores. Facsimile-edition of the Latin Charters*, 2nd series, ed. G. Cavallo, G. Nicolaj, part XCV, Italy LXVII, Milano 2, publ. A. Zuffrano, Dietikon-Zürich 2016.
- ChLA², XCIX = *Chartae Latinae Antiquiores. Facsimile-edition of the Latin Charters*, 2nd series, ed. G. Cavallo, G. Nicolaj, part XCIX, Italy LXXI, Brescia, Cremona, Udine, Venezia, publ. C. Mantegna, L. Pani, G. De Angelis, Dietikon-Zürich 2018.
- MGH, Conc. II = *Concilia aevi Karolini*, 2 vol., ed. A. Werminghoff, Hannover-Leipzig 1906-1908 (MGH, Conc., 2).
- MGH, DD Lo I / Lo II = *Die Urkunden Lothars I. und Lothars II.*, ed. T. Schieffer, Berlin-Zürich 1966 (MGH, Diplomata Karolinorum, 3).
- MGH, DD Lu II = *Die Urkunden Ludwigs II.*, ed. K. Wanner, München 1994 (MGH, Diplomata Karolinorum, 4).

1. *Introduction: monasteries in the middle?*

Recent research on the monastic landscape of Carolingian Italy has focused especially on a few key religious institutions, like Nonantola, S. Salvatore in Brescia, and St. Ambrose of Milan¹. These monasteries are those best provided with both written and material evidence for the ninth century². Their role in the Italian kingdom's political, economical and social networks was decisive, and is reflected in the richness of both their landed wealth and of their archives. Yet at a closer inspection their charters provide glimpses of a richer and more complex picture. A number of religious institutions spread across the areas where these monasteries held lands are mentioned as being involved in their transactions, as owners of neighbouring lands, or as their dependencies. The purpose of this paper is to highlight some features of this densely populated monastic landscape. I will first provide the methodological starting points for my survey. Then three case-studies will be analyzed. All of them take into account urban institutions located in Lombardy, a region that François Bougard has labelled as the *ventre mou* of the kingdom, where the interactions between monasteries and a range of other social players can be clearly appreciated³. The role of these communities in

¹ Just a few recent examples: *Dalla corte regia al monastero*, ed. Brogiolo; De Rubeis, *San Salvatore di Brescia*; Paziienza, West-Harling, *Networking Nuns*; Manarini, *Politiche regie e conflitti*; Santos Salazar, *Fiscal Lands, Rural Communities*; Balzaretti, *The Lands of Saint Ambrose*.

² See for instance the recent edition of the charters of San Salvatore by Gianmarco Cossandi: *Le carte del monastero*. Also see *Nonantola 6*, ed. Gelichi, Librenti, Cianciosi.

³ Bougard, *Du centre à la périphérie*. He formulated this definition for the late ninth early tenth century, but it also seems applicable to Lothar's age.

the networks in which they were included will be analyzed by the means of the charter evidence, that is, mostly through the perspective of their economical transactions. The timespan I consider follows the mentions of these monasteries in the sources of the Carolingian period, thus roughly covering the whole ninth century.

The theoretical framework for my investigation is grounded in a twofold premise. In a recently edited volume on early medieval priests, Carine van Rhijn and Steffen Patzold developed for these figures the definition of “men in the middle”⁴. Van Rhijn and Patzold underscored that especially in Carolingian times priests were «actively shaped as the ideal, literate, educated, intermediaries between the court and the episcopate, on the one hand, and the people of the Franks, on the other», and that they «fulfilled various functions within their lay communities, many of those as intermediaries»⁵. Thus in their definition of early medieval priests, Patzold and van Rhijn emphasized their functions as intermediaries between different social groups. Something similar can be said for the monastic institutions I will discuss here. That is the reason why, in my view, they can be profitably seen as “monasteries in the middle”. Their “middleness” was the result of different conditions, that need to be assessed case by case. These institutions operated as intermediaries between different levels of society and as nodes in the networks of which they were a part. They were in the middle also for their positioning in the social hierarchies. As the cases studied here will show, their social connections allowed them to get in touch with the higher echelons of Carolingian Italy’s society, and sometimes to the royal authorities themselves, but they extended also downwards on the social ladder. Local landowners looked forward to establishing connections with these institutions in order to acquire status and move up socially. Therefore, the monasteries in the middle, like the men in the middle, established channels of communication that connected elites and non – or lesser – elites.

This is where my second theoretical premise comes to the fore. In the process of identification of the “monasteries in the middle”, the geographical scale of each institution’s actions had been crucial. While institutions such as St. Ambrose, S. Salvatore of Brescia and Nonantola developed amounts of landed wealth stretching kingdom-wide, the monasteries I focused on worked on a local level, usually limited to the territory of their dioceses. So, my idea of monasteries in the middle finds support in the distinction among different levels of elite groups drawn by Simone Collavini in a contribution of 2007⁶. The third level he identified, that of the “diocesan” elites, was characterized in his eyes by «le dimensioni relativamente ridotte dei patrimoni, limitati di solito a un solo territorio comitale / diocesano (o al massi-

⁴ *Men in the Middle*, ed. Patzold, van Rhijn.

⁵ Patzold, van Rhijn, *Introduction*, pp. 1-2.

⁶ Collavini, *Spazi politici*.

mo ad aree di confine tra più comitati), la residenza urbana, (...) l'assoluta egemonia informale sulla società cittadina»⁷. The monasteries I will discuss equally featured these traits. They were urban institutions, deeply embedded in their local contexts, while the extension of their landed wealth did not stretch beyond that of their bishoprics. In Collavini's model, the diocesan elites were in the middle between the elite kin groups whose fortunes and offices extended to a regional level, right below the *Reichsadel*; and the local elites «che dominano, variamente connesse con le altre élites, società di villaggio o centri diocesani dall'incerto profilo urbano»⁸. Such a positioning in the social landscape, together with an intermediary role between different social levels, provides the key grounds for my definition of the monasteries in the middle.

2. *Can a monastery protected by kings be in the middle? Lothar I, Pavia and S. Maria Teodote*

Scholars have underlined that, in Lombard times, the monastic landscape in Pavia was dominated by female communities, and that their presence offered spaces of political action to Lombard queens especially⁹. Far from removing these possibilities, the Carolingians connected the queens' role in managing religious institutions to the definitions of the ruler's wives as *consortes regni* developed in the first half of the ninth century¹⁰. Monasteries and their landed wealth were included in the patrimonies granted to the queens in Carolingian and post-Carolingian Italy, thus contributing to the shaping of these women's responsibilities as administrators of public resources¹¹. Among the dependencies of S. Salvatore of Brescia granted in usufruct by Lothar I to his daughter Gisla in 851, a «monasterium in Pavia qui vocatur Regine», established by the last Lombard royal couple Desiderius and Ansa, was also included¹². As Cristina La Rocca underlined, the monastery's title connected it to the queen as an institutional role, not to a specific queenly figure¹³. So, it comes as a surprise that neither this monastery nor another female community possibly established by the royal authority, S. Agata, obtained charters from Lothar or any other previous Carolingian ruler of the Italian kingdom – or at least no such document has come to us. The only monastic institution in Pavia that repeatedly received grants by Lothar was

⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 321-322.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 322.

⁹ Forzatti Golia, *Monasteri femminili*; La Rocca, *Monachesimo femminile*, pp. 122-126; Settia, *Pavia carolingia*, pp. 146-149.

¹⁰ Delogu, «*Consors regni*»; Erkens, «*Sicut Esther regina*»; Tondini, «*Consors regni*».

¹¹ See the contributions collected in *Il patrimonio delle regine*, ed. Lazzari.

¹² MGH, DD Lo I / Lo II, n. 115, pp. 265-266 (851 IX 8, Gondreville), at p. 266. Also see Forzatti Golia, *Monasteri femminili*, p. 313; Rotili, *Testimonianze monumentali*, p. 76.

¹³ La Rocca, *Monachesimo femminile*, p. 129.

S. Maria Teodote¹⁴. Between 833 and 841, a crucial period of conflicts within the Carolingian family, this monastery obtained four royal charters, all addressed to the Abbess Asia¹⁵. The four charters actually represent the only sources that we have for the community, its abbesses, and the monastery's estates for this period. Nonetheless this limited dossier is helpful to assess to what extent an institution so closely connected to Carolingian power can be seen as a monastery in the middle.

The first grant to S. Maria Teodote is dated to April 833, a few months before the rebellion of Louis the Pious's sons against their father¹⁶. Asia obtained for her monastery the king's immunity and protection and exemption from the payment of tax revenues on its lands. This was a meaningful act for many reasons. A direct connection was established between the Carolingian rulers in Italy and a monastery that according to Paul the Deacon had been founded by a Lombard king, Cunincpert¹⁷. Other hints point to a private initiative, and the version of the foundation reported in the *History of the Lombards* sounds legendary, but it shows that by the late 8th century a royal identity had been developed for S. Maria Teodote¹⁸. The grant of immunity of 833 was the only one, as far as we know, issued by Lothar for a female community¹⁹. Asia was therefore the only abbess who was able to have her institution included among those protected by the Carolingian power in Italy. To be sure, the ruler was more accessible in Pavia than elsewhere, but the location of the monastery in the former Lombard capital could be as much an issue as it was an opportunity. It has been argued that Pavia and its religious institutions suffered a sort of punishment for the resistance that the city opposed to Charlemagne in 773-774²⁰. As a result, they were excluded from royal munificence. As Leonardo Sernagiotto underlined, Lothar developed a new attitude toward the capital of the kingdom, probably in the attempt to reproduce in the Po Valley the model of his grandfather's capital, Aachen²¹. Asia was ready to grasp this chance.

In his royal charter of 833 Lothar also appointed a supervisor (*inspector*), the *venerabilis abbas* Gisleram, entrusted with the duty to watch over the respect of saint Benedict's rule by the nuns. The imposition of an external supervisor could possibly show Lothar's lack of trust in the nuns' behaviour, but there is the possibility that Asia was not so upset by his decision. The MGH editors of Lothar's charters argued for the identification of Gisleram

¹⁴ See Peroni, *Il monastero altomedievale*, though especially focusing on the monastery's material structures.

¹⁵ For an overview on these years see de Jong, *The Penitential State*, pp. 46-58.

¹⁶ MGH, DD Lo I / Lo II, n. 12, pp. 76-78 (833 IV 17, Pavia).

¹⁷ MGH, *Pauli Historia Langobardorum*, V, 37, p. 157.

¹⁸ Forzatti Golia, *Monasteri femminili*, p. 303.

¹⁹ On Lothar's Italian charters see Screen, *Lothar I in Italy*.

²⁰ Settia, *Pavia carolingia*; Majocchi, *Pavia città regia*, pp. 39-44; Vocino, *Hagiography as an Instrument*, p. 171.

²¹ Sernagiotto, *Spes optima regni*.

with the Gisleran *eruditissimus et prudentissimus abbas* acting as a *missus* in 837 together with another abbot, Prando²². The two abbots were called to be members in a committee investigating the possessions of S. Salvatore of Brescia²³. This identification looks plausible. Gisleram/Gisleran and Prando were considered by Lothar as trustworthy figures, especially skilled in dealing with female monasteries and their needs. Being in touch with them, even though as objects of their moral supervision, meant to be ranked among the institutions that the ruler took care of.

In another charter issued by Lothar in Pavia in June 834, S. Maria Teodote was granted the rights of collecting timber in *Carbonaria* and free fishing in the Po and Ticino rivers²⁴. These privileges were meant to compensate for «fragilitatem sexus Asiae abbatissae et deo famulantium feminarum in monasterio Deodotae»²⁵. The idea of the *fragilitas sexus*, the nuns belonging to the “weaker sex”, finds no other parallels in Lothar’s documents, but had a long tradition since Antiquity as a juridical and rhetorical device to assess male authority over women²⁶. In 6th century Byzantine Italy, as Cristina La Rocca has highlighted, it was used by women in judicial contexts as a way to claim public protection over their properties²⁷. The emphasis on a condition of subordination as inherently connected to her and her nuns gender identity could be equally part of the toolkit deployed by Asia for supporting her requests to the ruler. But there is also the possibility that Lothar himself chose to underline this motivation. In the summer of 834, when Lothar conquered Chalon-sur-Saône in the final stage of his revolt, he had the sister of Bernard of Septimania, Gerberga, accused of sorcery, and executed, enclosed in a barrel and drowned in the river²⁸. Gerberga’s death was criticized by contemporary sources as the *nec plus ultra* embodiment of the cruelty shown by Lothar and his wicked supporters²⁹. Lothar probably acted on the grounds of accusations of adultery, incest, abortion and/or infanticide against Gerberga, as this kind of execution suggests³⁰. So, in those months he experienced serious issues with female crimes and women’s *fragilitas sexus*, and he might have chosen to support his acts by recurring to this rhetorical theme.

²² The two figures were recorded under the same item in the index of the MGH edition, p. 504.

²³ MGH, DD Lo I / Lo II, n. 35, pp. 112-115 (837 XII 15, Marengo). Also see Lazzari, *Una mamma carolingia*, pp. 49-50; Paziienza, West-Harling, *Networking Nuns. A Gisleramnus abbas*, immediately following a *Uuala abbas*, also appears in the *liber memorialis* of S. Salvatore: see *Der Memorial- und Liturgiecodex*, p. 168 (my thanks to Leonardo Sernagiotto for driving my attention to this).

²⁴ MGH, DD Lo I / Lo II, n. 22, pp. 91-93 (834 VI 25, Pavia).

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 92.

²⁶ Beaucamp, *Le vocabulaire de la faiblesse*; Graziosi, “*Fragilitas sexus*”, pp. 22-25.

²⁷ La Rocca, *Ritornare fragili*.

²⁸ De Jong, *The Penitential State*, pp. 200-201; Booker, *Past Convictions*, pp. 152-153.

²⁹ Sernagiotto, *Spes optima regni*, pp. 425-427; Airlie, *Making and Unmaking*, pp. 143-144.

³⁰ See for instance the episodes from the works of Gregory of Tours discussed by Mistry, *Abortion in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 85-92.

Royal grants to the monastery were increased in May 839, when Lothar assigned to S. Maria Teodote a piece of land close to Pavia's walls³¹. The charter draws the boundaries and specifies the neighbours of the granted land. A part of its borders was identified in the form of properties and buildings already belonging to the monastery, a tower and an oratory. The remaining neighbours were the public road (i.e. the royal fisc), the city gate *qui dicitur Marenca* and another female monastery, S. Maria del Senatore, established in Lombard times as a private institution³². These borders attest to the physical proximity between the lands of different monastic institutions in the urban landscape of Pavia, especially in the south-western part of the city³³. Most importantly, the charter provides evidence of the ongoing support that S. Maria Teodote enjoyed from Lothar. Other religious institutions of Pavia, like S. Maria del Senatore, were apparently denied such a relationship, as no royal charter in their favour survives. Yet this document warns us not to assume royal charters as a direct reflection of intimacy to the ruler. In the following part of the text an exchange of lands between Asia and Theutberga, abbess of the monastery of S. Agata, was acknowledged and confirmed³⁴. The exchange, the precise terms of which were not reported, was considered "equal" and "reasonable" by Lothar and had been agreed upon *nostra auctoritate*, by the order of the king. The monastery of S. Agata had been established by the Lombard king Perctarit and remained a royal possession in Carolingian times³⁵. Yet no royal charters for S. Agata survive. Could it be that, since its connection to the ruler was institutionally sanctioned, there was no need for royal charters? Communication between the court and royal monasteries may not necessarily involve the production of charters. In the case of S. Agata, documentary silence may not be a sign of the monastery's inability to approach the king³⁶. The difference between S. Agata, a royal monastery, and S. Maria del Senatore, private and equally lacking royal charters, lies in their juridical condition. The diploma of 839 for S. Maria Teodote is the piece of evidence that allows us to operate distinctions in the status of different female monasteries in Carolingian Pavia. Despite the narrative of its royal foundation, S. Maria Teodote needed to obtain royal protection formally. This monastery also appears to have been somewhere in the middle between a public and a private status.

Thanks to Asia's efforts, S. Maria Teodote was included in a network of high-ranking figures connected to the court. The abbot Gisleram mentioned above was one of them. The charter of 839 once again recalled the practice of

³¹ MGH, DD Lo I / Lo II, n. 38, pp. 117-119 (839 V 6, Pavia).

³² Forzatti Golia, *Monasteri femminili*, p. 309.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 302.

³⁴ MGH, DD Lo I / Lo II, n. 38, p. 119.

³⁵ La Rocca, *Monachesimo femminile*, p. 123; Forzatti Golia, *Monasteri femminili*, pp. 298-300; Majocchi, *Sviluppo e affermazione di una capitale*, p. 175; Majocchi, *Pavia città regia*, pp. 55-56.

³⁶ Similar considerations have been recently proposed by Pazienza, *Le donne di San Ciriaco*.

the Rule of Benedict in S. Maria Teodote, probably a reference to the role of Gisleram as *inspector*. In the fourth royal charter addressed to the monastery, issued in July 841, its inclusion in these networks was improved³⁷. On that occasion Asia obtained from the king the appointment of two *tutores* with the duty to conduct an inquiry on the land patrimony of S. Maria Teodote, probably on the model of the one held in 837 for S. Salvatore of Brescia. Asia had denounced illegal subtractions by *pravi* and *invasores homines*. The *tutores* appointed by Lothar were the *comites* Leo and John, father and son, two figures very well known to scholars³⁸. Even though they didn't belong to the empire's top-level aristocracies, Leo and John experienced a quick rise as public officials in Lothar's service³⁹. On many occasions they were appointed with the task of investigating disputes involving key religious institutions of Carolingian Italy, such as St. Ambrose of Milan and Bobbio. The *advocatio* of 841 was one of the first tasks which they were on called to handle together. It was therefore a relevant turning point in their careers, as a confirmation of Leo's position and its transmission to his son. John consolidated his father's achievements in the last years of Lothar's rule and then under Louis II. As early as 844 he appears among the counts who took part in the Roman expedition led by Louis⁴⁰. In the same way as Abbot Gisleram specialized in supervising female monasteries, Leo and John did in settling disputes. Their appointment as *tutores* of the properties of S. Maria Teodote confirms the high esteem enjoyed by Asia and her monastery in Lothar's eyes. The ruler chose his best men to fulfill her requests. Despite (or thanks to) her *fragilitas sexus*, Asia established effective channels of communication with the kingdom's ruler and political elites. She repeatedly won Lothar's support for her endeavours for the sake of her nuns, while also achieving S. Maria Teodote's inclusion in a network of powerful figures.

In 871 Caila, who succeeded Asia as abbess, addressed Louis II to have the rights and estates of S. Maria Teodote confirmed⁴¹. The diploma issued by Louis was shaped as a memoir of all the benefices granted by Lothar to S. Maria Teodote, that is, all the rights obtained by the *ancilla dei* Asia from the king *pro diversis utilitatibus eiusdem monasterii*. The closeness developed by Asia with the royal court was at the root of Caila's request. The range and scope of the monastery's patrimonial interests as reflected in Lothar's charters, referring to the navigation on the Ticino and Po rivers and to real estate transactions in Pavia, seem focused on the city and its surrounding territory. The royal charters equally show Asia's successful efforts to establish

³⁷ MGH, DD Lo I / Lo II, n. 59, pp. 165-166 (841 VII 20, Aachen).

³⁸ For what follows see Bullough, "Leo qui apud Hlotharium"; Castagnetti, *Il conte Leone*; Santos Salazar, *Governare la Lombardia carolingia*, pp. 165-171.

³⁹ Also see Hlawitschka, *Franken, Alemannen, Bayern*, pp. 219-220 (Leo) and pp. 212-213 (John).

⁴⁰ Gantner, *A King in Training?*, especially pp. 166-167.

⁴¹ MGH, DD Lu II, n. 53, pp. 170-171 (871 IV 14, Benevento).

an intimate relationship with the ruler. While operating in the middle of the densely populated monastic landscape of Pavia, S. Maria Teodote carved its own space of action on the local scene, and of communication with the court.

3. *Between the city and the countryside: monasteries in the middle in Carolingian Milan*

The monastic landscape of Milan in Carolingian times was dominated by one institution⁴². St. Ambrose, one of the top-ranking religious communities of the kingdom, enjoyed political support and economical endowment from the Carolingian rulers since the 780s⁴³. As a consequence of this, it also played a pivotal role in Milanese society, attracting lands from the elites of both the city and its territory⁴⁴. This is one of the main reasons why the archives of St. Ambrose collected and preserved precious information, otherwise lost, also on other Milanese monasteries⁴⁵. Though inevitably selective and even distorted according to the documentary needs of St. Ambrose, the surviving memories of these institutions “in the middle” can be fruitfully investigated.

In June 823, according to a *chartula commutationis* written by the priest Podo, the brothers Walpert and Theudibert exchanged lands with the *vassus domni imperatoris* Hernust⁴⁶. The two brothers lived in Carpiano, South-East of Milan, where the exchanged lands and also the church of St. Martin, the place of the charter’s drafting, were located. In 812, as a *vassus* of Charlemagne, Hernust had been involved in another exchange of lands with the Milanese merchant Bruning⁴⁷. It has been argued that Hernust was one of the Franks who followed Charlemagne in his conquest of the Lombard kingdom in 774 and then settled in Italy⁴⁸. In July 823, less than two months after the exchange with Walpert and Theudibert, Hernust and his wife Weltruda exchanged with one another in usufruct all their lands both in Italy, including the goods in Carpiano, and in Alamannia, probably the area where at least one of them came from⁴⁹. The extension of the couple’s landed wealth thus embraced both sides of the Alps. Among the witnesses of this act twelve people who declared themselves as *franci* and eleven *alamanni* were recorded.

⁴² For an overview on Milan specifically in the times of Lothar I see now Tessera, *A fragmentary story*.

⁴³ Balzaretti, *The Lands of Saint Ambrose*. On Balzaretti’s work see now De Angelis, *Milano altomedievale*.

⁴⁴ Castagnetti, *La società milanese*; Rapetti, *Il monastero di Sant’Ambrogio*.

⁴⁵ See the in-depth overview by Balzaretti, *The Lands of Saint Ambrose*, pp. 49-88, and Santos Salazar, *Governare la Lombardia carolingia*, pp. 50-52.

⁴⁶ ChLA², XCIV, n. 12, pp. 55-57 (823 VI 3, Carpiano).

⁴⁷ ChLA², XCIV, n. 8, pp. 38-41 (812 IV, Carpiano).

⁴⁸ Balzaretti, *The Lands of Saint Ambrose*, p. 353.

⁴⁹ CDL, n. 102, cols. 186-187.

The presence of *Rataldus*, priest and *missus domini imperatoris*, and at least one gastald (Menulfus), highlights the imperial consent to the operation, its more-than-private nature, and the inclusion of Hernust and Weltruda among the elites of the kingdom. Eduard Hlawitschka also suggested that we should identify *Rataldus* with Ratold, bishop of Verona, one of Louis the Pious's most loyal advisors in Italy⁵⁰. Whatever the case, the *vicus* of Carpiano appears as an area where an imperial *vassus* developed landed wealth. As Ross Balzaretto has underlined, «it is quite clear that (...) Carpiano had attracted owners of high social status who profited from the Carolingian takeover of this part of Italy»⁵¹.

The writer of the charter concerning Hernust and the Carpiano brothers recorded the edges of the exchanged lands⁵². Those obtained by Walpert and Theudibert were delimited by lands of St. Ambrose, the goods of a certain Ursus and a public road – that is, the royal fisc. Hernust acquired portions bordering lands he already owned, once again the royal fisc (*terra regis*) and the monastery, probably nunnery, called *Maggiore*, of Milan. The foundation of the *Monasterium Maggiore* has been tentatively traced back to the second half of the 8th century, but information about it remains scant all along the ninth century⁵³. Its only other ninth century mention appears in the will of the brothers Deusdedit and Senator, clerics from Milan, of 853⁵⁴. In their will, they established that after their death a xenodochium was to be founded on the lands they owned in *Octabo*, between Concorezzo and Cologno Monzese⁵⁵. Their two sisters, referred to as *monachas Monasterii Maggiore*, were given the lifelong usufruct of the xenodochium. After these women's death it was to become the property of St. Ambrose. No possibility that the two women had children was apparently conceived, thus supporting the idea that they were nuns. Even though they are few and scattered, these references to the *Monasterium Maggiore* allow to draw some considerations on the range of its social connections in the first half of the ninth century. Its lands were concentrated in areas where a whole range of different social players all owned possessions⁵⁶. The royal fisc and the Frankish elites installed in Italy were among them, as well as other Milanese religious communities such as St. Ambrose and S. Vittore di Meda, whose possessions in the area of Carpiano are mentioned in charters from at least 856⁵⁷. As one of their neighbours, the *Monasterium Maggiore* was in touch with a number of kin groups and religious

⁵⁰ Hlawitschka, *Ratold, Bischof von Verona*. Also see Depreux, *Prosopographie*, p. 359.

⁵¹ Balzaretto, *The Lands of Saint Ambrose*, p. 354.

⁵² Santos Salazar, *Governare la Lombardia carolingia*, pp. 226-227.

⁵³ Occhipinti, *Appunti per la storia del Monastero Maggiore*; Occhipinti, *S. Maurizio*, p. 71.

⁵⁴ ChLA², XCV, n. 5, pp. 30-33 ([852 IX-853 I/II], Concorezzo). Also see Castagnetti, *La società milanese*, pp. 382-383; Balzaretto, *The Lands of Saint Ambrose*, pp. 378-379 and pp. 498-500.

⁵⁵ Rossetti, *Società e istituzioni*, pp. 23-24.

⁵⁶ On Cologno Monzese see the work by Gabriella Rossetti quoted in the previous footnote, and Balzaretto, *The Lands of Saint Ambrose*, pp. 362-389.

⁵⁷ ChLA², XCV, n. 10, pp. 46-48 (856 VI, Milan).

institutions connected to the Carolingian rulers. In other words, this nunnery appears as one more cluster of connections operating within the frame of a highly differentiated social landscape, where the impact of the Carolingian conquest had led to strong transformations. At least this was the way in which Deusdedit and Senator read the monastery's role in this context. By the means of the xenodochium they planned to establish, they devised their family's inclusion into the social networks of St. Ambrose.

The *Monasterium Maggiore* was just one of the monasteries contributing to the social complexity of Carolingian Milan. A *cartula ordinationis* of July 850 casts some light on another one of these, S. Vincenzo in Prato⁵⁸. This is not the first mention of S. Vincenzo in early medieval charters⁵⁹. In 806 Odelpert, archbishop of Milan, granted the church of S. Vincenzo, probably not yet connected to a monastic community, to Abbot Arigausus of St. Ambrose⁶⁰. S. Vincenzo in Prato was also mentioned in the suspicious charter issued in 835 by Archbishop Angilbert II to the monks of St. Ambrose as a confirmation of their rights and properties, mostly matching those granted to the community by Lothar in the same year⁶¹. In any case the subordination of this institution to St. Ambrose had been established since the early ninth century. This was certainly clear to Scaptoald from Sumirago, north-west of Milan, who in 850 had his will written down in Milan by the notary Ambrose. Scaptoald, son of the deceased Vuarnefrit, destined to his sister Giselberga the greatest part of his goods, located in many places of what is now *Varesotto*. Other people and institutions, like his uncle Erminald (a priest) and the church of S. Maria e S. Lorenzo of Sumirago, were equally included as beneficiaries of his generosity. In his will Scaptoald also took care of his servants, whom he set free, granting them the usufruct of little pieces of land for the sustenance of themselves and their families. At the death of these servants the whole patrimony was to be recollected by his sister. Only in the case Giselberga had no children (*quod non credo*, Scaptoald stated), all his goods were to be assigned to S. Vincenzo. In the final part of the charter the notary Ambrose recorded that two copies of it, one for Giselberga and one for S. Vincenzo, were produced. Provided that the will has been preserved in the archives of St. Ambrose, some conclusions can be drawn. 1) Scaptoald's goods were actually included in S. Vincenzo's patrimony, hence in that of St. Ambrose. 2) Giselberga had no children, or none of her children survived to adult age. 3) The copy of the charter we have is the one produced for S. Vincenzo. Further confirmation comes from the mention in a later charter (956) of properties actually held by S. Vincenzo in the area where Scaptoald's lands were located⁶².

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, n. 1, pp. 17-20 (850 VII, Milan).

⁵⁹ On this monastery see Spinelli, *L'origine desideriana*.

⁶⁰ ChLA², XCIV, n. 3, pp. 24-27 (806 I).

⁶¹ CDL, n. 112, cols. 218-219. Lothar's diploma: MGH, DD Lo I / Lo II, n. 26, pp. 99-101 (835 May 8). Also see Tessera, *Ambroise et Martin*, pp. 13-15, with more bibliographical references.

⁶² CDL, n. 614, cols. 1049-1051.

As Ross Balzaretto highlighted, Scaptoald's patrimony was described as a *curtis* with *domocoltile vel massariciis*, composed of individual plots scattered in many different places⁶³. His wealth looks considerable and raises the question of the social status of Scaptoald and his kin group. Sumirago, most probably his place of origin and residence, was at the core of his patrimony and of his plans for it. Since the early ninth century Sumirago appears as another one of the areas where the Frankish elites established themselves and developed their patrimonial presence in Carolingian Northern Italy⁶⁴. In 807 the Alamannian Count Alpcar, *baiolus* of King Pippin's daughter Adelheid, already had properties in Sumirago⁶⁵. Scaptoald and his family were thus the neighbours of a figure ranking among the highest political elites of the kingdom, who had moved to Italy after 774, most probably just like Hernust. Ambrose, the notary who wrote Scaptoald's will, is well attested in the central decades of the ninth century as working for the social elites of Carolingian Lombardy⁶⁶. In 836 he produced the charter by which Hunger, brother of the abovementioned Hernust, designated the executors of his will⁶⁷. Theutpald from Gnignano also had his will written down by Ambrose⁶⁸. His connection with St. Ambrose is further witnessed by two sales of lands to the monastery⁶⁹. So Ambrose (the notary) was a reference point among the professionals of legal writing that contributed to the shaping of the social networks linking wealthy and powerful figures, whose lands were concentrated in Milan's hinterland, to St. Ambrose. With his act, Scaptoald apparently followed a similar pattern. The inclusion of S. Vincenzo in his inheritance plans, though as an alternative solution to the heirless death of his sister, established a connection between Scaptoald and a religious institution connected to St. Ambrose. There can be little doubt of his awareness of the institutional connection existing between S. Vincenzo and St. Ambrose. Scaptoald was apparently familiar with Milan. His charter was written there. Three *negotiantes de Mediolano* subscribed it as witnesses. On these grounds Andrea Castagnetti suggested that Scaptoald himself could be involved in commercial activities⁷⁰. That would place him close to other contemporary figures such as Toto of Campione, a Lombard merchant who established connections with St. Ambrose by the means of gifts of lands⁷¹. An ecclesiastical career looks equally plausible for Scaptoald. He subscribed in a tentative caroline minus-

⁶³ Balzaretto, *The "Curtis"*.

⁶⁴ De Marchi, *L'alto medioevo nel Seprio*.

⁶⁵ On Alpcar see Hlawitschka, *Franken, Alemannen, Bayern*, pp. 120-121; Castagnetti, *La società milanese*, pp. 65-77. On his role as *baiolus* see now Zeller, *Waldo von St. Gallen/Reichenau*, especially, pp. 79-80.

⁶⁶ Castagnetti, *La società milanese*, pp. 260-267.

⁶⁷ ChLA², XCIV, n. 23, pp. 92-97 (836 II, Milan).

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, n. 26, pp. 103-105 (839 VIII, Milan).

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, n. 37, pp. 143-145 (847 V 14, Milan); *ibidem*, n. 39, pp. 149-151 (848 III 15, Milan).

⁷⁰ Castagnetti, *La società milanese*, pp. 361-362.

⁷¹ See the contributions collected in *Carte di famiglia*, especially the papers by Le Jan, *Il gruppo familiare di Totone*, and Gasparri, *Mercanti o possessori?*

cule⁷². He had neither wife nor children, and a priest, his uncle Erminald, was among his closest relatives. Whatever the case, Scaptoald belonged to or wished to be included in, networks of social connections linking different areas of Carolingian Lombardy around one of the key monastic institutions of the kingdom, St. Ambrose.

Within Scaptoald's plans, S. Vincenzo effectively worked as a monastery in the middle. A man of the local elites of the Seprio territory, already neighbour to other figures of more-than-local social relevance, he established a connection with one of the paramount monasteries of Carolingian Italy by including S. Vincenzo in Prato in his will. As Ross Balzaretti argued for tenth century Lombardy, «the on-and-off presence of high-status outsiders helped to make Milanese society a highly competitive and extravagantly violent political environment within a highly competitive policy which displayed elaborately developed and often complex networks of allegiance»⁷³. The same seems applicable to the ninth century. This socially fluid landscape offered chances for self-promotion. In such a context, a strong need for intermediaries must have been felt. In Scaptoald's plans S. Vincenzo played that role. This monastery placed itself in the middle between Scaptoald and St. Ambrose, while acquiring lands in Sumirago in the process. Its middleness was both social and patrimonial.

4. *Between a bishop and the lands of his church: Brescia and S. Faustino Maggiore*

Like Milan, Carolingian Brescia was the location of one of the kingdom's most prominent monastic institutions, S. Salvatore, a female community established by the last Lombard king Desiderius and his wife Ansa in the third quarter of the 8th century⁷⁴. If compared with Milan and Pavia, the religious landscape of Brescia, which was dominated by S. Salvatore, appears less complicated, and yet by no means unchangeable. In Carolingian times, and in continuity with the last period of Lombard rule, Brescia featured a range of initiatives for the promotion of the local episcopal seat, its religious communities, and the saints and relics preserved in its territory. The bishops of Brescia were at the core of these processes. In 816 Bishop Anfridius established a new basilica dedicated to the local martyrs Faustinus and Jovita⁷⁵. He also took care of the transfer of their relics to the new church from their

⁷² Petrucci, Romeo, "Scriptores in urbibus", p. 62. On the diffusion of the caroline minuscule in Carolingian Milan see Valsecchi, *La scrittura carolina*.

⁷³ Balzaretti, *Women, Property and Urban Space*, p. 61.

⁷⁴ Among a very rich bibliography, see Brogiolo, *Desiderio e Ansa a Brescia*; Andenna, *La vita e il ruolo del monastero*; Baronio, *Desiderio e la "costruzione" del regno*; Gasparri, *Desiderio*, pp. 62-68; and the contributions quoted above, note 1.

⁷⁵ Gavinelli, *Il gallo segnamento*, pp. 21-22.

former resting place in S. Faustino *ad sanguinem*. A community of canons was installed in the new basilica's compound, charged with liturgical service and the administration of the relics' veneration. In so doing Anfridius showed his adherence to some of the key principles driving the Carolingian reforms of the cult of saints, such as preference for saintly figures of the past (especially martyrs) and a reorganization of the spaces and staff in the shrines preserving their remains⁷⁶. His choice to establish a community of canons, a way of religious life that underwent reform at the councils held in those years at Aachen, also highlights his acquaintance with contemporary debates over pastoral issues⁷⁷. Around 830 his non-immediate successor Rampertus had Anfridius's endeavour materially celebrated in a golden wind vane in the shape of a rooster, placed on the top of S. Faustino Maggiore⁷⁸. An inscription running on the metal feathers of the rooster recalled the translation. Some years later, in 838, Rampertus operated his own transfer of relics and reappraisal of a saint's cult. The body of Philastrius, a 4th century bishop and a correspondent of Ambrose, was taken from the church of S. Andrea to the winter cathedral. Rampertus was also the author of a hagiographical text celebrating the event, the *Translatio Filastrii*⁷⁹. As Giorgia Vocino has argued, «la translation des reliques de saint Filastre scella alors le programme de valorisation de la cathédrale de Brescia»⁸⁰.

Around 841 a new intervention on the cult and the church of Faustinus and Jovita was promoted by Rampertus. The community of canons was turned into a community of monks⁸¹. According to the act of foundation of the monastery, the bishop endowed it with a range of properties scattered in the territory of the diocese and previously pertaining to other religious institutions or to vassals of the bishop⁸². The foundation charter thus witnesses a wide-ranging plan of land concentration. The bishop's purpose was that of establishing a closer control over goods previously dispersed among different institutions and areas of his episcopal territory. The core of this project was the new monastery, founded by and depending on the bishop, even though Rampertus granted to the monks the right to elect their abbot freely. According to the foundation charter, the monastery was placed in the middle between the bishop and his re-organized landed wealth. S. Faustino Maggiore was called to function as the bishop's safe, collecting for him all the income that could be produced by the lands under the monks' administration. Caution is nevertheless necessary. Even though it has come to us only in later copies, the

⁷⁶ Fouracre, *The Origins of the Carolingian Attempt*; Veronese, *Tra rispetto delle leggi e furti notturni*.

⁷⁷ Kramer, *Rethinking Authority*, pp. 94-121.

⁷⁸ Gavinelli, *Il gallo segnamento*; Gavinelli, *Il gallo di Ramperto*.

⁷⁹ Bettelli Bergamaschi, *Ramperto, vescovo di Brescia*, also providing an edition of the text.

⁸⁰ Vocino, "*Triginta autem Brixianenses*", p. 317.

⁸¹ Spinelli, *Ordini e congregazioni religiose*, pp. 295-296; Baronio, *Il monastero di San Faustino*, pp. 49-62.

⁸² CDL, n. 140, cols. 245-248.

foundation charter, dated to 31 May 841, is usually accepted as authentic and reliable⁸³. Recently Giancarlo Andenna has noticed «aspetti che ci inducono a propendere per la non genuinità dell'atto, fortemente interpolato»⁸⁴. In 842 Archbishop Angilbert of Milan issued a *praeceptum synodale* confirming the foundation of the monastery, together with the rights to elect the abbot freely and to appoint a *defensor*⁸⁵. But Angilbert's act has equally been transmitted through late copies⁸⁶. What appears certain is that monastic life was actually established in S. Faustino Maggiore in the early 840s, when the Frankish monks Hildemar and Leodegarius were called by Angilbert to teach the principles of saint Benedict's rule to the local community⁸⁷. The archbishop thus actively supported Rampertus's initiative. Later Hildemar and Leodegarius were given the same task in S. Pietro of Civate⁸⁸. When they left, Rampertus asked Bishop Hagano of Bergamo for substitutes⁸⁹. The priest Maginarius, trained like Rampertus in the Alamannian abbey of Reichenau, was chosen to replace Hildemar and Leodegarius. Angilbert, Hagano and Rampertus took the establishment of a monastic community seriously, contributing with both material and cultural resources. The foundation, endowment, and religious organization of S. Faustino Maggiore as a monastery was a shared endeavour, started by Rampertus and involving a number of bishops. In his will of 846 Bishop Billung of Verona also granted a part of his estates to S. Faustino Maggiore, described in fact just as a *basilica*, not (yet?) a monastery⁹⁰. Billung, most probably coming from Alamannia like his predecessors Egino, Ratold, and Notingus, is a shadowy figure⁹¹. A deacon Billung was the first subscriber of Rampertus's foundation charter. A personal connection between the bishop of Verona and the monastery of S. Faustino could certainly provide an explanation for his choice of benefiting a religious institution located outside his diocese⁹². No doubt the documents concerning the foundation of S. Faustino deserve deeper analysis. Yet it looks possible to draw a basic consideration. The monastery of S. Faustino Maggiore was established by Rampertus as one more step in the bishops of Brescia's attempts to increase the dignity of their office and their ranking among the bishops of Carolingian Northern Italy. In order to do that they could not count on S. Salvatore. Its character as a Lombard royal foundation was reinstated by the Carolingian rulers, who

⁸³ See the bibliography quoted above, footnotes 78-81.

⁸⁴ Andenna, *Ramperto*, p. 329; also see Barbieri – Concaro – Vecchio, *Le carte del monastero*, p. 211.

⁸⁵ MGH, Conc. II, n. 62, pp. 814-815.

⁸⁶ Zagni, *Gli atti arcivescovili*, pp. 26-28.

⁸⁷ Villa, "Denique Terenti dulcia legimus acta", pp. 18-20; Witt, *The Two Latin Cultures*, pp. 48-49.

⁸⁸ Tomea, "Nunc in prefato monasterio Clavadis"; Tessera, *A fragmentary story*, pp. 39-42.

⁸⁹ On Hagano see De Angelis, *Poteri cittadini e intellettuali di potere*, pp. 39-56.

⁹⁰ ChLA², LX, n. 26, pp. 118-121 (846 X [12], Verona). Also see Gasparri, *I testamenti nell'Italia settentrionale*, p. 104; Bougard, *Tesori e "mobilia" italiani*, pp. 83-84.

⁹¹ Castagnetti, *Minoranze etniche dominanti*, p. 19.

⁹² Baronio, *Il monastero di San Faustino*, p. 61.

consistently granted it and its revenues to their queens and empresses, from Louis the Pious's second wife Judith on⁹³. In these women's hands S. Salvatore became a repository of wealth and a place preserving the memory of the Carolingians in Italy. The ninth century bishops of Brescia were closely connected to S. Salvatore, as the inclusion of their names in the lists of the monastery's *liber vitae* witnesses⁹⁴. Yet they were always excluded from the possibility of using it for their own plans. As a consequence Rampertus probably felt the need to found a new monastery, that he and his successors could freely handle. A re-organization of his bishopric's resources was a task that such an institution could successfully accomplish.

Further framing for the establishment of the monastery can be pointed out when the issue of Rampertus's origins is taken into account. There is no agreement on that. Some scholars have suggested his connection to a local kin group of Lombard tradition⁹⁵, while others argued that he came from beyond the Alps⁹⁶. Rampertus had connections with the Alamannian monastery of Reichenau, where he probably received his education and where he retired in his final years⁹⁷. These connections have been highlighted as supporting his transalpine origins⁹⁸. If that was the case, Rampertus's position as a foreign bishop would be similar to that of other holders of public offices, bishops and counts, operating in Carolingian Italy but coming from other regions of the Frankish domains⁹⁹. Their appointment responded to the rulers' need to entrust the role of mediators in the political communication with the local elites of the newly conquered regions to reliable and skilled figures. Rampertus's endeavours in the reassessment of the cult of local saints, like Philastrius, Faustinus and Jovita, show similarities with those brought on in the same years by other foreign bishops, like Ratold of Verona¹⁰⁰. The successor of Rampertus as bishop of Brescia, Notingus, was certainly from Alamannia, and was well aware of Ratold's actions and plans, as he briefly was bishop of Verona in the early 840s before being appointed as bishop of Brescia¹⁰¹. Notingus actively supported the monasteries in the diocese of Brescia, thus showing his commitment in cooperating with the local society. In a diploma (858-866) by Louis II, preserved only in an early modern transcription, the gift of a *curtis* in Valenzano to the *monasterium Honorii* of Brescia, granted

⁹³ La Rocca, *Les cadeaux nuptiaux*; La Rocca, *Monachesimo femminile*; Lazzari, *Una santa, una badessa e una principessa*.

⁹⁴ See for instance ms. Brescia, Biblioteca Civica Queriniana, G.VI.7, f. 34v: *Rampertus ep(is-copus)* is the first name of the first line. The *liber* is published in *Der Memorial- und Liturgiecodex*. On San Salvatore's *liber vitae* see Ludwig, *Das Gedenkbuch von San Salvatore*.

⁹⁵ Baronio, *Il monastero di San Faustino*; Vocino, "Triginta autem Brixianenses".

⁹⁶ Gavinelli, *Il gallo segnamento*, pp. 26-27; Andenna, *Ramperto*, p. 328.

⁹⁷ Ludwig, *Zur Chronologie der Nameneinträge*, pp. 103-104.

⁹⁸ Andenna, *Ramperto*, p. 328.

⁹⁹ See Davis, *Charlemagne's Practice of Empire*, pp. 206-238.

¹⁰⁰ See Veronese, *The struggle for (self-)integration*.

¹⁰¹ Andenna, *Notingo*.

by Notingus in his will, was confirmed to Abbess Liutperga¹⁰². The document highlights the role of Amalberga, abbess of the *monasterium Novum* – S. Salvatore – as intermediary with the imperial court on Liutperga’s behalf¹⁰³. The relationships between San Salvatore and the *monasterium Honorii* are far from clear¹⁰⁴. Nowhere in the charter is the *monasterium Honorii* said to be formally subordinated to S. Salvatore. In the same way, Notingus is not addressed as the monastery’s founder. The first mention of the community in an original charter dates to 882, when Abbess Ardefusa granted *libellario nomine a sors massaricia* in Pollione¹⁰⁵. The charter says nothing more than Louis’s diploma about the monastery’s relationships with S. Salvatore, as well as with the bishops of Brescia. The only hint supporting the existence of connections with the episcopal authority is the initial location of the monastery in what is now the *broletto*, an area physically close to the cathedral. According to the diploma, the *monasterium Honorii* was one more patrimonial player in Carolingian Brescia, one that attracted a foreign bishop’s generosity and was used by him as a tool for developing his networks of relationships with the local society. In the meantime, this monastery accumulated lands in a diocesan range, in Valenzano and Pollione. The definition of monastery in the middle looks fitting in this case.

5. Conclusions

In a broad sense, all early medieval monasteries were in the middle. That was one of the reasons why they were established in the first place. In the eyes of their founders they were expected to attract gifts of lands from wealthy and powerful landowners in exchange for the services of intercessory prayer and memory upkeep performed by the monks or nuns¹⁰⁶. Monasteries thus became focal points around which networks of social and political connections were developed and nurtured. When they struggled, failed, or stopped doing that, or the kin group that had founded them was no longer in a condition to handle them, provisions had to be made. Reforms in the communities’ way of living, attachment to other religious entities like episcopal churches or monastic powerhouses, and the assessment of new cults through relics transfers were the most frequently adopted solutions. Despite the local and regional differences both in our sources and in the forms taken by the processes of accumulation of monastic landed wealth, early medieval monasteries clearly worked as intermediaries between different social groups, and contributed in

¹⁰² MGH, DD Lu II, n. 43, pp. 152-153.

¹⁰³ On Amalberga see Paziienza, West-Harling, *Networking Nuns*.

¹⁰⁴ On this monastery see Trotti, *San Cosma e Damiano*, especially pp. 52-57.

¹⁰⁵ ChLA², XCIX, n. 20, pp. 93-95 (882 XI 10, Brescia).

¹⁰⁶ Historiographical considerations in Diem, Rapp, *The Monastic Laboratory*. Also see Choy, *Intercessory Prayer*.

many ways to the configuration of the early medieval West as a temple society, as Ian Wood recently defined it¹⁰⁷. So, what is the point in talking about monasteries in the middle – especially with regard to the cases considered here?

Each of the three local contexts I examined featured conditions of their own, determining to a variable extent the possibilities, limits, and choices of the religious communities operating within them. In Carolingian times Milan and its archbishops developed close relationships with rulers, usually supporting and cooperating with them but sometimes also taking sides with a king against an emperor, as Archbishop Anselm did during the revolt of King Bernard of Italy¹⁰⁸. St. Ambrose played a key role in these processes. This monastery attracted the generosity of the Carolingians and became a place where their memory and their bodies were preserved and celebrated. A close connection with the archbishops' saintly predecessor Ambrose, whose body was equally preserved in the monastery's basilica, was thus established. As Miriam Tessera and Giorgia Vocino have underlined, the archbishops of Carolingian Milan were keen to celebrate, but also to reshape, Ambrose's memory through both material and textual endeavours¹⁰⁹. A similarly close connection tied the Italian branch of the Carolingians to S. Salvatore of Brescia, though with different tools. S. Salvatore's status as a royal foundation was preserved after 774 and more and more associated with its attribution to the women of the imperial family. Pavia was in a different situation in the aftermath of the Frankish conquest. Yet its monastic institutions, and especially its female communities, developed a role as intermediaries between the royal authority and the local society, as shown by both the royal charters issued for S. Maria Teodote and the attribution of the *Reginae* monastery to Queen Hirmingard. Yet the charter evidence connected with all these institutions also allows to appreciate, though only in glimpses, the existence and activities of other monasteries. A complicated and multi-layered monastic landscape, crowded with low-to-middle-level communities, thus becomes visible. Each of them offered multiple solutions to those willing to take advantage of the memorial and social services provided by monasteries in the Carolingian world. At the same time, and in so doing, they were able to set themselves as intermediaries between different players and institutions, both horizontally and vertically. S. Vincenzo in Prato, a male community whose founders are unknown, allowed Scaptoald to plan, or to enhance, his and his kin group's inclusion in the networks connecting Milan and the Seprio area. S. Faustino Maggiore, another male community founded by bishops, was one of the tools used by Rampertus to consolidate his position as a – possibly foreign – bishop in the local context of Brescia, while at the same time assessing his adherence to the Carolingian cultural toolkit kindly provided by Angilbert II, Leodegar-

¹⁰⁷ Wood, *The Christian Economy*.

¹⁰⁸ Noble, *The Revolt of King Bernard*; de Jong, *The Penitential State*, pp. 24-30.

¹⁰⁹ Tessera, *A fragmentary story*; Tessera, *Ambroise et Martin*; Vocino, *Framing Ambrose*; Vocino, *Bishops in the Mirror*.

ius and Hildemar. S. Maria *Honorii*, a female community of unknown foundation, apparently played a similar role for Bishop Notingus. Finally S. Maria Teodote, a female institution whose foundation was attributed to different figures, broke the wall of suspicion apparently surrounding Pavia's monasteries in the eyes of the Carolingian rulers of Italy, thus potentially developing a role as intermediary between the court and local elites. Male and female communities of both private and public foundation were equally part of the highly complicated monastic landscape of Carolingian Lombardy. Their ability to be acknowledged as social, political, economical and cultural intermediaries was what allowed them to make their contribution to the shaping of the networks connecting different social levels and groups. The definition of these institutions as monasteries in the middle points to the highlighting of the multiple meanings of their "middleness". They were in the middle of exchanges of lands between landowners characterized by different levels of wealth and power. They were also in the middle in the political communications between the city and their countryside. The connections they contributed to establishing were both horizontal and vertical, sometimes stretching as high as the king. At the same time their "middleness" was within the scope and limits of their patrimonies, circumscribed to the area of a bishopric. They were both medium-scale and in the middle.

The definition of monasteries in the middle appears to respond to different needs. On the one hand it provides a common interpretive category for dealing with different religious entities satisfying the criteria enunciated above. It therefore allows us to open up the investigation to institutions that scholars have not fully considered so far, but that can provide richer and more nuanced pictures of the local monastic landscapes of the Carolingian world. As a result this category of analysis seems useful as a reminder of the need to pay attention and further investigate the multiple ways and tools deployed by early medieval monasteries to fulfil their functions as intermediaries.

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