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new questions, new debates**

di Veronica West-Harling

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## **Female monasticism in Italy in the Early Middle Ages: new questions, new debates\***

by Veronica West-Harling

This introductory essay consists of two parts. The first is a contextualisation of the overall purpose of the monographic section, as well as a general summary of the questions, issues and themes which we were proposing to debate. The second part is an Appendix, which sets out the guidelines of the database *MedItaNunC*, which supported some of the research, and now provides not only a large percentage of the source material, but also a methodology about the connections which can be made through the information brought together. The essay looks at the historiography of the subject, including the recent wealth of research published from the perspective of gender studies in this area, and the way in which the Italian material fits into it. It also explains the chosen chronology, and the geographical spread used in the volume, and the important input of archaeology, which has helped propose new questions. Lastly, it sets out the three core themes which run through the other papers in the volume: the links between female monasteries and the city elites, the history of the monasteries concerned in the light of both their foundation and hagiographical myths, their material culture, and their ideological place in the cityscape, and finally, the attempt to identify the difference, if any, between female and male monastic houses. It is hoped that the collection will provide a first panorama of female monasticism across the multiplicity of Italian political and cultural landscape.

Questo saggio introduttivo si articola in due parti. La prima è una contestualizzazione dello scopo generale della sezione monografica, nonché un sommario generale delle domande, degli argomenti e delle tematiche proposti alla discussione. La seconda parte è un'Appendice, che definisce le linee guida del database *MedItaNunC*, che è stato alla base di alcune delle ricerche e che adesso fornisce non solo una grande percentuale delle fonti, ma anche una metodologia sulle connessioni che possono essere fatte grazie alle informazioni riunite. Il saggio esamina la storiografia specifica, rilevando la recente ricchezza di ricerche pubblicate sotto il profilo degli studi di genere in questo settore e il modo in cui le ricerche italiane si inseriscono in tale contesto. Spiega anche la cronologia scelta, la copertura territoriale delle indagini attuate per questa sezione monografica e l'importante contributo dell'archeologia, che ha contribuito a proporre

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The appendix contains a presentation of the database built during the project.

nuove domande. Infine, l'intervento espone i tre temi centrali che attraversano i contributi qui proposti e più orientati sulle fonti scritte: i legami tra monasteri femminili e le élite cittadine; la storia dei monasteri alla luce del loro mito di fondazione e della loro agiografia, della cultura materiale e del loro peso ideologico nel paesaggio urbano; e infine il tentativo di identificare la differenza, se esiste, tra monasteri femminili e maschili. L'auspicio è che la raccolta di studi fornisca un primo quadro del monachesimo femminile contestualizzato rispetto a un variegato panorama politico e culturale italiano.

Middle Ages; 5<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> Centuries; Italy; female monasticism; social and cultural history of women's power; historical anthropology of family relations; cultural gendering.

Medioevo; secoli V-XI; Italia; monachesimo femminile; donne, cultura e potere nella società medievale; antropologia storica sulla famiglia; genere e rappresentazioni di genere.

This collection of essays has, at its heart, the papers of a one day-conference held at Ca' Foscari on 4 May 2017, entitled *Family, Power, Memory: female monasticism in Italy from 700 to 1100*. The volume has been augmented and restructured to create a coherent study of greater scope and organic unity for publication as a monographic section.

At the beginning of this project, the bibliography available was somewhat limited in its attention to the topic. The study of monasteries in the early Middle Ages between the 17<sup>th</sup> and the early-20<sup>th</sup> centuries has been centred on their spiritual function; then on the role of new monastic orders from the Cistercians in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and the Mendicants in the later Middle Ages; and in recent years on monastic origins in Late Antiquity or its formidable role in the construction of Carolingian Europe in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries. Most of these studies have, of course, been mostly interested in male monasticism. In the last thirty years or so, studies of female monasticism have begun to appear, specifically of Anglo-Saxon, Frankish Merovingian and German Ottonian nuns<sup>1</sup>. In Italy too, although an increasing amount of work had been carried out recently, studies until lately limited themselves to one religious house, and to a single regional framework, to discuss the role and evolution of one monastery<sup>2</sup>. Nuns were, of course, mentioned in general works on Italian monasticism<sup>3</sup>, or on Italian women, especially in relation to queens<sup>4</sup>. Until

<sup>1</sup> For England, Foot, *Veiled Women*; for France, Venarde, *Women's Monasticism*; Skinner, *Benedictine Life for Women in Central France*; Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*; Le Jan, *Monastères de femmes*; on Germany, the literature is vast, but classic studies remain Leyser, *Rule and Conflict*; Parisse's works, especially *Religieux et religieuses en Empire*; Althoff, *Gandersheim und Quedlinburg*; Wemple, *Monastic Life of Women*; and Wells, *The Politics of Gender and Ethnicity*.

<sup>2</sup> For San Salvatore, see Bettelli Bergamaschi, *Monachesimo femminile e potere politico* or Andenna, *San Salvatore di Brescia e la scelta religiosa*; for San Zaccaria, see Rapetti, *Una comunità e le sue badesse*.

<sup>3</sup> Penco, *Storia del monachesimo in Italia; Il monachesimo italiano dall'età longobarda all'età ottoniana*; Rapetti, *Storia del monachesimo medievale*; Capo, *Monaci e monasteri nella storia di Roma*. On female monasticism in Italy, see Wemple, *Female Monasticism in Italy*; Abrahamse, *Byzantine Asceticism and Women's Monasteries*.

<sup>4</sup> Skinner, *Women in Medieval Italian Society*; and several works by Cristina La Rocca, or edited by her, for example her *Donne al potere; Agire da donna; Donne e uomini*. Moreover see

very recently, however, with the partial exception of one article by Alessandra Veronese<sup>5</sup>, there had been relatively little attempt at putting together such individual knowledge to create a picture of even regions of the peninsula, let alone all of it – for, in particular, it is very rare for studies to look at the South of Italy together with the North. Moreover, studies tended to be largely narrative, or occasionally analytical on specific topics, such as the economic possessions of religious houses (Sant'Andrea Maggiore in Ravenna)<sup>6</sup>, the individual families of the nuns and abbesses (San Zaccaria in Venice, Santa Sofia of Benevento)<sup>7</sup>, female monasteries in specific areas and cities<sup>8</sup>, or the queens and their founding and patronage of nunneries (Queen Ansa for San Salvatore, Queen Angilberga for San Sisto of Piacenza)<sup>9</sup>. In the last few years, there has been a considerable expansion and important work on female monasticism in a comparative context, in terms of political and social, as well as from an anthropological perspective. This has been general in the historiography, in the work of Giulia Barone, Anne-Marie Helvétius and most recently Steven Vanderputten<sup>10</sup>. It has also been especially well represented in relation to female monasticism in Italy. Key papers are those by Cristina La Rocca, Tiziana Lazzari, Anna Rapetti, Eleonora Destefanis<sup>11</sup>, who have led the way into the areas of work of which this study is a part.

Italian nunneries during this period fell into several geographical groupings, with multiple houses in the core Lombard royal area of Pavia, Piacenza and Brescia, four in Venice, over five in Rome, several in Naples, a group of small nunneries in Lombard southern Italy, and various others in Emilia-Romagna, for example in Verona, and Liguria. Studying them together in a comparative way allows one to see whether they function differently across

Lazzari, *Una mamma carolingia*; Le Jan, *Femmes, pouvoir et société*; Forzatti Golia, *Modelli di potere femminile*.

<sup>5</sup> Veronese, *Monasteri femminili in Italia settentrionale*.

<sup>6</sup> *Le carte del monastero di Sant'Andrea Maggiore*; now *Le carte ravennati del secolo decimo*; *Le carte ravennati dei secoli ottavo e nono*; *Le carte ravennati del secolo undicesimo*. *Archivio di Sant'Andrea Maggiore*; *Le carte ravennati del secolo undicesimo*. *Archivi minori*.

<sup>7</sup> Fees, *Le monache di San Zaccaria a Venezia*; Rapetti, *La formazione di un'aristocrazia*; Martin, *Chronicon Sctae Sophiae*; Stasser, *Où sont les femmes?*

<sup>8</sup> Carraro, *La laguna delle donne*; Guglielmotti, *Poteri femminili, monasteri e chiese*; Forzatti Golia, *Monasteri femminili a Pavia*.

<sup>9</sup> Wemple, *San Salvatore/Santa Giulia*; Becher, *Das Königliche Frauenkloster San Salvatore/Sta Giulia in Brescia*, and more recently Ludwig in the new edition of the *Liber Vitae, Der Memorial- und Liturgiecodex von San Salvatore/Santa Giulia in Brescia*; Cimino, *Angelberga*; Sereno, *Bertilla e Berta*.

<sup>10</sup> Key work on this topic has been carried out by Vanderputten, *Debating reform*; Vanderputten, *Un espace sacré au féminin?*; Vanderputten, *Dark age nunneries*; Helvétius, *Le monachisme féminin*; Helvetius, *Les religieuses dans le cloître*; Barone, *Società e religiosità femminile*; and Musardo Talò, *Per una fenomenologia del monachesimo femminile*; *Il monachesimo femminile in Italia*.

<sup>11</sup> La Rocca, *La reine et ses liens avec les monastères*; La Rocca, *Velate e «in capillo»*; La Rocca, *Monachesimo femminile e potere delle regine*; Lazzari, *Poteri femminili, monasteri e chiese*; Destefanis, *I monasteri femminili*; Albuzzi, *Il monachesimo femminile*; Sereno, *Il monachesimo femminile*; Consolino, *Ascetismo e monachesimo femminile*.

centuries and across the extent of Italy. The houses mentioned were, broadly speaking, the most significant in terms of size, wealth and power, and consequently often of documentation, many being foundations by the ruling families in the areas in which they found themselves, whether ducal or royal and, uniquely for Rome, San Ciriaco in Via Lata by the women of Prince Alberic's family<sup>12</sup>. We travel geographically, throughout the volume, from one city to another across seven urban centres. These are, from North to South, Brescia, Verona, Venice, Ravenna, Rome, Naples and Benevento. More significant than the geography itself are the political and cultural traditions in place in those cities: Lombard then Carolingian for Brescia and Verona, and technically also for Benevento in the South, Byzantine and post-Byzantine in Ravenna and Venice, as well as Naples, and Rome itself, with its rather complex individual case, technically post-Byzantine too, but adapted in various ways by popes, Carolingian emperors, then aristocratic reformers.

Chronologically, the period covered in this volume extends from that of full Lombard dominance in the Kingdom of Italy and the southern duchies, as experienced from the mid-8<sup>th</sup> century in Brescia, Verona and Benevento, through the change to Carolingian dominance in the first two cases, as well as, increasingly, in Ravenna, to the remaining post-Lombard and Byzantine control in Benevento and Naples, as well as in Venice. This chronological span covers also the political world of Rome, from its integration into Byzantine rule as a duchy subjected to the Exarchate of Ravenna, to papal and Carolingian dominance in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, to aristocratic rule in the 10<sup>th</sup> and early 11<sup>th</sup> century, and finally to the beginnings of the Church Reform movement led by the papacy from the mid-11<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Across these 400 years, the forms and development of the various monasteries were, of course, very different. Some had their origins in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, like San Salvatore in Brescia, Santa Maria of Verona and Santa Sofia in Benevento; others in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, like San Zaccaria in Venice, or in the 10<sup>th</sup>, like San Ciriaco in Rome and the main female monasteries of Ravenna. By the same token, some of them disappeared, or were incorporated or transformed into male monasteries, such as Santa Sofia of Benevento, while others went through a period of relative decline, even though they regained their prestige from the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards, such as San Salvatore (by now Santa Giulia) of Brescia and San Zaccaria in Venice, from then on still successful until their dissolution in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Why were these successful and continued to exist, while others failed to remain active?

There are, of course, other nunneries, some similar in terms of their royal or aristocratic foundations, but few among them have an extensive portfolio of sources. It is quite clear, from the papers of the volume, that the most important of these sources, in all cases, are the collections of charters recording land transactions (grants, leases, exchanges, purchases, disputes) as well as diplomas of exemption and those granting immunity and various rights, as

<sup>12</sup> Cavazzi, *Un monastero benedettino* and Cavazzi, *La diaconia di Santa Maria*.

well as the protection of bishop, duke, king or emperor to specific houses. More or less chronologically, these are: the charters of Santa Sofia of Benevento from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the early 10<sup>th</sup> century, when the monastery was under the rule of an abbess (Giulia Zornetta)<sup>13</sup>, the grants made by the duke/bishop of Naples to women of the family from the 8<sup>th</sup> century onwards (Vinni Lucherini)<sup>14</sup>; the large body of Ravenna charters from the two monasteries of Santa Maria in Cereseo and San Martino, both later subsumed into the monastery of Sant'Andrea Maggiore from the 11<sup>th</sup> century onwards (Mila Bondi)<sup>15</sup>; the two foundation charters of a monastery of Santa Maria in Verona in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, with a gap until a new set of charters begins in the 1060 for the monastery of San Giorgio in Braida (Mariaclara Rossi)<sup>16</sup>; the increasingly large body of charters of the recently-founded monastery of San Ciriaco in Rome from the 970s onwards (Annamaria Pazienza)<sup>17</sup>; and the, at first sparse, then much richer documentation of San Zaccaria in Venice, including its court cases in the 11<sup>th</sup> century (Silvia Carraro)<sup>18</sup>. All these documents are a mine of information on a large range of topics, from the obvious ones such as the names of abbesses and nuns and thus their family origins and links, to the extent of their authority in economic terms, and in terms of judicial activity in the region, to the level and frequency of literacy based on which nuns actually sign these documents, to the spatial organisation of the monastery, its control over churches and villages, its political links with the secular and ecclesiastical authorities, its cultural, liturgical and hagiographical interests through its books – these being only a sample of their usefulness.

Some of the volume authors have the benefit of being able to use narrative sources too, especially the two essential chronicles of the *Historia veneticorum* by John the Deacon in Venice (Carraro) and the *Historia episcoporum Neapolitanorum* in Naples (Lucherini), while others could use slightly more peripheral chronicles, for example those of Monte Cassino of Leo Marsicanus or of San Vincenzo al Volturno for Santa Sofia (Zornetta), and that of Subiaco for San Ciriaco (Pazienza)<sup>19</sup>. San Ciriaco has an absolutely essential document to help study its history, a necrologium (list of names of nuns, patrons, their families and all the other dead for whom prayer is required), which started in

<sup>13</sup> Martin, *Chronicon Sanctae Sophiae*.

<sup>14</sup> Capasso, *Monumenta ad Neapolitani Ducatus historiam pertinentia*.

<sup>15</sup> See above, note 6; also Bondi, *Proprietà e spazi monastici*.

<sup>16</sup> *Le carte di San Giorgio in Braida*.

<sup>17</sup> *Ecclesiae Santa Mariae in via Lata tabularium*.

<sup>18</sup> These have not been collected into one edition, but some have been edited anew in *Documenti veneziani*, < <http://saame.it/fonte/documenti-veneziani/> >. The later material has been printed as a unit in the study by Tasini, *Monselice e il monastero di San Zaccaria*; see also Modzelewski, *Le vicende della «pars dominica»* and Agazzi, *«Territorio Sancti Zacharie»*. There is a rich body of charters for San Salvatore/Santa Giulia of Brescia, *Le carte del monastero di Santa Giulia di Brescia*, I, but they are treated elsewhere by the editor of this volume.

<sup>19</sup> Giovanni Diacono, *Istoria Veneticorum*; *Gesta episcoporum Neapolitanorum*; *Chronica monasterii Casinensis*; *Chronicon Vulturense*; *Registrum Petri Diaconi*; *Il Regesto Sublacense del secolo XI*.

the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century almost contemporaneously with the monastery itself, and continued throughout the medieval period – a document of this type is second only to the more famous necrologium of San Salvatore of Brescia<sup>20</sup>. Both are core documents used by myself and Paziienza in the database constructed for this project (see Appendix). Finally, among the written sources, we have also examples of hagiography, for examples the Passions and Translations of saint Mercurius and the twelve martyrs associated with Santa Sofia (Zornetta)<sup>21</sup> and the difficult, or rather, controversial Translation of saint Ciriacus (Paziienza)<sup>22</sup>. Through these sources, we can trace the social and political background and activity of the nuns and, consequently, of the major ruling families during this crucial period of Italian history – the core work carried out by the authors of this volume.

There is now a growing awareness of the importance of archaeology in allowing us to perceive and interpret aspects of medieval society, whether through the organisation of space as expression of power, place of sacredness, or means of control via ceremonies and processions, or as a statement of belonging, for example through the adoption of the Carolingian benedictine monastic model<sup>23</sup>. The study of the orientation of the monastic buildings, and the organisation of the liturgical space shown in the 9<sup>th</sup>-century frescoes of San Salvatore of Brescia is revealing on this score. Material culture contributes to our knowledge of exchanges and influences, whether through books, relics and artefacts setting the monastery in the context of specific associations. Work of this kind has already been done on Santa Giulia of Brescia and on San Zaccaria, for example<sup>24</sup>. One of the most profitable areas of research has been the use of archaeology for the purpose of better understanding gender, namely how and why nunneries might be different from male monasteries. Work in that area has been greatly encouraged by the studies of Roberta Gilchrist on English nunneries, and of Penelope Johnson or Jane Schulenburg, though their focus is on the later Middle Ages and in northern Europe<sup>25</sup>. Nevertheless

<sup>20</sup> Ludwig, *Der Memorial- und Liturgiecodex*. See also on this major sources D'Acunto, *Il codice memoriale e liturgico di Santa Giulia*.

<sup>21</sup> *Translatio S. Mercurii* (BHL 5936) and Delehaye, *La Translatio S. Mercurii Beneventum; Translatio duodecim martyrum* (BHL 2302) and Grégoire, *La leggenda dei XII Compagni*.

<sup>22</sup> Martinelli, *Primo trofeo della S.ma Croce*; on the discussions relating to the dating of this document, see below Paziienza, note 44, with Santangeli Valenzani, *Aristocratic evergetism and urban monasteries*, pp. 282-285 believing it to have been written almost contemporaneously with the events, while Wickham, *La struttura della proprietà fondiaria*, pp. 210-213, suggests a date in the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>23</sup> De Rubéis e Marazzi, *Monasteri in Europa occidentale*; Bitel, *Convent Ruins and Christian Profession*; Destefanis, *Archeologia dei monasteri altomedievali*; Baldassarri, *L'archeologia dei monasteri femminili in Italia*.

<sup>24</sup> Brogiolo, *Santa Giulia di Brescia: gli scavi dal 1980 al 1992*; Brogiolo, *Santa Giulia di Brescia. Archeologia, arte, storia*; Brogiolo, *Dalla corte regia al monastero di San Salvatore*; Cavazzana Romanelli, Piana, *Archivi monastici e archeologia urbana medievale*.

<sup>25</sup> Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture*; Gilchrist, *Sisters of the house: the archaeology of religious women*; Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession*; Schulenburg, *Gender, Celibacy and Proscription of Sacred Space*.

the issues brought forward in these studies, for example the placing of the cloisters on the northern side of the monastery, associated with the negative values of the North, the Old Testament and the female, rather than the male placing in the South, is a good example of the use of archaeology. Examples of this important area of study for Italy in recent years have been the papers by Gisella Cantino Wataghin, Eleonora Destefanis, and Monica Baldassarri<sup>26</sup>. In this volume, art history, architecture and epigraphy have also been used, adding to the possible interpretations of exchanges of influences and links in iconography and artistic techniques, and allowing us to observe the extent to which the painting, books and sculpture production of a nunnery may reflect a gender-specific devotional bias in the iconography<sup>27</sup>.

The organicity of the present volume centres around the coherence to be gained from the study of a larger number of individual monasteries, or group of urban monasteries, from the perspective of a comparison between them on several counts. This purports to be achieved through the focus of the study on three core themes. The themes relate to questions which are relevant to all papers, in greater or smaller degrees, but also to key aspects of female (and male) monasteries in early medieval Italy during the period between 700 and 1100. Naturally, not all papers deal with, or bring answers to, all those themes, but all have at least some relevance in their context. The three key themes discussed are as follows.

The first is the attempt to identify the privileged links which may have existed between a particular monastery with a particular family, or families, of the city or political elite. This could be in terms of political association, social bonds, economic interests and spiritual dependence. It could also be with representatives of the political and social ruling members within a city, be they count, duke, bishop, or indeed beyond the city itself, with the king, pope or emperor. In practice, this signifies assessing whether the success or otherwise of a female monastery from the time of its foundation, and through the creation of an area of influence in terms of power and wealth, is related to, or results from, the links of this monastery with such families in the first place. Furthermore, whether its subsequent success or possible decline is related to such connections, their continuation or severance, and whether continuity of association with the original elite families is needed to the successful expansion of that monastery.

A second line of enquiry is that of tracing the outline of the history of each monastery. This refers to its perceived foundation (and, above all, foundation

<sup>26</sup> *Monastères et espace social*, especially Cantino Wataghin and Destefanis, *Les espaces funéraires dans les ensembles monastiques* and Louis, *Espaces monastiques sacrés et profanes*; Destefanis, *Archeologia dei monasteri altomedievali*; Baldassarri, *L'archeologia dei monasteri femminili in Italia*.

<sup>27</sup> Schulenburg, *Holy Women and the needle arts*; Frings and Gerschow, *Krone und Schleier*; Hamburger, *Crown and veil*; see Federici, *L'antico evangelario dell'archivio di Santa Maria in Via Lata* and Marchiori, *Rogatrix atque donatrix*.



myth); its development in material terms, through the creation of its landed wealth, immunity and exemption, acquisition of relics, and creation of buildings and artefacts; and its spiritual and ideological success through the elaboration and exaltation of family memory, political influence and sometimes the representation of city unity and identity.

The third theme is an examination of whether, on all the counts mentioned above, there is a significant difference between female and male monasteries in the various contexts examined, for example in terms of their relations to political power, the nature of their patrimony and patrons, and their ability to develop in terms of wealth, prestige, and social function. If such a difference can be identified, how can one attempt to explain it.

These themes and guiding lines are, of course, very broad, and there will be certainly realignments and adaptations as we move across monasteries and regions. Mila Bondi has defined quite successfully the three methodological lines for each of these studies as being: a) to identify privileged links between a particular monastery and a particular family group, b) to assess the creation or otherwise of a monastic power, notably through family connections or landed wealth, and c) to identify specific features of these, including through the variations between male and female monasteries. Most papers in the volume follow, to a greater or smaller extent, this methodological pattern, if we examine them in a very broad chronological order.

Giulia Zornetta re-examines the traditional view that Santa Sofia of Benevento was a foundation which paralleled San Salvatore of Brescia, and that it became the Lombard national monastery of the South, through looking at it in relation to the role of Duke Arechi in the refoundation of the monastery in 774<sup>28</sup>. The family dimension of the monastery is important in that sense, but so is its close association with the principality of Benevento as constructed by Arechi. Here the suggestion that the large number of donations of churches to the “palace” as an intermediary, rather than directly to Santa Sofia, and the large number of public assets (*beni fiscali*) given to the monastery, is quite different from the mainly family properties granted to San Salvatore by both Lombard and Carolingian kings. Santa Sofia’s association with a family is thus not just one with the family of Arechi specifically, but with that of Arechi as prince of Benevento. This is made clear by the decline of interest of the next ducal/princely family in the monastery, while its focus moves to the patronage of the cathedral of Benevento. Santa Sofia meanwhile is increasingly subjected to the rule of Montecassino, and only fights for its independence from it once it has become a male monastery in the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

Lucherini, with fewer sources and far more modest monasteries in Naples, highlights the unusual situation of having a ruler who is both bishop and duke of the city, thus making it more difficult to associate foundations with

<sup>28</sup> Bertolini, *Arechi II*. For a comparison with San Salvatore, see Marrocchi, *Ansa regina*; Brogiolo, *Desiderio e Ansa a Brescia* and, in the South Italy, «*Con animo virile*».

one function or the other. However, the few documents and the material in the *Historia episcoporum Neapolitanorum* seems to make clear that fact that, regardless of this, the monasteries are created as grants of property made to the women of the family, though it is rather difficult to perceive the difference between male and female monasteries in this context, on the basis of type of grant, administrative traditions or even prayer function.

In Ravenna, most of the documentation pertains to the three monasteries already mentioned, and here the sources are almost exclusively documentary, since all three have been destroyed since. Of the three monasteries, only one, Santa Maria in Cereseo, can be in fact closely associated with one of the ruling families in the city, that of the Duchi Sergi (from which came also several archbishops). The association is well documented through gifts and bequests to the monastery and the presence of women of the family as nuns. But only one of the three had such close family links, and eventually, whether for that reason alone or not, these three monasteries eventually merged, to become one, Sant'Andrea Maggiore. Here the policy seems to have concentrated less on links with a specific family, than on creating, through economic and political associations, a network of connections with the important people in the city, secular rulers, merchants and artisans. The creation of these clientele was a means through which families strengthened their power, consolidating wealth and social prestige. This would expand even further in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, when the emperor used grants of immunity, and gave his protection to Sant'Andrea, partly in order to limit the power of the archbishop by allowing the abbess to exercise public functions. Bondi makes the point that, in Ravenna, we see a clear distinction between male and female monasteries, especially in their landed wealth. Male monasteries were not only bigger, with a patrimony not only larger but different in its creation, since it came essentially from large gifts from important people, was richer, more widespread and increasingly involved in control of the territory. Female monasteries had smaller and less widespread patrimonies, formed from fairly small donations *pro anima* from more modest urban families, and only in one case involved the possession of a *castrum*. On the other hand, they were generally more involved in purely agrarian exploitation, notably through clearing and supporting the expansion of new demographic centres.

Veronese monasteries, the first of which goes back to the 8<sup>th</sup> century from its foundation charter, is also clearly associated with family property, and the family in question carefully creates safeguards to preserve the unity of the property. Here also the monastery is placed under the authority of a male one, Santa Maria in Organo. Equally, of the very few known female monasteries known, it seems evident that the connections are predominantly with the local urban aristocracy with a strong upward social movement, or with rural owners, and that the bishop or count have little interest in them. It is only from the 1060s that a new monastery comes to the fore, San Giorgio in Braida, on a rather grander scale. This latter, however, is sufficiently successful economically to see the creation of a monastic *borgo*, and even more exceptional

in gaining not only immunity, but also the benefit of being in charge of pastoral care within this *borgo*.

The last two cases discussed both involve monasteries situated in places of unusual context: San Ciriaco in Rome, and San Zaccaria in Venice, both cities one places with difficulty within the standard urban context of Italy. San Ciriaco is perhaps less unusual in being founded by, and associated with, a major ruling family, that of the Theophylacts and the *princeps* Alberic, the descendants of this family, including the Tuscolani, and other aristocratic groups closely related to them, like the *de Meliosi*<sup>29</sup>. The arguments for such an association are irrefutable, despite the difficulties and challenges posed by the dating of the hagiographic text which specifically creates this association in a narrative context. It is supported by such elements as topography, the presence of the families in the necrologium of the monastery, as well as the presence of nuns from these families from the start and into the 11<sup>th</sup> century<sup>30</sup>. Annamaria Pazienza has dealt with great sensitivity with these problems, and concluded that the links with the family from the first cannot be doubted, even if one were to accept a later date for the writing of the text itself. Here also we have an example of the creation of a great patrimony with the gifts from major aristocratic families of 10<sup>th</sup> century Rome, reinforced by the presence of high-born ladies from the apex of the Roman aristocracy. These are ladies which have easy access to the pope, are often literate, and produce, in one case, one of the rare devotional books known to have been written by a woman<sup>31</sup>. However, after the 1030s, the donations change from this high social level to a more marked middle rank group of both urban and suburban tenants and grantors. These nuns also used their tenants to support clearing and the creation of new villages through attractive economic advantages, as well as entries for prayers in the necrologium. Even more interestingly, the monastery begins occasionally to act as a banker for Roman families in economic difficulties, or for major life events, by loaning money to them. San Ciriaco is an example of a monastery where it is possible to see close associations with the city both in terms of material culture and artefacts, and in terms of prayer and memory.

This is equally valid in the case of San Zaccaria, whose development Silvia Carraro follows through a comparison between it and other Venetian monasteries, in order to identify the success and the insertion of the monastery in the political and religious life of the Venetian duchy<sup>32</sup>. The two other monasteries are Sant'Ilario (male) and San Lorenzo (female), both founded by the

<sup>29</sup> Hamilton, *The House of Theophylact*; Lazzari, *I Teofilatti nel necrologio*; Santangeli Valenzani, *Aristocratic evergetism and urban monasteries*.

<sup>30</sup> *Necrologi e libri affini*. On the importance of this kind of source, see Feiss, *Necrologies and Mortuary Rolls*.

<sup>31</sup> Federici, *L'antico evangelario dell'archivio di Santa Maria in Via Lata*; Marchiori, *Rogatrix atque donatrix*.

<sup>32</sup> Carraro, *Il monastero di San Zaccaria*.

family of the Particiaci in the early 8<sup>th</sup> century, the first by the Doge Justinian, the second by the bishop Ursus, and all with an eye to helping create a form of transmission of public power in the family through inheritance<sup>33</sup>. However, Sant'Ilario and San Zaccaria, though having the same founder, had two very different purposes, the first defensive in an area of strategic importance on the border of the duchy, where Venice's control was not as yet very assured, the second located near the palace, the seat of power, whose purpose was to demonstrate the political consensus and social cohesion of the leading families, many of which had daughters at San Zaccaria. At first, the monastery ran into problems, once the ducal family of the Particiaci was replaced by another, which favoured another terraferma monastery, Brondolo<sup>34</sup>. But San Zaccaria regained its influence in the 10<sup>th</sup> century because it managed to associate itself not with the founding family as such, but with the ducal power itself as a function. From that moment onwards, it became acknowledged as both the peace-maker and broker of consensus between warring factions in the city, and as the custodian of the memory of the doges in general. Eventually it became the representative and custodian of the city itself in a strongly symbolic way. It would continue to preserve this role, even as a lower point in the 11<sup>th</sup> century saw its economic success decline somewhat, as Venetian wealth gradually relied more and more on the eastern trade and less on the land, thus making it more difficult for women to keep control of such developments from a far more restrictive *clausura* than before.

Two other volume contributions concern San Salvatore of Brescia. The first, though at first sight very specific in its re-reading of the main foundation inscription of the monastery on the right wall of the church of San Salvatore, nonetheless provides us with a seminal re-dating of the complex of frescoes in the church, through what would seem incontrovertible proof of their attribution to King Desiderius, his wife Queen Ansa and their son, rather than the so far-accepted attribution to Desiderius with a hypothetical «Tiro Hludovicus», meant to be a Carolingian king, which has long puzzled historians<sup>35</sup>. Through such a re-reading of the frescoes and the inscriptions, Flavia De Rubeis has placed squarely the creation and decoration of San Salvatore in the full Lombard period. She has thus, by extension, challenged the accepted view of San Salvatore being a manifestation of Carolingian art in Italy, but shown it to have been a fully developed and supreme form of Lombard art in the continuation of the Liutprandian golden age, rather than continuing to accept the Carolingian dating on the grounds of its more sophisticated quality. Similarly, through challenging the traditional dating of the single capital representing the martyrdom of santa Giulia in the crypt of San Salvatore, and bringing it forward to the 9<sup>th</sup> century, Tiziana Lazzari attempts to show how the ico-

<sup>33</sup> *SS. Ilario e Benedetto e San Gregorio*; see also Rapetti, *Il doge e i suoi monaci*.

<sup>34</sup> *SS. Trinità e San Michele Arcangelo di Brondolo*.

<sup>35</sup> De Rubeis, *Desiderio re, la regina Ansa e l'epigrafe dedicatoria*; on the frescoes see also Mitchell, *The painted decoration*.

nography on all four sides can be closely associated to the specific event of the entry into the monastery of one of its most prestigious inmates, the princess Gisla, daughter of the Emperor Lothar and the Empress Ermengarda, in 848<sup>36</sup>. The suggestion, if accepted, would place this capital as a sole remnant of the monastic sculptural decoration of the full Carolingian age in the monastery, but also and more importantly in the context of this volume, as a rare example of an iconography commissioned by and for the nuns in a female devotional context.

It is a purpose of this volume to provide not only an analysis of individual female monasteries, but also a comparative picture of female monasticism in Italy on the basis of these case studies, which will be at the core of Anna Rapetti's concluding essay. The main themes already mentioned: the links between monastic foundations and particular families or elite groups, the material as well as spiritual success of particular monasteries across the period, and the specificity of female monasteries if and when different from the male ones, will be reviewed and discussed, and possible contrasted across regions, and political and cultural traditions of early medieval Italy explored, so that some interpretations and conclusions could be proposed for further discussion. To help in this direction, it is also essential to recall that a companion to the volume can be found in the project database, *MedItaNunC*, of which the main principles and entries can be seen from the brief presentation in the following Appendix.

<sup>36</sup> Bettelli †, Bergamaschi, "*Felix Gorgona... felicior tamen Brixia*": la traslazione di santa Giulia; Panazza, *I capitelli della cripta*; Stroppa, *Santa Giulia di Brescia*.

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## Appendix

Presentation of the database *MedItaNunC*  
<https://www.unive.it/pag/19343/>  
Veronica West-Harling and Annamaria Paziienza

The database of the project is hosted on the website of Università Ca' Foscari of Venice, with also possible access from the Home page of the website of the SAAME (Centro Interuniversitario per la Storia e l'Archeologia dell'Alto Medioevo). It has been constructed by Veronica West-Harling and Annamaria Paziienza, with the technical help of the ASIT (Area Servizi Informatici e Telecomunicazioni) staff of Ca' Foscari.

The following is a brief presentation of the functioning of the database, and of its basic principles. The principles for the construction of the DB rely of two fundamental pillars, which are aimed at allowing access and cross-examination of the material from either point of entry. The first point of entry is a prosopography of the nuns and of the people involved in some way with the relevant monasteries, which includes as much information as it was possible for gain on each of them. The second point of entry is through the monasteries themselves, and all the information collected on them.

### *Point of entry I: the prosopography*

The names entered in the prosopography are those of the nuns and those of the people involved with the monasteries. Each entry typically includes the name, date(s), family group, status and the transactions in which this person is involved. The category is further subdivided into:

- I. nuns
- II. external people.

Category I is again subdivided into two sub-categories:

- 1. nuns with no relations and
- 2. nuns with relations.

The nuns with no relations are those for whom the only information that we have is their name, possibly date, and which appears on one occasion alone, for example as an entry in a necrologium, or associated with one particular economic transaction, for example a grant. Such a name would thus be entered once, and would only be cross-referenced with the specific transaction itself in the list of such transactions of the relevant monastery.

The nuns with relations are those for whom we have more information than just a name, especially such information as concerns possible links with a family group, itself possibly involved in dealings with that specific monas-

tery on more than one occasion. This is clearly more often found in the case of abbesses from important families on the local political, social and economic scale, or indeed in some cases of very high rank, such as Carolingian princesses at San Salvatore of Brescia. Each of these names is searchable, with a cross-reference to such families and its members, associations with the monasteries in question, any known dates, and other details such as gifts – everyone of these is also searchable and can be cross-referenced to all these data across the system.

Category II of the prosopography concerns external people – which is to say everybody with some known association with a monastery. This covers a wide range of names from our documents, from smallest lessee of land to the emperors, empresses, counts or bishops, and, most importantly, the names of all members of the family and extended family group of a nun/abbess and the information available on them. For major figures such as empresses, for example, in view of the limitations of the DB, not everything known about them is included, but only any material relevant to their relation with this particular monastery, e.g. the material on Empress Ermengarda is only recorded in relation to her association with San Salvatore, not in every source which names her in a different context. In the DB, however, her name, that of the family and extended group including Charlemagne and Lothar, the religious associations and economic transactions of the family, are all searchable and cross-referenced through drop-down menus.

### *Point of entry II: the monasteries*

Each one of the five monasteries covered by this DB has a separate entry, with a full set of drop-down menus. These include:

1. the history and foundation story of the monastery
2. the sources (printed and online with a link)
3. the list of nuns with their names, dates and extended families (individually searchable)
4. the list of all the people involved with a monastery (in the case when we have a necrologium, as at San Ciriaco), including all the people who have religious or economic links with it, for example are entered as being prayed for. All names, kinds of associations and families are searchable, with cross-referencing and sources.
5. the relics and hagiography
6. the artefacts, both those extant, and those no longer available but known from written sources
7. the economic transactions of the monastery. These are also searchable by date, type of document and property, location, brief description and names of the main participants involved. They are all searchable for cross-referencing with the prosopography, and further searchable in terms of their extended family relationships to each other and to the nuns.

A few general points need to be made. This DB is still a work in progress. Thus, for example, not all artefacts have as yet been entered. Also, through lack of time and due to the extremely complex further research involved, dates relating to some entries have to be revised: for example, the dates of some aristocrats whose daughters were given to a monastery as oblates have only been entered as those of the said daughters, until it will be possible to examine and identify each individual aristocrat and give them their own dates.

Lastly, this DB, through currently standalone, is constructed in such a way that it can support a potential expansion and connectedness with further work. Such possible extensions are:

1. enhanced entries on all major figures mentioned, for example Lombard or Carolingian rulers;
2. a full detailed entry of all material pertaining to economic history on the basis of the charters, which have been only dealt with here as a basic record of the transaction and its participants from the point of view of the monastery;
3. the full list of names of everyone recorded in the necrologies, such as local clergy and bishops, monks of Reichenau, with which San Salvatore had a shared prayer agreement, and other such figures which are not of immediate use from the point of view of the study of female monasticism;
4. a similar set of information for other Italian monasteries than the five involved here;
5. a much larger complement of photographs and maps.

The DB *MeditaNunC* uses Access, one of the most common database software on the market developed by Microsoft. The construction and implementation of the DB *MeditaNunC* has been developed through three main working phases.

#### *Working Phase I: Concept*

The first working phase has been the creation of the database from a theoretical and conceptual point of view, by means of a constant dialogue with the ASIT staff of Università Ca' Foscari. *MedItaNunC* is a relational database, through which the recorded pieces of information are not simply archived, but above all put into relation one to each other.

The basic unit of a relational database, and therefore also of our DB, is represented by a table (also called *relation*). Each table is organized into horizontal rows, also called *records*, uniquely identified by an ID or primary key (i.e. a numerical code), and into vertical columns or fields, also called *attributes*. Each table containing a data set is linked to one or more tables, since its fields or attributes are filled out with one or more primary keys. The links connecting one table to the others can be univocal, i.e. 1 to 1, or multiple, and therefore more complex, articulated through various intermediate tables.

At this first working stage, therefore, the biggest challenge has been to literally ‘translate’ all the historical data at our disposal concerning the five monasteries studied, with particular reference to the people linked to them in some way, into the Structured Query Language (SQL), employing tables, rows, columns and IDs.

An example might help to clarify what this ‘translation’ has meant. Our DB includes a table that describes each monastery studied (ID monastery), with columns for its name/dedication, information about its foundation, the attested nuns belonging to it, the associated material culture, whether still extant or not, the controlled monasteries, if any, and all the economic transactions which have involved the monastery during the period under study. Also, the DB includes a second table for all these economic transactions (and royal or imperial grants) (ID transaction). This table has columns for the monasteries involved (ID monastery), the type and date of transaction, the type of goods transacted (or rights granted), and all the participants involved in this transaction (ID person). The two tables are then related through a third intermediate table that describes all the persons mentioned in the sources surveyed (ID person), including nuns, abbesses, founders, lay people, that is to say all those persons attested in later foundation myths and chronicles, those remembered in necrologies, and also the participants involved in the economic transactions mentioned above. This table has columns for the person’s name, his/her socio-political status, his/her family connections, the earliest and latest dates of attestation in our sources, all the transactions (ID transaction), if any, where he/she acts as participants, and finally the monastery to which the transaction pertains (ID monastery).

### *Working Phase II: Study of primary written sources and secondary references*

The second working phase has consisted of a long period of study devoted to the history of the five monasteries, through the collection and reading of the most relevant bibliography and the analysis of the surviving evidence (basically charters, and then the necrology of San Ciriaco and the *Liber Vitae* of San Salvatore).

This phase, which has been preliminary to the following and last phase, has been indispensable to acquire the necessary knowledge for mastering the sources from which the data recorded into the DB have been extrapolated.

The time devoted to this preparatory study has varied according to the different level of accuracy of the available publications. As far as the documentary collections is concerned, the *regesti* of the charters, where present, have been a valuable aid. In the case of San Zaccaria of Venice, on the other hand, the absence still today of a coherent edition of the monastic archive has represented a pretty critical point to face.

Finally, in order to obtain a reliable data set for the DB, the *Liber Vitae* of San Salvatore has been as critical as the material concerning San Zaccaria.



For the period covered by the project, in fact, the *Liber Vitae* contains at least seven lists of nuns, all of them compiled within a short time span and thus partially overlapping as far as the recorded nuns are concerned. The challenge has been to compare these lists in order to identify, with a greater or lesser degree of certainty, those nuns listed twice or even more often in each list. The scope was to avoid possible duplication or multiplication of records entered into the DB referring to the same person.

### *Working Phase III: Data entry*

The third and final working phase has been the data entry phase. This has been the more practical and mechanical part of the entire construction process of the DB, but not any less demanding for that. With the data obtained from the survey of more than 500 charters and the recording of more than 600 entries extrapolated from the necrology of San Ciriaco and the *Liber Vitae* of San Salvatore, the data entry process has in fact generated as a whole roughly 6,000 records.

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