Churches and Social Power in Early Medieval Europe
STUDIES IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

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Volume 42
Churches and Social Power in Early Medieval Europe

Integrating Archaeological and Historical Approaches

Edited by
José C. Sánchez-Pardo
and Michael G. Shapland

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Architectures and Power at the End of the Lombard Kingdom

Gian Pietro Brogiolo

Introduction

The fifty years between 725 and 774 were a critical period for Italy, characterized by a series of key events within a more general international political context, which in the Italian peninsula led to confrontation, resolution, and a new equilibrium. In Italy the principal protagonists were the Pope, newly delivered from the Byzantine sphere of influence as a consequence of the crisis of iconoclasm,1 and the Lombard kings, starting with Liutprand, who were unwilling to confront the Pope and to realize the prospect of the reunification of Italy.2 The outcome was fatal for the Lombards, because of the alliance between the Pope and the Frankish kings, first Pippin, later Charlemagne; however, it gave rise to new perspectives on the whole of Europe, with the formation of the Carolingian Empire.

In a tense European framework of political and military rivalry and conflict, those in power made the utmost use of all the tools of propaganda available to achieve consensus. The papacy resorted to the spiritual power of religion, to relics, tangible vehicles of exchange, which the popes, Stephan II and Paul I in particular, systematically collected from the suburban cemeteries of Rome, taking them back to town or gifting them to their peers in the contemporary networks of power. The Lombard kings, on their side, turned all expressions

1 Noble, The Republic of St. Peter.
2 Delogu, ‘Il regno longobardo’.
of their power to good account: literary works, such as *Laudes Mediolanensis civitatis* of 739;³ the short laudatory compositions of Paul the Deacon carved as epigraphic texts and displayed on buildings, like San Salvatore in Brescia and the palace chapel of Arechis II at Salerno; and saints’ lives commissioned and composed in connection with the evergetism associated with the acquisition of particular relics. However, by far the most meaningful expression of power is to be found in architecture,⁴ the topic I am going to address in the following text.

In northern Italy, in the theatre of the political and military confrontation which led to the victory of Charlemagne, three churches, Santa Maria in Valle at Cividale, San Salvatore at Brescia, and Santa Maria *foris portas* at Castelseprio, survive above ground, with substantial elements of their rich programmes of figural imagery and ornament still preserved (Map 14.1). Even though these buildings have been at the centre of historiographical debate for half a century, there is still no scholarly consensus as to their dating, whether eighth-century Lombard or ninth-century Carolingian. For Santa Maria in Valle at Cividale and San Salvatore in Brescia, there is general agreement that, despite differences in their design, they share similar building and decoration techniques and therefore were probably both the work of the same craftsmen.⁵ This theory has been confirmed by recent stratigraphic analysis. The dating of these monuments, with their original architectonic structure and decorative programmes of stuccoes and paintings in large part preserved, wavers between 750–60, on the one hand, and the middle decades of the ninth century, on the other. The third building, Santa Maria *foris portas* at Castelseprio,⁶ differs radically from these in construction and decoration. In this case, dates ranging from the sixth to the mid-ninth (tenth?) century have been proposed by archaeologists and art historians, although scientific old and new dating-indices (¹⁴C and thermoluminescence⁷) place its foundation in the middle of the sixth or, more

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³ Pighi, *Versus de Verona*.
⁵ L’Orange and Torp, *Il Tempietto Longobardo di Cividale*; Panazza, ‘L’arte dal secolo vii al sec. xi’.
⁶ Bognetti, Chierici, and De Capitano d’Arzago, *Santa Maria di Castelseprio*. On the excavations in the early 1980s, see Brogiolo and Carver, ‘Castelseprio (Va). 4.a campagna di scavo’; Carver, ‘S. Maria foris portas at Castelseprio’.
probably, in the early Carolingian period, while the famous frescos are possibly from the middle of the tenth century, a dating that put the church outside the context discussed in this paper.

The absolute dating of these churches is not a minor issue. On it hangs an accurate understanding of the nature of elite visual culture in the last decades of Lombard rule in Italy, on the one hand, of artistic expression and taste favoured by Carolingian patrons, in the succeeding age, on the other. To get these monuments wrong is to fail to discern the visual dynamics of Europe, in one of its most vital and inventive theatres, between the mid-eighth and the mid-ninth centuries.

Northern Italy, and particularly the court of Pavia, from the age of King Liutprand (712–44) was the centre of a cultural ‘renaissance’ documented mainly by high-quality sculptural decorations and, to a lesser extent, from architectures (mainly the church of Santa Maria alle Cacce at Pavia). The evolution of these cultural manifestations has been discussed at length. A special issue of debate has been whether the churches of Santa Maria in Valle and San Salvatore at Brescia, linked to the kings Ratchis and Astolfus born in Cividale and King Desiderius whose court was at Brescia, represent the highest level of this tradi-
tion or if, on the contrary, this artistic evolution finished after the kingdom of Liutprand (+744) and did not restart again until the Carolingian conquest.

In the present paper, first I shall discuss the outcomes of recent investigation of the fabric of the church of San Salvatore in Brescia, the date of which, I would propose, should be set in the reign of King Desiderius, around 760. San Salvatore should be seen as a symbolic monument, founded and built by the will of the King. We could term it a ‘dynastic church’, for the construction of which the King drew on all the means in his power — both ideological and technical. Then I shall attempt to contextualize the results of this investigation, by comparing San Salvatore with other Lombard royal ecclesiastical foundations. Finally, I shall discuss the architecture of the church in the context of the political and economic background of the final decades of the Lombard kingdom. The conclusion is therefore that this period represents the last stage of a long process of confrontation and integration between the Lombard population (fragmented between Catholic, Arian, and pagan components) and the Roman one. In this process religion becomes a reference point and a crucial element for social legitimation. Between the seventh and eighth centuries churches will multiply in the cities and the countryside, founded by different social levels: the king, the aristocracies, and the local communities. During the last twenty-five years of the reign (750–774) church foundation will also become a competition subject between Lombards and the papacy. At the end the winners of this competition, the pope and Charles the Great — such as a part of modern historiography — played down the contribution of Lombards to the artistic culture of that period.

The Church of San Salvatore at Brescia

The last thirty years has seen intense research on the church of San Salvatore (Figure 14.1), in particular, extensive excavation of the structures of the monastery and of the nuns’ graveyard, together with stratigraphic analysis of the standing fabric of the church and its crypt. It has been demonstrated that the crypt never formed part of an older cross-shaped plan church (San Salvatore I) discovered in the excavations of 1958–60, and later reused by the current church (San Salvatore II). The crypt, without any doubt pertains to San Salvatore II.8

However, it was only in December 2009 that scaffolding afforded close access to the nave walls, making possible a closer examination of the masonry and its decorative covering, so that definitive solutions to some outstanding issues relating to the chronology and the constructional phases of the church could be proposed. The problem of the relationship between architectural structure and decorative embellishment seems now to have been resolved, finally laying to rest the old hypothesis which had assigned structure and decoration to two different periods (the architecture to the Lombard Age, the decoration to the Carolingian Age). The attribution of the church, together with its finishing and fittings, to the evergetic agency of Desiderius, the last Lombard king, and his wife Ansa is likely to be correct, on the evidence of the results of recent \(^{14}\text{C}\) tests on three reeds used as reinforcing elements in the stuccoes.

The idea of a dynastic church was widespread at the time. Imperial mausolea attached to churches are attested from the age of Constantine. The Frankish

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9 Brogiolo and others, ‘Ulteriori ricerche sul San Salvatore’.

10 LTL4686A: 95.4% probability: 760±140; 68.2% probability: 715±65; 4.4% probability: 800±10; LTL4684: 75% probability: 685±45; 55.7% probability: 675±25; 20.4% probability: 755±15; LTL4685A: 95.4% probability: 760±110; 68.2% probability: 720±60 (analysis made in the \(^{14}\text{C}\) laboratory at the University of Lecce). The second sample excludes a date after 770; the first and the third have a median date of 760 with 95.4% of probability.

11 Johnson, *The Roman Imperial Mausoleum in Late Antiquity*. 
kings founded church-mausolea from the time of Clovis, at Saint-Denis, the Lombard kings from the time of Agilulf and Teodolinda, at Monza around 600, subsequently in a series of foundations in Pavia, and later still, around the mid-eighth century, with the kings Ratchis and/or Aistulf, at Cividale, assuming that Santa Maria in Valle, built inside the king’s court, was established and built by one of these two rulers.

From the concept to the project, the development was strongly influenced by a number of ideological determinants.

(1) The church was located in an area west of the city and in one of the two centres of Brescian civil power belonging to the king’s court, an area which, according to a document of 759, Desiderius had received as a donation from King Aistulf. Therefore, it was not a place of little significance, rather a centre of civil power, in which a church and some associated buildings were already present. The construction of a monastery meant taking possession of this place through a more ambitious and higher-profile evergetic enterprise.

(2) The architectural form chosen, an aisled structure with three apses, had already been used a few decades earlier in a royal foundation in Pavia, Santa Maria alle Cacce. On the other hand, it shows cultural distance from the other main Lombard centers: Spoleto, where the two surviving possibly Lombard churches make heavy reference to classical models, and Benevento. The ‘Tempietto’, near the source of the river Clitunno (Spoleto), takes a Roman temple as its model: a barrel-vaulted nave with a little apse preceded by an imposing porch with columns which support a triangular pediment. The suburban church of San Salvatore at Spoleto had aisles separated from the nave by columns which support a Doric trabeation; the presbytery is vaulted by a lofty segmented cupola. The church of Santa Sofia at Benevento, built by Arechis II, the son-in-law of King Desiderius, in 760, is also a highly sophisticated architectural structure, on a central plan, which has been attributed to Byzantine craftsmen. Here, a circling arcade of magnificent spoliate ancient columns, framed by an ambulatory, is covered by a composite vault resting on arches and crowned possibly by a central domical lantern.

12 Krüger, Königsgrabkirchen der Franken, Angelsachsen und Langobarden.
13 Blake, ‘S. Maria delle Cacce: lo scavo archeologico del 1979’.
14 Emerick, The Tempietto del Clitunno near Spoleto.
15 Jäggi, San Salvatore in Spoleto.
16 Carella, ‘Sainte-Sophie de Bénévent’.
The use of *spolia* as building material is a feature common to all Lombard churches and shows, as is well known, a clear ideological link with the power of classicism, mirrored not only in the architecture but also in the way of life of the elite in medieval society. This phenomenon is exemplified in the inscription which commemorates the construction of a palace church built by King Liutprand at Corteolona, just a few kilometres from Pavia. This records how the King, while in Rome praying by the tomb of St Anastasius, abandoned the construction of a bath complex in his palace and instead built a church dedicated to this saint, embellishing it with *spolia* recovered from the Eternal City.

The church of San Salvatore at Brescia significantly comprises a quantity of *spolia*, some, including basket-shaped capitals, probably obtained in Ravenna following the conquest of the city by King Aistulf in 752. This is a deliberate choice which reveals the relationships existing with the exarchate, contacts which were strengthened after the Lombard conquest. Roman columns and capitals represented an index of quality and status in Lombard constructions at the highest level, as evidenced in the Pavia churches of Santa Maria alle Cacce and San Salvatore. In San Salvatore at Brescia three Roman sarcophagi, representing the Amazons, the Three Graces, and the story of Jonah, were reused as paving slabs in the Romanesque phase. It has been proposed, in the light of a late source which refers to Queen Ansa as having been buried in a grand sarcophagus, that these may have been reused as privileged graves during the Lombard period. If true, this would represent a precedent for the re-employment of prestigious Roman sarcophagi by the Carolingians.

For the construction and decoration of San Salvatore skilled workers were recruited, and it is highly likely that these were the craftsmen who previously had been responsible for Santa Maria in Valle in Cividale. On this there is consensus due to similarities in the brickwork of each church, similar ornate stucco archivaults, and similar wall paintings executed in the same technique and style. These innovative paintings comprise a new visual language of narra-

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17 Mitchell, ‘The Uses of Spolia in Longobard Italy’.
18 Arce, ‘Dagli imperatori ai re barbari: simboli e rappresentazioni del potere’.
20 *MGH, Poetae latini aevi Carolini*, i, 105–06.
21 Cutler, ‘Reuse or Use’; Effros, ‘Monuments and Memory’.
22 Morandini, ‘Sarcofagi di età romana reimpiegati nel monastero di Santa Giulia’.
23 L’Orange and Torp, *Il Tempietto Longobardo di Cividale*.
tive panels along the church walls, which is used for the first time in these monuments, and which would go on to enjoy great success in the Carolingian Age. These were skilled artisans who had a history of working for royal patrons and followed a tradition already established at the end of the seventh century, as evidenced by a contemporary document recording exemplary remuneration for a range of construction activities, known as *De mercede magistris commacinarum.*

These skilled craftsmen were required by their patrons to carry out a comprehensive project for a dynastic funerary church, with architecture, ornamentation, and graves designed and executed following a pre-established plan. This is clear from a number of details: (a) iron cramps to secure the stucco embellishment of the archivaults of the nave arcades set into the mortar of the arches while it was still wet; (b) the sequence of stuccoes and frescoes in mutually interconnected stratified phases; (c) elaborately carved screens enclosing the sanctuary, belonging to the original design; (d) major graves, also part of the original plan and in phase with the primary fabric of the building. Due to the partial preservation of the monument, the number of these primary graves is uncertain. Those which survive include an arcosolium grave built into the southern external wall, traditionally thought to be the tomb of Queen Ansa, and three block-built graves with double-pitched cappuccino tiled covers, set within a rectangular enclosure which rose above the pavement level and abutted the outer face of the sanctuary enclosure.

(5) However, before the project was completed a further event occurred: a crypt, which did not form part of the original design, was most likely inserted while work on the church was in progress. This is suggested by the form of the central apse, with complex access routes from the central nave, down steps, via the side-apses, then narrow corridors and further steps, down to the pavement of the crypt itself. This area also presents the main stratigraphic problems in the church, as it involves a complex sequence of building phases, in particular the relationship of the walls of the crypt and the access passages to the east wall of the nave. It is difficult to assess the significance of these relationships:

24 Lomartire, ‘Commacini e marmorarii’; Brogiolo, ‘Architetture e tecniche costruttive in età longobarda’.
25 Brogiolo and others, ‘Ulteriori ricerche sul San Salvatore II di Brescia’.
whether they represent a simple building phase, a redesign of the eastern end while works were in progress, or a later phase after a partial dismantling of an earlier apse. There are three possible interpretations of these stratigraphic relationships: (a) the crypt might be associated with a second construction phase of the present building;27 (b) the crypt might be assigned to the initial construction phase of the second church (as suggested by Uwe Lobbedey);28 (c) the crypt may be the result of a change of plan during construction.

From the outset, Desiderius and Ansa had undoubtedly intended to deposit a relic of Santa Giulia in the church they were going to found. The relic of Santa Giulia, which was to become the most famed possession of the community, with the monastery assuming the name of the saint at the end of the ninth century, was obtained from the island of Gorgona, off the coast of Tuscany. Relics of some Roman saints, also deposited in the crypt, were donated by Paul I in 762, a pope who, according to a late source, was present at the dedication of the church on 28 October 763.29 It is possible that the crypt, which did not form part of the original design, was constructed to hold these new Roman relics.

(6) An integrated unity of architecture and sculptural and painted decoration, featuring a major programme of painted narratives, anticipated Carolingian practice in the following century. Specifically, inscriptions played a critical role, as vehicles of propaganda to convey the ideas and intentions underlying this investment: firstly, the fragmentary inscription running over the south nave arcade, beneath the painted narratives illustrating the story of St Giulia, in which only two words are clearly legible ‘REGNANTEM DESIDERIUM’, enough, however, to connect the king with the church (maybe also with the translation of the relics of the saint);30 secondly, a long inscription (now unfortunately lost) in letters of gilded bronze, composed by Paul the Deacon, most probably for the arcosolium tomb of Ansa, to celebrate the glory of the queen and her family;31 and finally, there were other inscriptions, transcribed in late medieval sources, connecting Queen Ansa with St Giulia.

These multivarious visual messages were all located inside the church. The exterior walls are articulated simply with a series of blank arched recesses, in the same manner as other surviving royal and elite foundations in northern Italy, of

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27 Brogiolo, ‘Analisi stratigrafica del San Salvatore di Brescia’.
28 Lobbedey, Jakobs, and Reichwald, Brescia, San Salvatore.
29 Biblioteca Queriniana di Brescia, MS H.VI.11, c. 1; Brogiolo, ‘Gli edifici monastici nelle fasi altomedievali’, pp. 61–70.
30 De Rubeis, ‘Desiderio re o Ludovico imperatore?’, pp. 103–04.
31 MGH, Poetae latini aevi carolini, i, 24–26.
the central decades of the eighth century, the fronts of which are still preserved. In Pavia (Santa Maria alle Cacce and San Felice), in Sirmione (San Salvatore), and in Cividale (Santa Maria in Valle), churches had plain, unadorned exteriors, aside from their lime-washed blind arcades, still visible at San Felice in Pavia and at San Salvatore in Brescia.

In short, the undertaking involved (a) an idea (the dynastic funerary church); (b) a project entrusted to craftsmen who had already been active for King Aistulf; (c) the incorporation of *spolia*, redeployed ancient architectural elements charged with high symbolic value; and (d) a clear project of visual messages through the church.

**Churches Related to San Salvatore and Other Churches Built by King Desiderius**

Among the properties (*curtes*) belonging to the monastery of San Salvatore, two churches, San Felice at Pavia and San Salvatore at Sirmione, are still partially preserved in elevation. Both churches owed their existence to the same royal patronage and reveal a similar quality of investment. There has been no excavation in the possessions of the monastery in other territories, but some surviving elements, such as the sculpture (as in the church of San Martino di Gusnago, at Ceresara\(^\text{32}\)) testify to royal involvement, to the participation of the same craftsmen who had been active in Brescia.

The church of San Felice at Pavia, built by the royal couple, Desiderius and Ansa, and donated to the Brescian monastery in the year 760,\(^\text{33}\) was originally

\(^{32}\) Chavarría and Crosato, ‘La cristianizzazione delle campagne nella provincia di Mantova’.

\(^{33}\) Brühl, *Codice Diplomatico Longobardo*, III, n. 33.
The early medieval church had a single nave, three apses, and a transverse crypt. A section of the south wall, the apses, and the crypt are still preserved (Figure 14.2). The southern wall (the only wall of the original structure which is now visible) was built with reused — and for the most part broken — Roman bricks. On the exterior, the wall was articulated by arches, some of which framed windows of varying dimensions, while others were blind. Here incised plaster, a falsa cortina, in imitation of brickwork, recalls the worked surface of the southern wall at San Salvatore in Brescia. Excavations at San Felice identified the foundations of the façade and an atrium containing the burials of a number of early abbesses: eight tombs have been found, two of them (nos 61 and 133) with painted inscriptions on their interior walls, one of which (no. 61) refers to Abbess Ariperga.35

From these surviving features it is possible to reconstruct a rectangular building with a single nave measuring $8 \times 15$ m, and with three apses and an atrium c. 10 m in length. Subsequently, probably at the end of the tenth century, the church was further extended, to enclose the atrium, reaching 25.5 m, later extended to 31 m. The arches on the outer face of the southern wall, rising from a brickwork base, have their analogues at San Salvatore in Brescia and at Santa Maria alle Cacce in Pavia. The crypt is similar to those in Santa Maria alle Cacce (Figure 14.3) and in San Salvatore at Sirmione.

This last church, San Salvatore at Sirmione (Figure 14.4), was founded by Queen Ansa in the 760s. Before 772 it was a dependency of the monastery of San Salvatore in Brescia. Recent excavations have shown that the standing walls belong to the original construction. It is a single-naved building, with three apses and a transverse crypt, similar to San Felice at Pavia. Some motifs of the wall paintings still partially preserved in the crypt of Sirmione

36 *MGH, Diplomata Karolinorum*, i, 115.
37 Cervigni, ‘Nuove ricerche sul monastero di San Salvatore di Sirmione’. 
and in the atrium of San Felice at Pavia present relevant analogies to those of San Salvatore at Brescia, both in subject (saints standing in flowering fields, and characteristic flowers with winding stems and red blooms) and in colour (yellow, red, and brown).

San Salvatore at Sirmione is also very similar, in plan and structure, to San Giorgio di Montichiari, a church that, according to a fourteenth-century written source, was probably a dependency of the monastery of Leno, which was
founded by King Desiderius in these same years (756–58). Lastly, the church of San Salvatore – San Benedetto at Leno, excavated by Andrea Breda between 2002 and 2004, is very similar to San Salvatore at Brescia. In has a single nave with three apses, and outer walls decorated with blind arcades; only the crypt dates from a later transformation in the eleventh century (Figure 14.5).

From such evidence, I think we may conclude that the royal family had highly skilled craftsmen at its disposal who probably worked first for the Lombard king Aistulf, on the church of Santa Maria in Valle at Cividale, and then subsequently for Desiderius and his wife, Queen Ansa, at Brescia, Leno, Pavia, and Sirmione.

The Origins of the Skilled Workers Involved in Church Construction in the Mid-Eighth Century

The church of Santa Maria alle Cacce, at Pavia, constructed during the first half of the eighth century, shows evidence of the early formation of the skilled craftsmen whose activity can be traced later, during the reign of Desiderius. The foundation of this suburban church, close to the porta palacense, has been ascribed to a daughter of King Ragimpert (700) or Ratchis (744). A number of features from the original structure (radically modified from the seventeenth century on) have been identified:

1. A crypt with three apses (two of them visible, the third discovered during excavation in 1979).
2. Some elements of the northern wall (one window still visible and two others documented in photographs of 1934).
3. The lower part of two pilasters over a plinth in the southern wall.
4. A reused column with its capital and two arcades over brick pilasters, visible in the photographs of 1934. They probably belonged to the northern nave colonnade.

These elements, albeit fragmentary, indicate a church with a nave and aisles divided by columns and terminating in three apses, similar to the churches previously described, at Brescia and Leno, and typical of the Desiderian monaster-

38 Breda, ‘Leno: monastero e territorio’.
39 Vicini, ‘La civiltà artistica’.
40 Blake, ‘S. Maria delle Cacce: lo scavo archeologico del 1979’.
ies. The building is constructed with Roman bricks and had a corridor crypt, which was accessed from the aisles by stairs, was vaulted, and had relic-niches in its western wall. This kind of crypt, as we have seen, already takes the characteristic form found in the later crypts of San Felice/San Salvatore at Pavia, San Salvatore at Sirmione, and San Giorgio at Montichiari.

Churches, Power, and Economic Resources in the Lombard Kingdom

This close examination of San Salvatore at Brescia in the context of church architecture in northern Italy at the end of the Lombard kingdom admits of two interpretations. The first is of a political-ideological nature and accords well with the historical background described in the introduction. The second is economic and is discussed below.

Confrontations among major powers in the decades around the turn of the eighth century closely concerned the Church and religious issues. There was a sincere engagement with Christian principles on the part of some of the major players (one has only to think of King Ratchis’s retirement to the monastery of Monte Cassino). In this context, we should recall a well-known passage in which Paul the Deacon describes the inscription which King Liutprand set up in the church of Sant’Anastasia, at Corteolona. The King wanted to build a thermal bath complex in his palace at Corteolona, some kilometres away from Pavia. For this purpose he recovered some columns from Rome, but after visiting the tomb of St Anastasious he changed his mind and used them for the construction of a church devoted to this saint. 41

The role played by religious devotion was clearly perceived by the elite of the time as central to political life. In a period of extreme weakness of the kingdom after the defeat of Aistulf by Pippin in 756, Desiderius was nominated king, thanks to the support of the Pope and the Franks. In return, he promised the Pope the restitution of some Byzantine cities that King Liutprand had conquered thirty years before, to which the foundation of the monasteries of San Benedetto at Leno (758) and San Salvatore at Brescia (maybe 753 but refounded in 759) can be ascribed. On first coming to power, Desiderius and the family of his wife, Ansa, invested their full prestige in the construction of the monasteries and of their representative churches. The audience for this was not the citizenry of Brescia, but their political peers, the leading powers of the day.

41 MGH, Poetae latini aevi Carolini, 1, 24–26.
The second interpretation of the architecture and construction of the church of San Salvatore at Brescia is an economic one. As in many other energetic enterprises of the time, economics played a major role in the eighth century, in Lombardic Italy as in the Frankish kingdoms elsewhere.\(^{42}\)

The church of San Salvatore belongs to a monastic urban complex comprising other buildings of the same architectonic standard, albeit not identical in design. The facade of the south-west building is still preserved and gives us a general idea of its architectural design. A thermal facility, established when the complex was still being built, depended on the construction, in 761, of an aqueduct channeling water from an old Roman watercourse and extending to the west of the town to feed water mills owned by the monastery. This property consisted of a vast area of urban pasture (identified in gearchaeological analysis of the dark layers), which later would be leased out by the nuns of the convent in the twelfth century. Through an agreement with the city authorities, the monastery donated land for a civic square, in return for which it obtained the rights to develop new buildings in the surrounding area. According to the surviving documents, from the earliest of 759 to the late ninth-century polyptych, the monastery of San Salvatore was a business complex made up of farms,\(^{43}\) spread over many regions of Italy, employing over four thousand servants, and of curtes (lordly estates) producing iron (in the Camonica Valley), fabrics, and carved stone and providing pork, fish, and also wine, oil, and cereals (as is described in the Polyptic).\(^{44}\)

It is therefore apparent that our churches are not only the outcome of political-ideological agendas and decisions. They are also the result of an economic development which made resources available and ensured the possibility of the requisite organization, advanced skills of construction, and fine craftsmanship: the opening up and operation of limestone and marble quarries (for carved items, for some capitals, and for at least two newly cut columns in the San Salvatore Church in Brescia); kiln construction for the manufacturing of bricks (at least for the decorated terracotta tiles and friezes), glass (for the bulbs of the stucco flowers), metal items (including the iron cramps used both for securing stucceans and in woodworking), and lime; the employment of masons capable of undertaking major works; and craftsmen for wall paintings and stuccoes.

\(^{42}\) Lebecq, ‘The Role of the Monasteries in the Systems of Production’.

\(^{43}\) On the economic role of early medieval churches as parts of agrarian complex, see Juan Antonio Quirós and Igor Santos’s paper in this volume.

\(^{44}\) Pasquali, ‘San Giulia di Brescia’; Pasquali, ‘La distribuzione geografica delle cappelle’.
Such a complex economic scenario, built on the relationships existing inside the kingdom, between dependent towns and territories on a local and a regional scale, does not appear to be the result of continuity or the rekindling of international trade. The interpretation I favour, based on an analysis of the investments made in churches, posits a development which occurred mainly inside the kingdom, made possible through the reorganization of agricultural estates. These moved from a late antique system centred on villae (founded in some areas where an intensive agriculture was possible for oil, vine, or cereals) to a new system involving an integrated economy based on agricultural crops, rearing-fosterage, and the exploitation of natural resources, which was introduced between the seventh and eighth centuries. The monasteries were the main protagonists of this development in northern Italy, not only those founded by Desiderius but also San Colombano di Bobbio (founded by the Irish saint in 612) or San Silvestro di Nonantola, established in 752 by Anselmo, duke of Friuli. Urban and rural monasteries acted as collection centres of the incomings from their properties, favouring the exchange of goods and increasing economic development.

In this system, a major role was also played by the exploitation of sloping alpine pastures and terraces in a period of warmer temperatures documented at the end of the seventh and the eighth centuries. For the same period, a related development in mining activity is known to have taken place in the region around Brescia and in Tuscany. At the same time, a concentration of wealth at the top of society is suggested by the introduction of a new gold coinage that would replace the existing bronze coinage, at the end of the seventh century. This economic development also resulted in an increase in regionally based trade. From this economic-productive system were derived the resources and the complex knowledge and skills needed to construct these elite buildings.

In conquering Lombard Italy, the Carolingians engaged with and exploited this advanced economic production system: they had little interest in breaking it up or destroying it. At first they simply controlled it; later they devel-

45 Brogiolo, ‘Paesaggi, insediamenti e architetture tra età romana e xiii secolo’. Similar trends of agrarian intensification during the same period are detected, for example, in the case of Galicia (see José Carlos Sánchez-Pardo’s essay in this volume).

46 Delogu, ‘L’ambiente altomedievale come tema storiografico’.

47 Cucini and Tizzoni, ‘Un forno da ferro longobardo nelle Alpi italiane’, pp. 8–9; Cucini and Tizzoni, La Miniera Perduta.

48 Saccoci, ‘Tra antichità e medioevo’. 
oped it by placing officers they could trust into key positions: earls, bishops, and abbots. They also exploited existing local expertise and skills for their new foundations in the newly conquered territory. An early instance of this is the monastery at Müstair (Switzerland), where the churches have been dated to the 770s and 780s, according to the latest dendrochronological analyses.49 This is a chronological distance from Cividale and Brescia, which makes good sense in terms of differences in architecture and painted decoration. From Italy, Charlemagne did not merely retrieve antique architectural spolia, like the material from Ravenna which was re-employed in his palace in Aachen, but also technical know-how, ideas, and craftsmen. The Lombard heritage was certainly not the only cultural resource available to the Carolingians. Other traditions were sought out and drawn on, from far and wide. So, Santa Maria foris portas in Castelseprio — should new 14C and termoluminescence analysis support a date in the early ninth century — would appear to have been constructed in this period and adorned with paintings by artists working in a fairly pure eastern Byzantine idiom.

49 Goll, Exner, and Hirsch, Müstair.
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