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Medieval Architecture for Religious Tourism and Hospitality along the Pilgrimage Routes of Northern Italy

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The reception of travellers, the sick, and pilgrims in religious centres in the Middle Ages was one of the cornerstones of life in many monastic and convent communities. The growing number of *domus hospitales* and *xenodochii*, recorded from the early centuries of the Middle Ages until the 15th century, demonstrates the need for them and their widespread dissemination in Italy and Europe. The research findings presented in this paper derive from research aimed at identifying these sites of religious hospitality architectures through a study of the documentary sources and an analysis of the buildings still preserved in the territory of Northern Italy. In particular, analysis of the main cases linked to monastic hospitality, such as the *Sacra di San Michele* – the centre of worship of Archangel Michael, an essential step in the pilgrimage between Mont-Saint-Michel in Normandy and San Michele del Gargano in Puglia – *Novalesa* and *Staffarda* constitutes the main theme of this investigation.

Even today these sites represent places of pilgrimage and reception of great interest and inflow; the long tradition of hospitality that has characterized the Christian world since the Middle Ages seems to be continuing, and is revitalized and reaffirmed by recent pastoral guidelines. Religious tourism in the contemporary era has seen a significant increase, linked to a form of spirituality that rediscovers the history of the oldest monasteries as places of meditation and prayer. The tourism of major religious events and shrines that represent an attraction for millions of people is increasingly witnessing more intimate visits aimed at rediscovering the historical value of the journeys, which are often undertaken on foot in the footsteps of the pilgrims as modern *homines viatores* on the trail of ancient experiences and spirituality.

Key Words: pilgrimage routes, religious architecture, religious tourism, hospitality

Introduction

Sacred spaces are, and have always been, places of reception: hospitality is in fact a precept of God. Many biblical passages remind us of this, such as *Gen 18, 4-5*, in which Abraham welcomes three guests, washes their feet and offers them a piece of bread and a place to rest under a tree. Saint Benedict, in chapter 53 of the *Rule*, insisted on the need to honour pilgrims and travellers, who should be welcomed with a charitable service ready for devotion, and stated that all guests who entered the monastery should be received as if they were Christ, having their hands and feet washed.

The reception of travellers, the sick, and pilgrims in religious centres in the Middle Ages was one of the cornerstones of life in many monastic and convent communities. The growing number of *domus hospitales* and *xenodochii*, recorded from the early centuries of the Middle Ages until the 15th century, demonstrates the need for them and their widespread dissemination

in Italy and Europe. It seems to be possible to identify phases of this development linked to the different monastic and convent orders that dedicated themselves to relieving the suffering of travellers and the sick. An initial significant presence along the road axes was followed by a subsequent phase of settlement in the major urban centres. Each community had its rules which also influenced the choice of where the sites were positioned, the buildings in which to receive pilgrims and the architectural typologies, often clearly designed to immediately identify the place.

The findings presented in this paper derive from research aimed at identifying religious hospitality architecture through the study of the documentary sources and the buildings still preserved in the territory of Northern Italy. In particular, the analysis of the main cases linked to monastic hospitality, such as the *Sacra di San Michele* – the centre of worship of Archangel Michael, an essential step in the pilgrimage between Mont-Saint-Michel in Normandy and San Michele del

Figure 1. Map of the medieval pilgrimage routes in Europe and the Mediterranean area.



Source: www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/pellegrinaggio.

Gargano in Puglia – *Novalesa* and *Staffarda*, constitute the main theme of this investigation (Figure 1).

Through an exhaustive review of the existing published historiography and the examination of documentary sources regarding the analysed case-studies, this essay is aimed at an in-depth survey of the evolution of places devoted to religious hospitality from the Middle Ages to the present day. The objective of the study is the identification of recurrent elements in the religious hospitality policies, together with an examination of the type of reception reserved for pilgrims, the facilities devoted to them, their localization and characteristics.

Today these places still represent places of pilgrimage and reception of great interest and inflow; the long tradition of hospitality that has characterized the Christian world since the Middle Ages seems to continue, and is indeed revitalized and reaffirmed by recent pastoral guidelines. Religious tourism in the contemporary era has witnessed a significant increase, linked to a form of spirituality that rediscovers the history of the oldest monasteries as a place of meditation and prayer (Stoddard and Morinis, 1997). The tourism of major religious events and shrines represents an attraction for millions of people and is

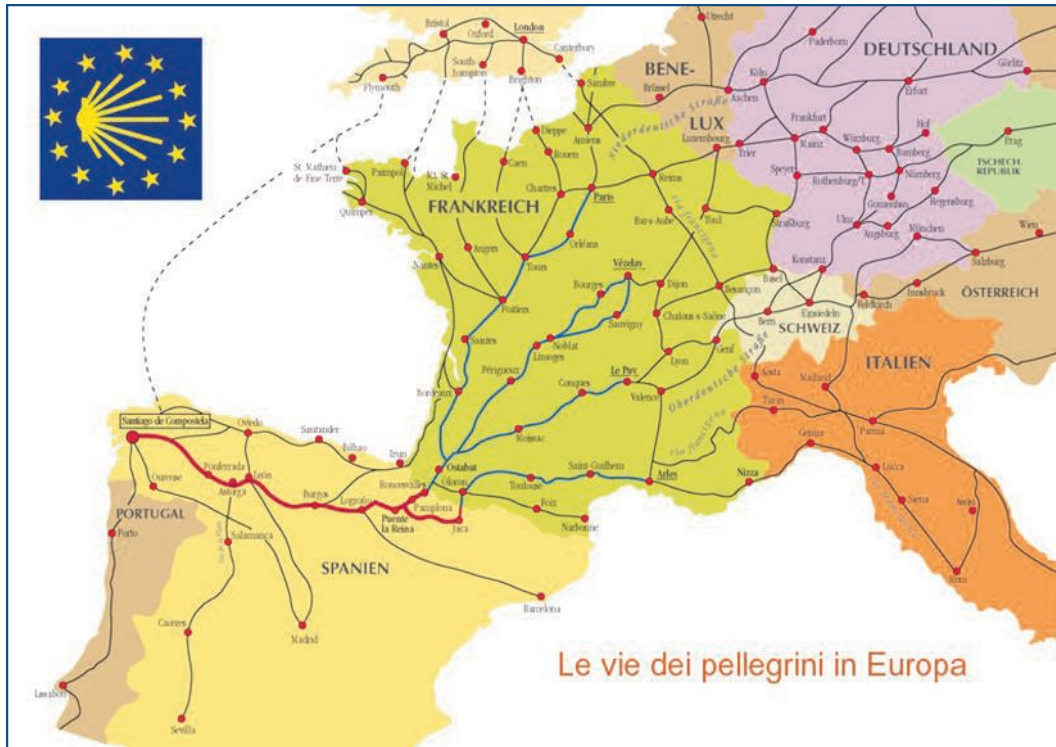
increasingly witnessing more intimate visits, aimed at rediscovering the historical values of the journey, which is often undertaken on foot in the footsteps of the pilgrims, as modern *homines viatores* on the trail of ancient experiences and spirituality.

Origins

Since Roman times, Northern Italy - with particular reference to the regions of Valle d'Aosta and Piedmont - has been a transit area for pilgrims, soldiers and merchants bound for both Central Italy and Northern Europe. The numerous branches of the main road arteries have been widely traced by the historiography of the last decades, so that a plurality of *viae francigenae* can be identified (Renouard, 1963; Sergi, 1991; Bocca and Centini, 1994; Castelnuovo, 1996; Stopani, 1998) (Figures 2, 3).

In Piedmont, a section of the *viae francigenae* passed through the Susa Valley, and the route of Sigeric, Archbishop of Canterbury, stretched from Vercelli towards the Valle d'Aosta (Sergi, 1979; 1981; Kanceff, 1990; Sergi and Tuniz, 1998; Scagliola, 1995; Comba and Sergi, 1998; Massola, 1998) (Figures 4, 5). The routes, which branched out into small roads, overlapped and joined, thus creating "road areas" (Toubert, 1997:150; Greci, 2000; Sergi, 2000).

Figure 2. Map of the pilgrimage routes: *Ways of St. James in Europe*.



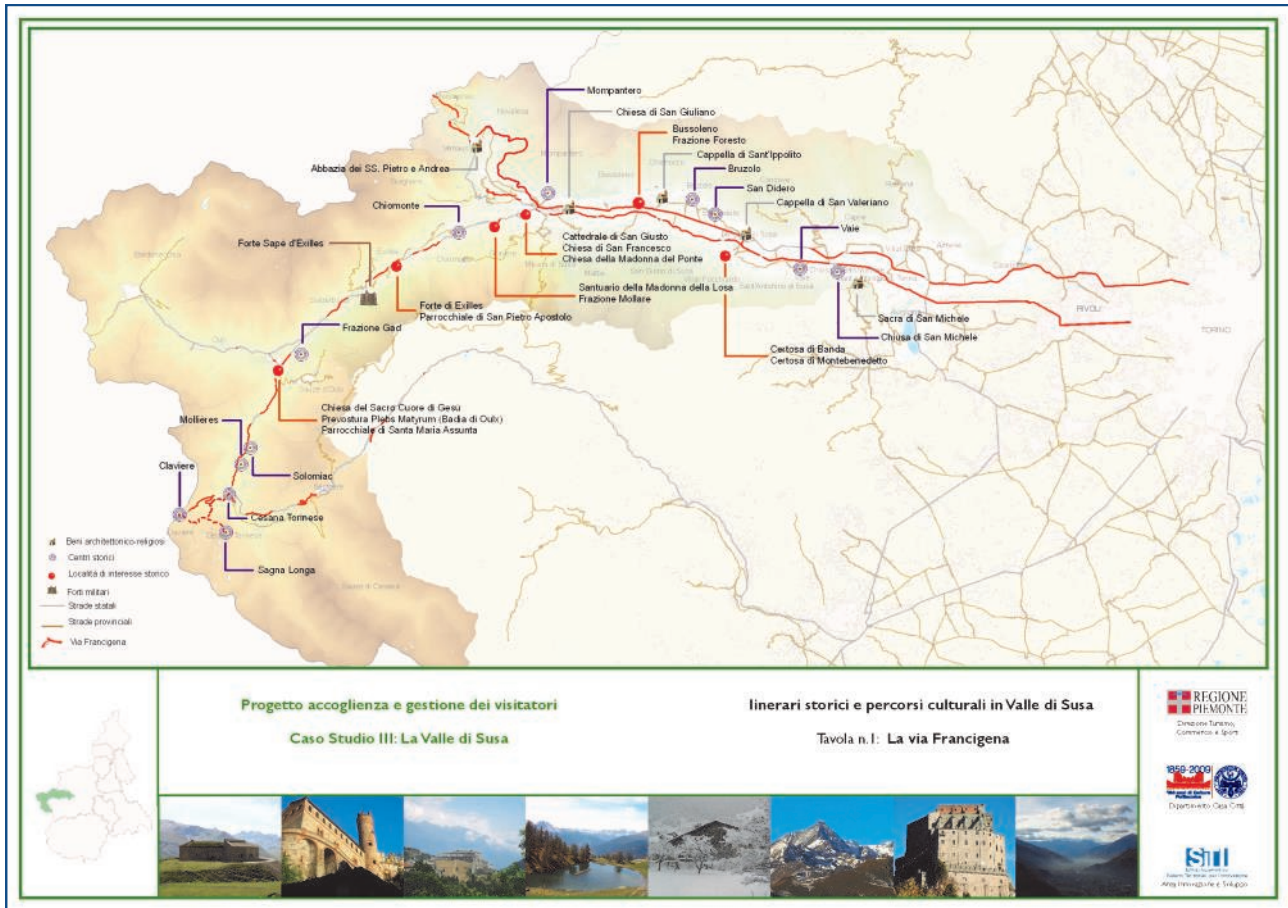
Source: <http://www.pellegrinibelluno.it/mappe/le-vie-dei-pellegrinibig.jpg>

Figure 3. The pilgrimage way of Sigeric, Archbishop of Canterbury, from Rome to Canterbury in 990. (Sigerico on map)



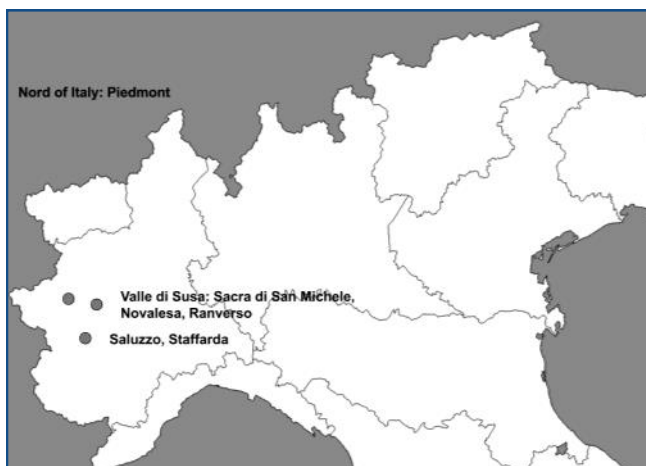
Source: <http://www.francigena-international.org/newsite/upload/cartinaVF-E.10.jpg>

Figure 4. Thematic map of the Via Francigena in the Susa Valley.



Source: Beltramo, 2011.

Figure 5. Locations of the main sites linked to religious hospitality discussed in the text (northwest Italy).



Source: Author

They were also characterized by some well-defined convergence points: on the one hand, infrastructures of some importance such as bridges, and, on the other, urban centres which previously existed or were formed along them (Merlo, 1996).

The network of religious assistance established along the road axes determined the significant presence of the so-called *domus hospitales*, ministered by the main religious institutions either in the rural territory or within the towns (Leistikow, 1967). The spreading of the different terms – *xenodochium*, *hospitale*, *domus elimosinaria* and the like – used in coeval documents to define the system of sustenance for pilgrims and which has been widely investigated by the historiography, implies the need to clarify their function and location (Conrad Peyer, 1987; Albini, 1993). Furthermore, a distinction needs to be made between the foundations set up from the 12th to the mid-13th century and those established from that date until the end of the 15th century.

This periodization largely corresponds to the two most significant seasons of the European pilgrimage: the former being strongly oriented to Santiago, and the latter being characterized by a renewed flow headed

for Rome as a result of the first Jubilee in 1300 (Cherubini, 1999; Segre, 1999). The Santiago stage corresponds to the birth and growth of the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela under the impetus of Cluny's reforms¹ (González and Lopez, 2012; Santos Solla, 2006; Carrasco Pérez, 1999; Laliena Corbera, 1994; de Cortázar and de Aguirre, 1992); its chronological start and end points can be set at the beginning of the 12th century and in the mid-13th century. The second stage, the result of the indiction of the first Roman Jubilee in 1300, extended throughout the 14th century and for the most part of the 15th century. This new devotional impulse, which developed into a "health-oriented" modernization of the hospitality structures, progressively faded away (Lusso, 2010).

The different chronologies correspond to different types of architecture and settlements, rural and urban. These will be outlined in the following section

Pilgrimage and Hospitality Structures in the First Period: the reformed regular canons and the military orders

The first and by far most significant datum arising from this author's studies is the noticeable metamorphosis of institutional behaviour, which accompanied and influenced the natural evolutionary lines of the hospitality system. The first season of pilgrimages overlapped with the development of an assistance network founded on the initiative of the great monastic orders. The resumption witnessed in the 14th century was accompanied by a new, multifaceted reality, largely controlled by laymen or institutions that represented the new religiosity of the late Middle Ages. In the second period, the institutions that assumed the burden of hospitality were the confraternities.

The identification of institutions that promoted hospitality in Piedmont between the 12th and 13th centuries highlights a rather different reality to the one usually accepted by the historiography (Ruffino, 1958; Cognasso, 1958): only a marginal involvement of the large monastic foundations is recorded, while, on the contrary, the canonic foundations, almost exclusively the reformed regular ones, played an important role. It is worth noticing the number of annexes of *San Lorenzo di Oulx* or *Santi Pietro e Andrea di Rivalta*, both regular canonical houses (20), versus the overall amount of *domus hospitales* controlled by the non-reformed house of *Santa Maria di Chieri* (2).

¹ Reforms of Cluny or Cluniac Reforms (also called Benedictine Reforms) were a series of changes within Western medieval monasticism focused on restoring traditional monastic ways. The movement began within the Benedictine order at Cluny, founded in 910

Even the support of the military orders was rather more modest than it is usually supposed (Casiraghi, 1996). If it is true that some foundations were under the control of the Knights of Saint John, the share they represented looks marginal in comparison with the Diocesan structures in Turin and Asti, as revealed by the number of annexes of canonical houses. The Templar foundations were also absent, except for the *domus hospitales* in Moncalieri, Carpice, Asti and a few other cases; the number of *precettorie* (houses of the Templar Order), for which a hospitality function can be proven, is rather limited (Ruffino, 1958). Moreover, the rule and statutes of the Order did not contain any chapter specifically referred to hospitality obligations (Cerrini, 2011; Partner, 1982).

This did not apply to the Hospitallers of St. John of Jerusalem, who – by natural vocation – were required to offer hospitality, mainly in the Holy Land, as evidenced in the statute of their Order (Riley-Smith, 1967: 54). The *consuetudines* and the statute, approved by Eugene III before 1153, were organized around a central core deriving from the Rule of St. Augustine, followed by the *reformed canons regular*. This datum is significant since it establishes a connection between the two religious congregations which were mostly active in the first period of the "hospitality era".

All this deeply alludes to the relationship between pilgrimages and hospitality structures, and identifies two parallel though substantially divergent evolutionary trends. The spread of places providing hospitality was essential for the flow of pilgrims and obviously the rhythms of these two phenomena were rather synchronized. Furthermore, their introduction into a territory system governed by rules which were only partially aimed at pilgrimage in the strictest sense, provides the interpretive key to investigate the rationale behind the architectural choices. Thus, the phenomenon of the pilgrimage loses those atemporal characteristics often attributed to it, acquiring instead a dimension that reflects the political influences of a specific historical period, governed by the one-sided logic of ruling entities that can be easily identified and described.

Pilgrimage and Hospitality Structures in the Second Period: the origin of secular hospitality

The critical stage for the development of the pilgrimage phenomenon can be identified in the acute phase of Cluny's decline, which became irreversible in the 13th century and in the gradual fall from grace of Compostela's episcopate, which had always been close to the abbey of Burgundy (Caucci von Saucken, 1989). At the same time, the hospitality system in Piedmont was falling apart under the blows of the crisis affecting the canons regular. The events of *Santi Pietro e Andrea*

di Rivalta and its sudden decline are in some instances exemplar: after an irrepressible ascent, which lasted approximately one century during which the records also show an interference in the management of the *domus* of Moncenisio (Sergi, 1972), the canonical community suffered such an economic downfall that the bishops of Turin deemed it appropriate to join it to the abbey of Staffarda in 1256 (Quaglia, 1955). The same fate befell *San Lorenzo di Oulx*, which in 1252 was declared a family asset by the local count, Guigues VI of Albon, as well as *Santa Croce di Mortara* and *Santa Maria Nuova*, which were taken over by the Lateran Congregation in 1449, and *San Giacomo di Corveglia*, which was suppressed in 1473 (Tosco, 2004). The monastic institutions established in the wake of the community reformation, such as the Cistercians and one century later the Mendicant Orders, the Franciscans first and foremost, were not neutral to these events and distanced themselves in favour of a stricter discipline. The crisis of the canonical communities, which were involved in a process of progressive loosening of the behavioural models, even in contexts where the poverty constraint had been firmly introduced, strongly affected the whole hospitality system. The hospitals started to be perceived as a potential source of revenue, although they were not able to withstand the speculative pressure, which actually caused the disappearance of the main institutions, as recalled in documents from the 12th and 13th centuries. The urban centres characterized by a marked tradition of hospitality often preferred to

intervene and replace the more ancient established *domus hospitales* with new structures rather than investing to adapt those which no longer had capital resources. This, added to the new functional requirements, determined the disappearance of hospital structures of canonical origin.

The *Domus Hospitalis* for pilgrims in the abbeys: architectural patterns

It is known that in the Carolingian age the emperor assigned some abbeys the task of hosting illustrious pilgrims as well as simple wayfarers (*Dal Piemonte all'Europa*, 1988). The abbey of Novalesa, founded in 726 with a specific *vocation routièrè*, was one of them, as proven by the certificate issued by Louis the Pious in 814 (*Mont-Cenis*, 1977). The hospitality function was certainly exercised by the monks of Novalesa, even after the monastery was abandoned during the 10th century: upon their return, a *hospitale* must have been immediately built or restored, since the *Vita di San Simeone monaco* (drafted by 980) already mentions the hospitality offered there (Frati, 2004). Subordinate to the abbey of Breme (Pavia), the *cenobium novalicense* became increasingly specialized in its role as an institution serving travellers coming from or going to the Mont-Cenis pass.

In the early 13th century, the *hospitale* was purchased by the Savoy family and the management of the

Figure 6. View of the abbey of Novalesa.



Photo by the author.

monastery's assets was streamlined. Recent restorations and archaeological excavations have highlighted the structures of the medieval *cenobium*, though without clearly identifying its functions (*La Novalesa*, 1988). The so-called refectory of Novalesa now appears as a large hall covered by a lunette barrel vault, which was introduced at a further stage; the elevation walls show some re-used marble fragments of decorative apparatuses from the early Middle Ages, which would suggest dating to the Romanesque age (Figure 6).

The abbey of San Michele della Chiusa (*Sacra di San Michele*) also offered a safe resting place to wayfarers but, unlike Novalesa, it was not an intermediate step but rather the final destination of pilgrimages (Casiraghi, 1987). The choice of a mountain peak (see Figure 7) could only foster the worshipping of the Archangel, and the roughness of the area almost

immediately required the abbey to set up hospitality facilities (Tosco, 2003). Around 987, when Guglielmo da Volpiano went as a pilgrim to the *Sacra* to worship Saint Michael, the complex, which had just been founded by Ugo d'Alvernia, was certainly under construction and in all likelihood did not yet have a purposely-allocated building. Little more than a century later, the monk William, the biographer of Abbot Benedict II (1066-1095), boasted about the renowned hospitality of the abbey, which welcomed the most illustrious characters in accordance with a veritable rite:

offers of delicate food, use of perfect furniture, bathing facilities, gifts of clothing and horses (Casiraghi, 1996: 76).

Figure 7. View of the abbey of San Michele della Chiusa.



Photo by the author.

The guests often stayed for an extended time and the abbot provided them with comfortable *habitacula*, fitted with carpets, but also a *domus infirmorum* with *balnea* in accordance with the treatments in vogue during the Middle Ages.² The *domus* was located to the south of the church, on the opposite side to the monastery, so that the monks were separated from the guests. The description given by the monk William in chapters VI and XVI of the *Vita di Benedetto II* corresponds to the conditions of the abbey at the end of the 11th century, i.e. before the momentous renovation of 1110: the comment on the guest quarter structures confirms such dating, even though their first documentary mention is rather late (1266). The *domus ellemosinaria* currently consists of a rectangular body separate from the monastery and supported by a wall strengthened by buttresses. Since the southeast façade cannot be observed up close, the discontinuity in the façades cannot be ascertained, even though the interruption of the buttresses at the level of the first floor and the variation in the language of the openings (single lancet windows below, double lancet ones above) would suggest two separate construction stages: the former at the same time as the works ordered by Abbot Benedict II and the latter related to the subsequent ones (Romano, 1990). The lower floor, adapted as a cistern, can be reached from only one arched door and is poorly lit by narrow single lancet and double splayed windows; the wooden attic above is accessible through two portals, and the room is lit by three double lancet windows which overlook a void. The guest quarters, although they were well separated from the spaces allocated to the monks, were within the enclosure of the abbey and this was the first building visitors would come upon. The remains of a door can be seen adjacent to the *domus infirmorum*; it was the only gate of the defensive circuit before the so-called “iron gate” – i.e. the new front gate of the abbey castle – was built one ramp below. Most likely, the ancient access could be controlled from the lower floor of the guest quarters, through a slit which is today bricked in (Figures 7, 8).

Assistance for pilgrims and sick people, which was a common practice amongst the Benedictine monks between the 12th and 13th centuries, was also a widespread practice among the reformed. In particular, the *hospitale* of the Cistercian monastery of Staffarda (Figure 9) was mentioned in a document dated August 16th, 1246: «domo que dicitur hospitale monasterii Beate Marie de Stapharda» (Gabotto and Barberis, 1901-1902, n. 361, vol. II:1). The building, which is referred to in the sources as the guest quarters, seems to have consisted of a rectangular body divided into two floors by a modular system of ribbed groin vaults

on circular stone pillars with capitals featuring phytomorphic and architectural decorations. The guest dormitory was located on the upper floor, and the refectory on the lower floor. The current configuration of the guest quarters, in line with the other buildings of the monastery, was achieved in the mid-century by the addition of the gallery (by 1251) and the portico by 1255 (Gabotto and Barberis, 1901-1902, n. 423, vol. II: 46; n. 447, vol. II: 6). The whole structure – with the sole exception of the pillars which had to be more robust – is constructed in brick, a cheaper technique incorporating simple and effective expressive means, such as the cross on the cusp of the west front or the painted rings of the single lancet windows of the upper floor (Figure 10). In the interior, which features great compositional clarity and light, the decorative parts are found in the stonework with sculpted capitals and keystones (Beltramo, 2010).

From the Past to the Present: pilgrims and tourists along the Susa Valley

The mountain landscape of the Susa Valley represents a significant laboratory for the study of the cultural landscape intended as a product of the activity of humans, who left behind the imprints of their history, the evolution of their civilization and their cultural patterns in the natural context (Figure 11). The mountain's cultural landscape was formed – during the Middle Ages – on the pre-existing passes generated by the territorial expansion of the Romans. The pathways of pilgrims and merchants were consolidated along the furrows of the Roman routeways, through the creation of hospitality systems serving the routes (Tosco, 2005: 85-93).

The history of the Susa Valley is characterized by elements which tend to be continuous throughout the centuries: the alpine cultural wealth which grew between the 5th and 6th centuries and later spread throughout centres of excellence such as the *Sacra di San Michele* and *Novalesa* and; the landscape of Romanesque architecture which characterizes the valley with a dense sequence of parishes and chapels. . These features in the history of the Valley have lasted through time and confirm themselves, despite multiple redefinitions, as the identity markers of the valley, namely: the *road*, the *border*, and the *alpine conformation of power* (Sergi, 2005). Combined, they form the elements that define a veritable jewel of both local and international culture.

In the Middle Ages, the *strada delle Gallie*, from the Mont-Cenis pass - through the Susa Valley - was one of the most utilized connections between Northern and Southern Europe. The Mont-Cenis pass was then joined by that of Montgenèvre, further to the south. The latter - with its smoother but longer routes - allowed access to southern Gaul and Briançon, whilst Mont-Cenis - which was more difficult but shorter –

2. *habitacula* = living space
domus = dwelling
infirmorum = infirmary
balnea = public baths or hot spring
ellemosinaria = charitable

Figure 8. Monastery and guest house of the *Sacra di San Michele*.



Photo by the author.

Figure 9. The Cistercian abbey of Santa Maria di Staffarda near Saluzzo.

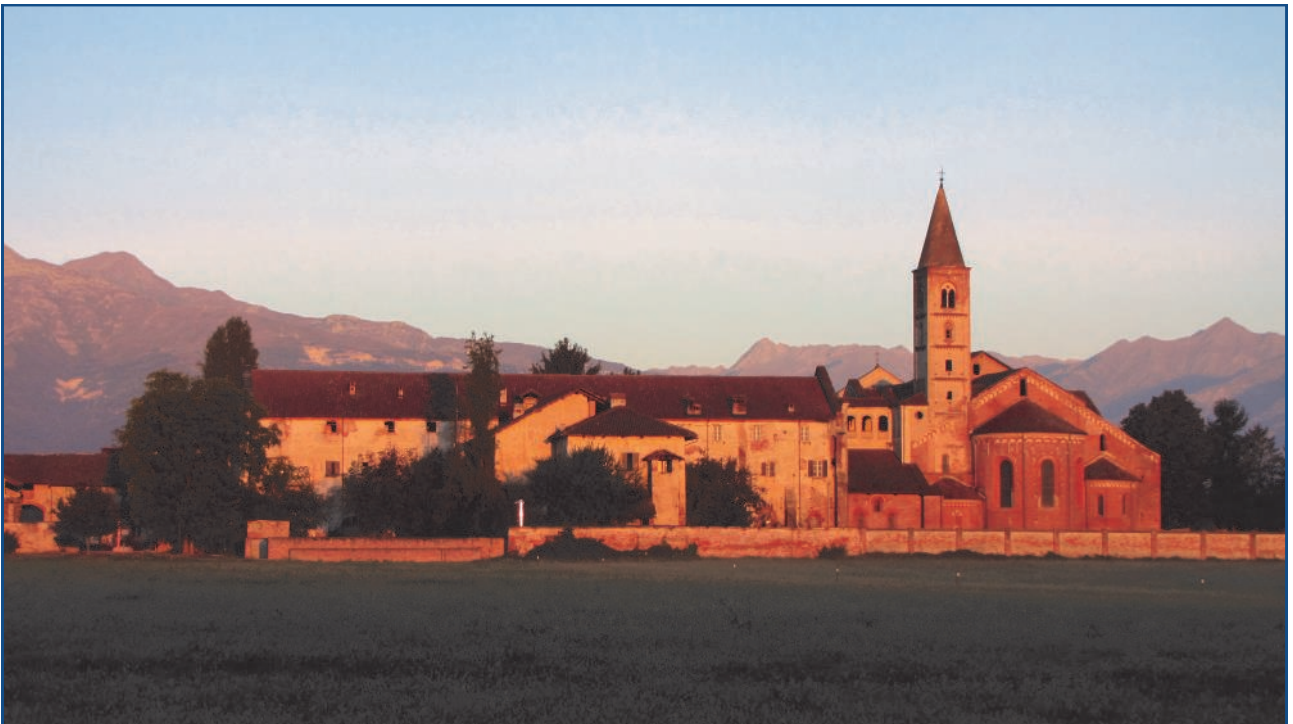


Photo by the author.

led to Maurienne and Burgundy. The paved way of Montgenèvre was used by heavy transport and large armies, whilst Mont-Cenis was a simpler path, suitable for small armies and travellers wishing to minimize the duration of their journey across the harsh mountain.

Mirroring these two routes, in the Middle Ages, the Susa Valley was also crossed by the *via Francigena*, which was a route area rather than a precise road / pathway. The alternative directions for the route included the low valley option via Susa, Moncenisio and *Valle dell'Arc* – and the higher one, providing access to Chiomonte, Montgenèvre and Briançon.

Nowadays the Susa Valley is one of the most important tourism areas in Piedmont. In addition to its historical and cultural attractions, the XX Winter Olympic Games held in Turin in 2006, resulted in a significant increase in tourists (Bottero, 2007).

The presence of pilgrims, as well as merchants and armies, throughout the ancient history of the valley is consolidated in the present day with the remarkable flow of visitors interested in places of worship, who mainly visit the *Sacra di San Michele*, which has been elected as the symbol monument of Piedmont (Rizzi and Onorato, 2011; Trono 2012; Cerutti and Dioli, 2013). This remarkable number of visitors who ascend the *Sacra* are attracted by various motives: the cultural, religious and landscape values and thus, the motivations attracting tourists to this route (nowadays

travelling mainly by car or bus) cannot be easily defined. At the same time, the records show an ever increasing number of walking pilgrims, who cover the ancient ways of the Middle Ages. These travellers are rediscovering a “slow” experience through their journey along ancient pathways and are thereby reconstructing different spaces and views, far from the frenzy of fast motorways and high speed trains (Beltramo, 2011) (Figure 12).

In the cultural landscape of the valley, places of unique character, such as the abbey of San Michele della Chiusa, the *precettoria di Sant'Antonio di Ranverso* (Figures 13, 14), the cathedral of San Giusto in Susa, the abbey of Novalesa, together with a dense network of religious, civil and military buildings, «offer dimensions of an overall program, for the safeguard and valorisation of a singular artistic heritage» (Griseri, 2005: 17).

Conclusions. Today's tourists: modern pilgrims?

The long tradition of religious hospitality from the early Christian centuries through the Middle Ages and up to the present day does not seem to have ever disappeared.

The reflection on the meaning and ways of receiving the faithful in sacred places, such as sanctuaries,

Figure 10. The guest house of Staffarda near one of the entrances to the complex.



Photo by the author.

Figure 12. A motorway viaduct in the upper part of the Susa Valley.



Photo by the author.

convents, monasteries and churches, is part of the pastoral care in religious tourism, in regard to which the importance of the relationship between the Church and contemporary society has recently been reaffirmed (*Il santuario, spazio per un'accoglienza*, 2002). This pastoral care – of which diligent hospitality is one of the most delicate and necessary aspects – is mainly founded on the reception, broadly understood as a set of situations aimed at receiving guests in the right way, demonstrating willingness to make their stay enjoyable and interesting, and showing proper respect for the culture and local traditions (Scordato, 2007:89).

There are many explanations for the interest in religious hospitality, especially with regard to its implications for tourism, the most tangible of which relates to the dimensions assumed by the phenomenon (Bo, 1991; Mazza, 1992; Trono, 2009; 2012; Griffin and Raj, 2012). The majority of the 330 million travellers who journeyed towards spiritual destinations in 2007 are concentrated in “God’s Continent”: Italy alone, with 40 million, represents over 10% of the total (Dallari, Trono and Zabbini, 2009; Ph. Jenkins, 2007; Sesana, 2006). It is no wonder, then, that we tend to look at this mass of travellers drawn to religious locations with an attention that concerns many situations where the Church is committed to providing hospitality. Reception thus becomes a reality that can

Figure 11. View of the Susa Valley from the Sacra di San Michele



Photo by the author

Figure 13. Sant'Antonio di Ranverso: church and *hospitale*



Photo by the author.

Figure 14. Sant'Antonio di Ranverso: façade of the church.

Photo by the author.

be shared through networking and the Internet (which has become the true, new frontier of evangelisation), a service to be proposed to a wide and varied audience (Marchetto, 2008). In the Holy Year 2000 celebrated by John Paul II, in which there were around 25 million pilgrim-tourists in Rome alone, the topic of reception clearly played a central role (Cipolla, Cipriani, 2002:94). According to the Roman Curia only an efficient reception could have made the Jubilee a truly global event for all mankind (Czarniawska, Mazza, and Pipan, 2001:114).

The marked attention paid to the topic of hospitality on the occasion of the Holy Year 2000, or other major devotional events (such as the Expositions of the Holy Shroud in Turin celebrated in 1998, 2000 and 2010 with an overall turnout of over 5 million visitors, and a further 3 million in 2015), created its own network of actions involving public and private organizations and drawing on the tourism industry, information, public

services, transport, software, culture and the environment (Cozzo, 2012; Raj and Morpeth, 2007; Margry, 2008). Although globalization tends to eliminate specificity and dull the awareness of the long-term, in this case it seems rather clear that the phenomenon cannot be reduced to a recently formed chronological or cultural context.

The case studies presented in this article are evidence of the long duration of the phenomenon of providing assistance in the Middle Ages which continues and has, as a matter of fact, in some respects increased in modern times (Beltramo, 2012; Gai, 2000; Morinis, 1992). In addition to religious tourism for major events (Jubilees, Expositions of the Holy Shroud, etc), roadside places receiving pilgrims seem now to recover their original use becoming modern hospices (or hostels) where travellers find a place to rest and recover (Beltramo and Cozzo, 2013; Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Cohen, 1992; Eade and Sallnow, 1991). The

notable recovery of slow tourism that moves along the ancient routes on foot has resulted in a new life for these structures giving them an incentive to renovate the spaces in order to ensure they are really usable. As regards the Susa Valley, in particular, the two main religious centres now represent important stages of the European cultural route of the Via Francigena, but they are also included in the route of St. Michael, linked to the cult of the Archangel Michael, which connects the North to the South of Europe, going from Mont Saint Michel in Normandy, to Monte Sant'Angelo in Puglia. Even the Cistercian abbeys have their own cultural route recognized by the Council of Europe, which, however, the monasteries in the Piedmont territory, including Staffarda, have not yet joined.

The possibility of putting online historical places or the European cultural routes represents now a good opportunity to enhance their value and recover disused areas of the European territory and landscape and a real opportunity for careful and enlightened tourism that can offer European pilgrims a common project of cultural and spiritual visits (Lombardi and Trisciuglio, 2013; Beltramo, 2013). The cultural routes are capable of inducing a process whereby residents and visitor-travellers regain the identity of the landscapes. Through the journey, tangible elements of common history can be rediscovered and recognized, preserving those characteristics that reflect a specific culture, the result of centuries of history (Timothy and Olsen, 2006).

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