



**A DOVE SONG:  
THE 'MIRACULOUS' FOUNDATION AND GROWTH OF BOBBIO ABBEY**

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**MA Thesis in Medieval Studies**

**University of Wales Trinity Saint David**

**Academic Year 2017-8**



## Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation

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## LIST OF CONTENTS

<b><u>Declaration</u></b>	p. 2
<b><u>Abstract</u></b>	p. 4
<b><u>Acknowledgements</u></b>	p. 5
<b><u>Abbreviations</u></b>	p. 6
<b><u>Chapter 1 – Introduction</u></b>	
1.1 General Introduction to the Research Topic	p. 7-9
1.2 Methodology and Research Questions	p. 10
1.3 Review of Primary Sources	p. 11
1.3.1 Primary Sources on Bobbio Abbey	p. 11
1.3.2 Primary Sources on Saint Columbanus	p. 11-2
1.3.3 Columbanus’ Opus	p. 13-4
1.4 Review of Secondary Sources	p. 15-6
<b><u>Chapter 2- Columbanus’ journey to Italy</u></b>	
2.1 <i>Peregrinatio pro Christi</i>	p. 17-9
2.2 The attributes of the Christian Warrior	p. 20-23
2.3 Columbanus at Agilulf’s court	p. 23-7
<b><u>Chapter 3- The choice of Bobbio as the site for an Abbey and the factors contributing to its ‘spectacular development’</u></b>	
3.1 Bobbio and its surrounding areas under Lombard rule	p. 28
3.2 Columbanus’ relationship with the Lombard King and Queen	p. 29-30
3.3 Bobbio’s unique legal status	p. 31-4
3.4 On location	p. 35-9
<b><u>Chapter 4- The impact of Columbanus and Bobbio Abbey in the Early Medieval Italian peninsula</u></b>	
4.1 The political role of Bobbio Abbey in Early Medieval Italy	p. 40-1
4.2 Bobbio as a pilgrimage centre and its hospitality network	p. 41-3
4.3 The development of a localised cult of Saint Columbanus	p. 44-5
4.4 The <i>Regula</i> fades away	p. 45-8
4.5 Bobbio as a cultural beacon	p. 49-51
<b><u>5 Conclusion</u></b>	p. 52-7
<b><u>6 Appendix</u></b>	
6.1 Fig. 1	p. 58
6.2 Fig. 2	p. 59
6.3 Grid of Italian churches, monasteries, oratories and chapels dedicated to Saint Columbanus with pictures, locations and some historical details	p. 60-5
<b><u>7 Bibliography</u></b>	p. 66-73

## Abstract

Legend has it that an ancient Irish monk known by the name of Columbanus, literally meaning ‘little dove’, morphed into a swan when he achieved his final ambition by founding Bobbio Abbey just a year before he died. The Abbey prospered in an exceptionally short period of time and outlasted him by twelve centuries. This dissertation will analyse the propitious circumstances leading to its foundation in a secluded, but hospitable environment on the border of the fledgling Lombard Kingdom.<sup>1</sup> Neither the Lombard King nor his Queen were bona fide Catholics.<sup>2</sup> Columbanus had a controversial reputation. Yet, they welcomed him with open arms and bestowed the Abbey with gifts from day one.

In his letter to Pope Boniface, Columbanus defines his encounter with the royal couple as a miraculous event.<sup>3</sup> His journey from Ireland to continental Europe was dictated by God’s will; an angel had inspired him to leave Switzerland for Italy.<sup>4</sup> In order to unravel the historical events underpinning Bobbio’s birth a two-fold approach has been employed. Firstly, information from a range of primary sources on Columbanus, the Abbey and the Lombards was gathered. The ensuing data was then contextualized with the help of recent historical, philological and archaeological research in English and Italian.

The settlement of new ethnic groups in former Roman territories represented a precarious time of transition. It was a synergy between the Columban hard line brand of Catholicism and the centralisation of religious and political authority that created Bobbio Abbey and kick-started the shift of power from former Roman *civitas* to Lombard monastic institutions. Although the reasons for Bobbio’s success have turned out to be ‘strategic’, it is doubtful that Columbanus and his fellow monks could have faced so many hardships and persevered in their undertakings if they had not been sustained by an unrelenting faith. (300 words)

<sup>1</sup> For the idyllic description of the site where Bobbio Abbey would be founded, see A. O’Hara, ‘Columbanus ad Locum’, *Peritia*, 26, 143-170 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), p. 168.

<sup>2</sup> “But on top of this occasion for writing, there is added the bidding of King Agilulf, whose request reduced me to amazement and manifold anxiety; since indeed I think that what I observe cannot be devoid of the **miraculous**” [*emphasis mine*]. Columbanus, Letter V.16, available at <https://celt.ucc.ie/published/T201054.html> (Accessed August 4th, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Agilulf, like most of the Lombard nobility, was an ‘institutional’ Arian, while his Bavarian Catholic consort had become involved in the Aquilean schism, possibly under the influence of her spiritual guide Secundus of Non. (P. Majocchi, ‘Arianorum abolevit heresen’, *Arianism: Roman Heresy and Barbarian Creed*, Berndt, G. M. & Steinacher R. (eds), 231-8 (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), p. 238.

<sup>4</sup> The ‘favourable divine intervention’ is recorded in the few lines Jonas dedicated to the arrival of Columbanus in Italy (A. O’Hara, *Jonas of Bobbio and the Legacy of Columbanus* (Oxford: OUP, 2018), p. 192.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my supervisor Harriett Webster and the Unit Coordinator Prof. Janet Burton at the University of Wales Trinity St David for their support, patience and kindness. I am very grateful to Alexander O'Hara for his encouragement and advice and for letting me have his latest book a month before the date of publication so that I could put the finishing touches to my dissertation ahead of schedule. A big thank you to Liam Dean and David Hyde at the University of Portsmouth for helping me to create my first Google Map. As a visually impaired person, I am particularly indebted to all those who invented the technology that has given me access to the delicate beauty of ancient art. It is to them that I dedicate the cover picture of doves drinking from a bowl taken in the Ravenna Galla Placidia Mausoleum and magnified with my extra eye (my Smartphone).

**Abbreviations**

*Ep.* = *Epistulae*

*Miracula* = *Miracula Sancti Colombani*

*RB* = *Regula Benedicti*

*RC* = *Regula Colombani*

*VC* = *Vitae Colombani*

## **Chapter 1 – Introduction**

### **1.1. General Introduction to the Research Topic**

The town of Bobbio is tucked in the North West corner of the modern Italian region of Emilia-Romagna, at the edge of the Apennine Mountains. Bobbio Abbey, founded in the seventh century, was the first Lombard monastery. A few other important monasteries were later founded by the Lombards in Northern Italy.<sup>5</sup> However, none of these played such a pivotal role as Bobbio Abbey did, both under Lombard and Carolingian rule.<sup>6</sup> What today appears as peripheral was a strategic location when the Abbey was founded in 614 by Columbanus, an Irish monk who had migrated to continental Europe on a mission of evangelization. Prior to arriving in the Italian peninsula, he had spent a couple of decades in Burgundy, where he had established the monasteries of Annegray, Luxeuil and Fontaine.<sup>7</sup> Over the centuries, as the size and prestige of Bobbio Abbey increased, the small hamlet surrounding the Abbey developed into a village and, in 1014 it was made into a diocese by Henry II.<sup>8</sup>

Even though Columbanus has lately drawn some media attention, picturesque Bobbio with its well-preserved historical centre lies outside the main Italian sightseeing routes.<sup>9</sup> Benedict XVI in his public speech in St. Peter's Square, heralded Columbanus as the first 'European' saint.<sup>10</sup> Pope Benedict remarked that in his epistolary Columbanus had addressed both Pope Gregory and Boniface IV as 'Heads of the Whole European Church' and thus contributed to the creation of a shared Catholic European culture.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>5</sup> These were the Abbeys of Nonantola and Pomposa, both in Emilia, and Monte Amiata in neighbouring Tuscany. R. Witts, *The Two Latin Cultures and the Foundation of Renaissance Humanism* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> The timeframe used in most studies on the Abbey is given from the year of its foundation to the creation of the local diocese (614-1014).

<sup>7</sup> M. Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism* (Maiden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), p. 159.

<sup>8</sup> M. Gazzini, *La rete ospedaliera di Bobbio fra alto e basso Medioevo* (Florence: Florence University Press, 2015) [E-book], p. 48, available at

[http://www.academia.edu/19186333/La\\_rete\\_ospedaliera\\_di\\_Bobbio\\_fra\\_alto\\_e\\_basso\\_medioevo\\_in\\_La\\_diocesi\\_di\\_Bobbio\\_Formazione\\_e\\_sviluppi\\_di\\_un\\_istituzione\\_millenaria\\_a\\_cura\\_di\\_E.\\_Destefanis\\_e\\_P.\\_Guglielmotti\\_Firenze\\_Reti\\_Medievali\\_-](http://www.academia.edu/19186333/La_rete_ospedaliera_di_Bobbio_fra_alto_e_basso_medioevo_in_La_diocesi_di_Bobbio_Formazione_e_sviluppi_di_un_istituzione_millenaria_a_cura_di_E._Destefanis_e_P._Guglielmotti_Firenze_Reti_Medievali_-) (Accessed September 18th, 2017).

<sup>9</sup> What sparked my interest on Bobbio Abbey was an article on an Italian bi-monthly history magazine recommending tourist destinations off the beaten track: C. Parente, 'Bobbio e i santi diavoli', *Il Medioevo nascosto*, Medioevo Dossier 2 (Milan: My Way Media, 2013)

<sup>10</sup> What Columbanus was referring to was neither a geographical nor a political entity but a religious and social one. A. O'Hara, 'Patria, Peregrinatio, and Paenitentia: Identities of Alienation in the Seventh Century', *Peritia* 22-23, 89-124 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), p. 116, available at [http://www.academia.edu/6308852/Patria\\_peregrinatio\\_and\\_paenitentia\\_Identities\\_of\\_Alienation\\_in\\_the\\_Seventh\\_Century](http://www.academia.edu/6308852/Patria_peregrinatio_and_paenitentia_Identities_of_Alienation_in_the_Seventh_Century) (Accessed August 10th, 2017).

<sup>11</sup> *Benedict XVI General Audience*, 2008, available at [https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2008/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20080611.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2008/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20080611.html) (Accessed June 20, 2017).

The year 2015 saw a flurry of initiatives to commemorate the Abbey's fourteen hundredth birthday. In the spring, excavations one and a half metres below the central nave of the current church, brought to life the entrance of a former Romanesque church.<sup>12</sup> Fragments of stucco, dressed stones and wall paintings suggest that it was brightly and lavishly decorated. Behind the threshold the steps that led to the nave were traced.<sup>13</sup> Outside the entrance there were large and deep burial chambers, which were presumably used also by the laity because they contained children bones.<sup>14</sup>

The reputation of Bobbio Abbey has faded over the centuries and, unlike at Montecassino Abbey in Southern Italy, visitors do not queue up outside its Museum.<sup>15</sup> This is somewhat surprising, because Saint Columbanus' life story lends itself to legend. His extensive travels across Europe were

<sup>12</sup> The fieldwork lasted two weeks and was funded by the *Columbanus Life and Legacy Project*, a European joint program involving NUIG, the National University of Ireland, Galway; Université de Franche-Comté in Besançon and the Italian Università del Piemonte Orientale. *RHS Making Europe: Columbanus and his Legacy*, available at <http://royalhistosoc.org/calendar/making-europe-Columbanus-and-his-legacy/> (Accessed June 20th, 2017). In the same year, the international network *Making Europe: Columbanus and his Legacy* promoted three conferences: the first one in Bangor, Ireland, in May, the second in Luxeuil, France, in September and the last one in Bobbio, in November, on the anniversary of the Saint's death.

<sup>13</sup> L. Siggins, *NUIG students discover church linked to St Columbanus in Italy*, The Irish Times, available at <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/nuig-students-discover-church-linked-to-st-Columbanus-in-italy-1.2198790> (Accessed June 10th, 2016). Further information can be found in the internet article *Bobbio, gli scavi svelano l'ingresso della chiesa altomedievale*, available at [https://www.google.co.uk/?gws\\_rd=ssl#q=.+Archivio+Med+It+Bobbio,+gli+scavi&spf=1500797583472](https://www.google.co.uk/?gws_rd=ssl#q=.+Archivio+Med+It+Bobbio,+gli+scavi&spf=1500797583472) (Accessed February 25th, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> Burying the dead at the entrance of churches in order to remind visitors to pray for the deceased was not an unusual practice in an Italian Medieval context. Prayers would help shorten the time sinners had to wait in Purgatory before being admitted to Paradise. R. Conversi, & E. De Stefanis, *Bobbio, scavi nella chiesa di San Colombano. Si entra nella chiesa medioevale (5.3.2015)*, available at <http://www.lett.unipmn.it/allegati/2015/comunicato532015.pdf> (Accessed May 14th, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> The current opening times of the Museo dell'Abbazia di San Colombano in Bobbio are clearly not designed to entice hordes of visitors. This observation is mine; while the opening hours can be found on the Museum website, available at <http://www.sulleormedisancolombano.it/bobbio-cambiano-orari/> (Accessed August 14th, 2018). The fate of the two similarly successful Italian early medieval monastic houses could not have been more different. Richter wondered why Bobbio had sometimes been referred to as 'the Montecassino of Northern Italy' whereas Montecassino had never been called 'the Bobbio of the South'. M. Richter, *Bobbio in the Early Middle Ages* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2008), p. 9. Montecassino's Abbey, having been completely reconstructed after a bomb raid in 1944, presently attracts over one million tourists every year. This number is expected to increase with the scheduled building of a cable car link between the Abbey and the nearby village of Cassino. A. Marozzi, *All'abbazia di Montecassino in funivia: mille turisti l'ora*, Corriere della Sera, February 7th, 2015, available at [http://roma.corriere.it/notizie/cronaca/15\\_febbraio\\_07/all-abazia-montecassino-funivia-mille-turisti-l-ora-325b90f8-af03-11e4-99b7-9c6efa2c2dde.shtml](http://roma.corriere.it/notizie/cronaca/15_febbraio_07/all-abazia-montecassino-funivia-mille-turisti-l-ora-325b90f8-af03-11e4-99b7-9c6efa2c2dde.shtml) (Accessed March 20th, 2017).



astonishing deeds for the time; particularly because he undertook his missionary activity in his forties or even fifties.<sup>16</sup> His exceptional longevity and energy allowed him to found and run a network of thriving monasteries in continental Europe over a span of just over 25 years.<sup>17</sup> He did so whilst adhering to very strict, self-imposed monastic rules.<sup>18</sup>

Alexander O'Hara observes that Columbanus possessed all the characteristics of the ideal pastor as portrayed in the *Regula Pastoralis* by Pope Gregory the Great.<sup>19</sup> In his privileged outsider/insider position, he was confident in dealing with the upper echelon of continental Europe's society. He was a monk from a far-away country who claimed his religious practices had not been watered down. At the same time, the Irish society he came from shared values and beliefs with those of the *gentes* he met on his mission.<sup>20</sup> The works he has left us give the impression that he was very educated and intellectually active. His biographers stress that his worldly tasks did not detract him from his spiritual life and that he went on retreats, particularly in the year before he died.<sup>21</sup> There are no official records of his canonization. It is, however, believed to be less than thirty years from his death, under Bobolenus, Bobbio's third abbot.<sup>22</sup> The reputation of the saint led to a long-lasting cult as attested by many religious places in Northern Italy and other parts of Europe bearing his name.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>16</sup> The observation is mine. There are no written sources specifying the exact age Columbanus left Ireland, hence a slight disagreement among scholars. Please go to p. 18 for further information.

<sup>17</sup> The period of time the monk spent outside his native Ireland is estimated to be from 590, the year he is reported to have met King Sigbert, to 615. T. Leso, 'Columbanus in Europe: the evidence from the Epistulae', *Early Medieval Europe*, 21, available at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/emed.12023/full> (Accessed May 20th, 2017).

<sup>18</sup> The rules spelled out in Columbanus' *Regula monachorum* and *Regula caenobialis* combined abstinence from food, sleep deprivation and the practice of silence (aside from unremitting praying) with manual work and frequent genuflections in front of the Cross. Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism*, p. 152.

<sup>19</sup> A. O'Hara, 'Columbanus ad Locum', p. 170.

<sup>20</sup> I am employing the word *gentes* to mean the heterogeneous group of migrants settled on the territories of Western and Central Europe, formerly belonging to the Roman Empire, following A. O'Hara's usage. A. O'Hara, *Columbanus and the People of Post-Roman Europe* (Oxford: OUP, 2018), p. 9.

<sup>21</sup> M. Richter, *Bobbio in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 31.

<sup>22</sup> A. O'Hara, *Columbanus and the People of Post-Roman Europe*, pp. 6-7. In the aforementioned introduction, O'Hara expands on the gift-giving culture shared by the Irish and the *gentes*. Ibid., p.13. M. Tosi puts forward a hypothetical reconstruction of Columbanus' canonization, claiming that the commission to write the VC could have represented the first step in this process. M. Tosi, La liturgia di San Colombano a Bobbio, 1-6, p. 2, available at [http://www.saintColumban.eu/sito/b-il\\_santo/b\\_09-liturgia/documenti/13-la\\_liturgia\\_di\\_san\\_colombano\\_a\\_bobbio.pdf](http://www.saintColumban.eu/sito/b-il_santo/b_09-liturgia/documenti/13-la_liturgia_di_san_colombano_a_bobbio.pdf) (Accessed June 28th, 2018).

<sup>23</sup> A comprehensive list of all Italian surviving religious institution dedicated to Saint Columbanus will be provided in the Appendix. For information on churches and monasteries outside Italy, see the website of the *Associazione Amici di San Colombano per l'Europa*, available at <http://www.saintColumban.eu/index.php/it/il-santo/siti-e-monasteri-colombaniani> (Accessed June 25th, 2018).

## 1.2. Methodology and Research Questions

God had invested Columbanus with the task to leave his native country and spread the Christian message. Bobbio's foundation, Columbanus' swan's song, was auspicious and momentous because of its divine nature.<sup>24</sup> Although there is a convincing narrative of how the Abbey came into existence and prospered, some issues have not yet been satisfactorily explained. The objective of this work is to fill the gaps by employing multidisciplinary secondary sources in English and Italian in order to interpret and elaborate on primary sources. Particular attention will be taken to ascertain whether historical information had been deliberately left out in some of the primary sources and, if so, why. The research questions will be explored in Chapters 2 to 4. In Chapter 2 the reasons that attracted Columbanus to Italy will be sought. Chapter 3 will deal specifically with the choice of Bobbio as a site for the first Lombard abbey and provide some explanations for its fast growth. The final chapter will evaluate the impact of the Irish monastic tradition on Italian soil and survey the Abbey's political, social and cultural legacy.

The main primary sources on the creation of Bobbio Abbey have been made readily available in the past few years. As far as secondary sources in Italian are concerned, a few of the Italian key texts are downloadable from *academia.edu*. The majority of the other texts in Italian have been published by niche publishers and were printed on demand by e-libraries or purchased as second-hand copies. Until recently, the bulk of the secondary sources in English focused on Columbanus' French experience, apart from a few notable exceptions. From the notes and bibliographies of the older secondary literature, it surfaces that, due to the lack of translation and limited availability, Italian and English scholars had read each other only to some extent.<sup>25</sup> This is no longer the case, thanks to four multidisciplinary international conferences on Columbanus, whose papers have just been published and/or will be published in the near future.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Jonas quotes from Genesis XII.1. The exhortation of the Lord to Abraham is the reason for Columbanus to leave Ireland: "*Esci de terra tua, et de cognation tua, et de domo patris tui et vade in terra quam tibi mostrarero*", Jonas, *Vita Sancti Columbani*, B. Krusch (ed), 4, 9-11, p. 159, available at <https://archive.org/stream/ionaevitaesancto00jona#page/154/search/148> (Accessed 21st January 2017).

<sup>25</sup> R. Balzanelli, 'Bobbio in the Early Middle Ages' (review) *Project Muse*, 96, 1, 98-100 (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010). As Balzanelli points out, Michael Richter did not take into consideration De Stefanis' archaeological investigations when he wrote his 2008 monography.

<sup>26</sup> The first international conference, organized in 2013 by Alexander O'Hara in Vienna, launched a three-year research project called *The Columbanus Network; Social Networks, Elite Identities and Christian communities in Europe*.

### 1.3. Review of Primary Sources

#### 1.3.1. Primary Sources relating to Bobbio Abbey

Disappointingly, reliable primary sources on Bobbio Abbey are not as abundant as one would expect for an institution of such calibre. Most of the original legal records relating to transactions between the Abbey and its sponsors and protectors, the Lombard royal family, have been lost. The story of the Abbey was traced by piecing together late medieval copies of ninth and tenth century MSS. Some of these are forgeries, produced in the attempt to reconfirm former Lombard royal grants to the Abbey and Papal privileges. Most are held in the Turin State Archive, where Bobbio's collection, the *Codice diplomatico del monastero di San Colombano di Bobbio fino all'anno MCCVII* was divided by nineteenth century historians Cipolla and Buzzi into four groups: the first one dealing with donations, privileges and concessions; the second with the sale and purchase of goods, the third with the administration of abbatial properties, while the fourth contains miscellaneous papers.<sup>27</sup> Although their organization is somewhat arbitrary (MSS are arranged according to the dates when they were presumably issued for the first time rather than the age when they were actually copied), it is still followed today.

#### 1.3.2. Primary Sources on Saint Columbanus

The earliest biography of the Saint is the *Vita Columbani abbatis discepolorumque eius*, written by a monk known as Jonas of Susa (his birthplace) or Jonas of Bobbio (where he took his holy orders). Jonas' text is regarded as a vital record of early European monasticism.<sup>28</sup> Commissioned by Bertulf, third Abbot of Bobbio and dedicated to Waldebert, fourth Abbot of Luxeuil and, according to the most recent calculations, it is supposed to have been written from 642 to early 643.<sup>29</sup> Columbanus is believed to have died in 615; Jonas entered Bobbio just a few months afterwards.<sup>30</sup> On the one hand, some of the information provided by Jonas was very likely drawn from the accounts of some of the monks who had known him well. On the other hand, the VC's historical reliability is compromised by hagiographical conventions and Jonas' multiple agendas.<sup>31</sup> Symbolism is heavily

<sup>27</sup> E. Bardella, *Il monastero di San Colombano di Bobbio dalla sua fondazione (614) alla creazione della diocesi bobbiese (1014)* (Tesi di Laurea in Storia Medioevale, Dipartimento di Lettere, Arti, Storia e Società, Università di Parma, 2014), p. 5, available at [http://www.academia.edu/9838988/Il\\_monastero\\_di\\_San\\_Colombano\\_di\\_Bobbio\\_dalla\\_sua\\_fondazione\\_614\\_alla\\_creazione\\_della\\_diocesi\\_Bobbiese\\_1014](http://www.academia.edu/9838988/Il_monastero_di_San_Colombano_di_Bobbio_dalla_sua_fondazione_614_alla_creazione_della_diocesi_Bobbiese_1014) (Accessed July 12th, 2016).

<sup>28</sup> A. O'Hara, 'The Vita Columbani in Merovingian Gaul', *Early Medieval Europe* (17) 2 126-153, p. 135 (Oxford & Maiden: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), available at:

[http://www.academia.edu/198789/The\\_Vita\\_Columbani\\_in\\_Merovingian\\_Gaul](http://www.academia.edu/198789/The_Vita_Columbani_in_Merovingian_Gaul) (Accessed August 18th, 2017) and Jonas, *Vita Sancti Columbani*, translated by A. O'Hara & I. Wood, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> A. O'Hara, 'The Vita Columbani in Merovingian Gaul', p. 137.

<sup>30</sup> Jonas, *Vita Sancti Columbani*, translated by A. O'Hara & I. Wood, p. 31.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, p. 3

embroiled throughout the text in order to portray Columbanus as a Christian hero, thus safeguarding his memory and promoting a specific monastic ideal.<sup>32</sup> This interpretation is reinforced by the fact that the *VC* places particular attention to contemporary monasteries venerating the saint.<sup>33</sup>

The prototext of the *VC* was published in the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* in 1905. Its author, the German historian Bruno Krusch, based it on 114 MSS. Since the beginning of the eighteenth century, other MSS have been discovered, for a total of 187. The oldest amongst them is the ninth century Metz MS, probably originating from Luxeuil. O’ Hara and Wood supplemented this latter MS to the Krusch edition as a source text for their 2017 English translation of the *VC*. The existence of so many MSS of the *VC* produced at different times all over Europe is a testament to the fact that the saint’s popularity rose steadily throughout the Middle Ages.<sup>34</sup> The presence of several early copies is inferred by literary cross-references and attests the *VC*’s immediate and extensive diffusion.<sup>35</sup> Jonas’ original work consisted of two books. The first one concentrated on Columbanus; the second on the Life of Athala, Eustasius, the Nuns of Faremoutiers and Bobbio’s monks during Bertulf.<sup>36</sup> The oldest MS containing the *VC* in the order Jonas wanted it is Turin FIV, 26, dated to the end of the ninth century and a product of Bobbio.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>32</sup> O’Hara stresses Jonas’ efforts to reinstate the memory of Columbanus, still controversial ten years after his death, by comparing him to Jesus and/or St. John the Baptist. A. O’Hara, *Jonas of Bobbio and the Legacy of Columbanus*, p. 261. Jonas’ comparisons between Columbanus, Jesus or St. John the Baptist have been noticed by other scholars. D. A. Bullough in M. Lapidge, ‘The Career of Columbanus’, *Columbanus: Studies on the Latin Writings*, p.27 comments on the fact that the monks who left Ireland with Columbanus were 12, just like Jesus’ disciples. Richter remarks on Jonas’ superhuman depiction of Columbanus, who had allegedly left Ireland at the tender age of 20 after having achieved many accomplishments. Richter, *Bobbio in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 55.

<sup>33</sup> E. Johnston, ‘Movers and Shakers? How women shaped the Career of Columbanus’, *Columbanus and the People of Post-Roman Europe*, p. 70.

<sup>34</sup> A. O’Hara, *Jonas of Bobbio and the Legacy of Columbanus*, p. 26

<sup>35</sup> A. O’Hara, ‘The Vita Colombani in Merovingian Gaul’, p. 126.

<sup>36</sup> Jonas, *Vita Sancti Columbani*, translated by A. O’Hara. & I. Wood, I., p. 38; A. O’Hara, ‘The Vita Colombani in Merovingian Gaul’, p. 138. Chronological evidence and the rarity of the name Jonas has led to speculations that, in later life, the monk was known as Jonatus, the first abbot of Marchiennes, a French nunnery or a double house. A. O’Hara. ‘Patria, Peregrinatio, and Paenitentia’, p. 108. This implies that Jonas could have had a personal interest in writing the monastic rules for nuns contained in the second book of the *VC*. A. O’Hara, ‘The Vita Columbani in Merovingian Gaul’, p. 138.

<sup>37</sup> The first MS where the *VC* is presented in the order originally envisaged by Jonas is Turin FIV, 26, dated to the end of the ninth century and a product of Bobbio (A. O’Hara, *Jonas of Bobbio and the Legacy of Columbanus*, p. 26).

The second and last biography of Saint Columbanus is the *Miracula Sancti Columbani*, an anonymous work in prose dating from the second half of the tenth century, divided into 27 chapters and focusing on the last months of the Saint's life. It is thought to have been written by one of Bobbio's monks in order to reinforce the link with the deceased Saint trying to hang on to some of the Abbey's original privileges constantly threatened by local bishops. Some of the information in the *Miracula* has been lifted from Jonas. There are, however, some additional details that cannot be found in any other text and are probably derived from the monastic community's oral tradition.<sup>38</sup> In some MSS, the *Miracula* is placed immediately after the VC because it integrates some of the information missing from the latter.<sup>39</sup> Columbanus and Bobbio Abbey are mentioned by the eighth century Lombard courtier Paul the Deacon in his *Historia Longobardorum*<sup>40</sup>. The seventh century Frankish chronicle *Fredegarii et aliorum cronica* holds a few details on Agilulf and his family. Other information on Columbanus can be extrapolated from the three biographies of Saint Gallus, one of his closest disciples.<sup>41</sup>

### 1.3.3. Columbanus' Opus

G.S.M Walker in 1957 edited, provided an introduction to his first English translation of Columbanus' corpus, the *Life and Writings of St. Columbanus*. Although the translation of the Latin text contains some errors, Walker's compendium made the Saint's writings accessible and, at the same time, sparked many questions about their authenticity.<sup>42</sup> Pivotal for this research are Columbanus' letters, known collectively as the *Epistulae*. Unlike some other texts in Walker's

38 M. Richter, *Bobbio in the Early Middle Ages*, p 25.

39 The section in the *Historia Longobardorum* dedicated to Agilulf and his family is quite detailed compared to the other ones. This is because Paul the Deacon could rely on the *Historiola*, written by the monk and courtier Secundus of Non and now lost. R. Cervani, 'La fonte tridentina della *Historia Longobardorum*', 97-104, available at [http://www.museocivico.rovereto.tn.it/UploadDocs/5880\\_Roberta\\_Cervani\\_p\\_97.pdf](http://www.museocivico.rovereto.tn.it/UploadDocs/5880_Roberta_Cervani_p_97.pdf) (Accessed January 21, 2018).

<sup>40</sup> Jonas, *Vita Sancti Columbani*, translated by O'Hara, A. and Wood, I. (Liverpool: ULP, 2017), p. 2.

<sup>41</sup> According to Jonas, at the time of Columbanus' departure to Italy, Gallus became ill and decided to stay behind by the Steinbach river (now in Switzerland), where he started a hermitage, which over a century later, developed into St. Gallen Abbey. Although at times contradictory, Gallus' first anonymous biography, the *Vita sancti Galli vetustissima*, written in 670-80 shortly after his death is the only source providing information on the activity of Columbanus prior to his journey to Italy (D. A. Bullough, 'The Career of Columbanus' in Lapidge, M., *Columbanus: Studies on the Latin Writings*, pp. 1-28, p.27. The only copy of Gallus' second biography, the *Vita Galli* by Wettli, is bound with the VC in a St. Gallen mid-ninth century MS and dates to the beginning of the ninth century. Twenty years' after Wettli, Walahfrid Strabo wrote a third *Vita Galli*.

<sup>42</sup> D. A. Bullough, 'The Career of Columbanus' in Lapidge, M., *Columbanus: Studies on the Latin Writings*), p.25.

collection, all the *Ep.* bar the sixth and last one are now commonly ascribed to the Saint because of the idiosyncratic features they share.<sup>43</sup> Thought to have been written between 596 and 613, they provide key historical information and give a precious insight into Columbanus' bellicose personality and education, hence allowing to read, to an extent, between the lines of the *VC*.<sup>44</sup> The fact that only these two copies are known and that in both Swiss MSS the five letters are bound together could be a sign that they were not circulated during the Middle Ages, possibly because they would have revealed, and to some extent, tarnished Columbanus' reputation. In all likelihood, what is left is only the tip of the iceberg of his vast epistolary with fellow monks and powerful people all over Europe.<sup>45</sup> It seems feasible that Columbanus could have exchanged letters with the Lombard royal family prior to his arrival in Milan.<sup>46</sup>

The other texts penned by Columbanus examined in this dissertation are his three short pieces of monastic legislation, the *Regula monachorum* and the *Regula caenobialis*. There are no copies of these prior to the ninth century.<sup>47</sup> A short and a long version of both *Regula monachorum* and *Regula caenobialis* are available. The *Regula monachorum* is primarily concerned with diet and liturgy and does not indicate that Columban monks had different ranks, while the *Regula caenobialis* stipulates in detail how to deal with the monks who did not behave according to the rules of the community.<sup>48</sup> The Penitential is a manual stating what punishments have to be inflicted for what sin. These harsh, non-hierarchical and non-exhaustive instructions regulating monastic life did not work well once the Columban community expanded.<sup>49</sup> In Chapter 4, the possibility that the *RC* in Bobbio was rapidly integrated with other rules will be investigated.

<sup>43</sup> M. Lapidge, *Columbanus: Studies on the Latin Writings*, p. vii. The original copies of the *Ep.*, now lost, were found inside a MS in Bobbio and transcribed at the beginning of the seventeenth century by Patrick Fleming, an Irish Franciscan monk. (D. A. Bullough, 'The Career of Columbanus' in Lapidge, M., *Columbanus: Studies on the Latin Writings*, p.25.

<sup>44</sup> N. Wright, 'Columbanus' *Epistulae*.' in M. Lapidge (ed), *Columbanus: Studies on the Latin Writings*, p. 87 and F. Nuvolone, *Colman, Columba, Giona* (Bobbio: Edizioni Pontegobbo, 2015) p. 53.

<sup>45</sup> D. A. Bullough, 'Colombano, Santo'. *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 27, 1982, p. 1, available at [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/santo-colombano\\_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/santo-colombano_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/). (Accessed May 26th, 2016). For an extensive analysis of where C mentions previous letters see T. Leso, 'Columbanus in Europe: the evidence from the *Epistulae*', p. 361.

<sup>46</sup> The observation is mine.

<sup>47</sup> The earliest version of the *RC* is much older than the first MS of the *RB*. The latter is located in the Hatton MSt in Oxford's Bodleian Library and is estimated to have been written around 540. D. A. Bullough, 'The Career of Columbanus' in Lapidge, M., *Columbanus: Studies on the Latin Writings*, p. 11.

<sup>48</sup> A. O'Hara, *Jonas of Bobbio and the Legacy of Columbanus*, p.61.

<sup>49</sup> M. Dunn, 'Columbanus, charisma and the revolt of the monks in Bobbio', *Peritia* 1-27, available at <http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/3826/> (Accessed April 21st, 2017), p. 6.

#### 1.4. Review of secondary sources

On the occasion of the 1,400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Columbanus in 2015, a series of international conferences took place, triggering a renewed interest in the subject. Books, essays and articles on the Abbey and its founder have been very recently published in English. As an introduction to the broader topic of research the late Michael Richter comprehensive work *Bobbio in the Early Middle Age* (2008) was very useful. As O'Hara observed, this is 'the first extensive work in English' on Bobbio. Nonetheless, it contains a few inaccuracies; some of its tenets should be taken with reservations.<sup>50</sup> Richter's view that the Irish element was an integral part of the life of the Abbey has been partly superseded.

Alexander O'Hara has produced a bulk of work on different aspects of Columbanus' activity in Europe. The article he wrote for *Early Medieval Europe* on the intended audience of the *Vita Colombani* in Gaul is illuminating as it enables one to read Jonas in context and to make sense of some information that appear as incongruous, to a contemporary reader.<sup>51</sup> O'Hara's study of another biography by Jonas, the *Vita Johannis* and the inclusion of post-Krusch MSS in his and Ian Wood's translation of the VC. O'Hara's study of another biography by Jonas, the *Vita Johannis* and his discussion of two recently found post-Krusch MSS provide a new insight into Colombian studies.<sup>52</sup> Pivotal for this research is the article *Columbanus ad Locum*, where considerations on the choice of Bobbio as a site for a new monastery are made.<sup>53</sup> His latest edited book *Columbanus and the People of Post-Roman Europe* contains a selection of essays stemming from the international conference he organised in Vienna in 2013.<sup>54</sup> In August 2018, O'Hara's latest work *Jonas of Bobbio and the Legacy of Columbanus* was published. This text is a compendium and a development of the

<sup>50</sup> A. O'Hara, 'Review of *Bobbio in the Early Middle Ages* by Michael Richter', pp. 1-4, available at: [http://www.academia.edu/198790/Review\\_of\\_Michael\\_Richter\\_s\\_Bobbio\\_in\\_the\\_Early\\_Middle\\_Ages\\_The\\_Abiding\\_Legacy\\_of\\_Columbanus\\_Dublin\\_2008](http://www.academia.edu/198790/Review_of_Michael_Richter_s_Bobbio_in_the_Early_Middle_Ages_The_Abiding_Legacy_of_Columbanus_Dublin_2008) (Accessed August 20th, 2016).

<sup>51</sup> A. O'Hara, 'The *Vita Colombani* in Merovingian Gaul', *Early Medieval Europe* (17) 2 126-153 (Oxford & Maiden: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), available at: [http://www.academia.edu/198789/The\\_Vita\\_Colombani\\_in\\_Merovingian\\_Gaul](http://www.academia.edu/198789/The_Vita_Colombani_in_Merovingian_Gaul) (Accessed August 18th, 2017).

<sup>52</sup> A. O'Hara, *Columbanus and Jonas of Bobbio: New Textual Witnesses*, 188-190, available at <https://www.academia.edu/people/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&q=O%E2%80%99Hara+Columbanus+and+Jonas+of+Bobbio%3A+New+Textual+Witnesses> (Accessed August 21st, 2017) p.190.

and Jonas, *Vita Sancti Columbani*, translated by O'Hara, A. and Wood, I. (Liverpool: ULP, 2017), p. 39.

<sup>53</sup> A. O'Hara, 'Columbanus ad Locum', *Peritia*, 26 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015) pp. 143-170.

<sup>54</sup> A. O'Hara, *Columbanus and the People of Post-Roman Europe*.

scholar's previous publications and represents the most up-to-date work on Columbanus and 'columbanism'. Marilyn Dunn's exploration of the intense relationship between Columbanus and the royal court is captivating.<sup>55</sup> In addition, her analysis of Jonas as a Merovingian courtier tallies with O'Hara.<sup>56</sup> The duplicitous role of Jonas as a monk and an adviser at the Frankish court is

The key Italian texts consulted in this research are the following:

*Il monastero longobardo di Bobbio* by Alessandro Zironi, a philologist in Germanic languages from the University of Bologna contains an exhaustive linguistic analysis of the anthroponyms used in the VC in order to establish the ethnicity of Columban monks. It also includes a thorough reconstruction of the MSS that once belonged to Bobbio's library. The author, like most of the Italian 'school', argues that the Irish dimension of the Abbey has been overstated and its character was predominantly Lombard.<sup>61</sup> Eleonora De Stefanis, Professor of Late Classical and Medieval Archaeology at the Università del Piemonte Orientale, has authored, among many others, three academic texts crucial for this dissertation. Her work matches primary sources with a study of the local landscape, including pilgrim routes and the organisation of the territory before and after the foundation of Bobbio Abbey.<sup>61</sup> Her findings are corroborated by a systematic evaluation of the artefacts discovered in the town of Bobbio and the surrounding countryside.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>55</sup> M. Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism* (Maiden, MA: Blackwell, 2001).

<sup>56</sup> M. Dunn, 'Columbanus, charisma and the revolt of the monks in Bobbio'.

<sup>57</sup> The German historian's in-depth investigation of the VC reveals how the Holy Scriptures and the Early Christian hagiographical tradition are employed by Jonas to justify Columbanus' outspoken and judgmental nature on the assumption that he was speaking the word of God.<sup>58</sup> Yaniv Fox's exploration of the connections between members of the Agilolfing family, some of whom were among the first disciples of Columbanus, gives the foundation of Bobbio a European perspective within the Early Medieval historical context.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>58</sup> D. von der Nahmer, *Agiografia altomedievale e uso della Bibbia*, (Naples: Liguori, 2001). This text has been published exclusively in Italian.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*, p. 228.

<sup>60</sup> Y. Fox, *Power and Religion in Merovingian Gaul* (Cambridge: CUP, 2014), p. 64.

<sup>61</sup> A. Zironi, *Il monastero longobardo di Bobbio* (Spoleto: Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 2004), p. 117. For a detailed linguistic analysis of the names of the monks mentioned in Jonas, see *ibid.*, pp. 28-46.

<sup>62</sup> E. De Stefanis' *Il monastero di Bobbio in età altomedievale* (2000) revisits primary sources in light of archaeological findings *in situ*. *Materiali lapidei e fittili di età altomedievale da Bobbio* ((Piacenza: Ed. Tip.Le.Co, 2004) contains a survey of tombstones and building material found locally. Both texts include original maps and images. *Il monastero di Bobbio sulle vie del pellegrinaggio altomedievale* originates from the papers delivered at a 2010 study day in Genoa entitled *Pellegrinaggi e monachesimo celtico. Dall'Irlanda alle sponde del mediterraneo* and dedicated to Irish monasticism and pilgrimage. The focus here is on the Abbey as a stop-over point on trans-European pilgrim routes and the hospitality network that developed around pilgrimage.



## 2. 1 Peregrinatio pro Christi

In order to understand why monks left Hibernia on a mission of evangelisation of continental Europe, one has to start with Columbanus' *Epistulae*. The tone and content of his letters ooze with pride for his Irish roots.<sup>63</sup> He is aware of belonging to a long lineage of wise men, whom he calls *viventes magistri* ('the living masters'), who have followed on from *defuncti magistri* ('the dead masters', that is, the Church Fathers).<sup>63</sup> Columbanus believed in the Primacy of the Pope and was convinced that only the Irish church could save the Papacy. In doing so, he breaks away from the Antique and Early Christian perception of the Irish as 'barbaric'.<sup>64</sup> The language of his fifth letter to Pope Boniface IV is peppered with military metaphors, revealing a combative and somewhat arrogant Columbanus. Such image echoes that of Christian Warrior as spelled out in Paul's *Instructio* II to Timothy and clashes with Columbanus' posthumous reputation.<sup>65</sup> Flavio Nuvolone, the editor of the *Archivium Bobiense*, compares Columbanus' mission to eradicate paganism to St. Patrick's task of fighting druidism. Like his Irish predecessor, Columbanus believed that God had endowed him with supernatural powers to enable him to perform his role as a guardian of the Church. The scholar also comments that the VC is underpinned by metaphors of the sun bringing light to a dark, corrupt world in an anticlockwise trajectory from West to East. He suggests that the sun symbol, a favourite in Celtic art, can be seen interwoven with Lombard ornamental motifs in the stone carvings at Bobbio Abbey's Museum.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>63</sup> It is worth noting that Columbanus' concept of Irishness does not share the features making up the contemporary notion of Irish national identity. T. Leso, 'Columbanus in Europe: the evidence from the *Epistulae*', pp. 363. When debating on the calculation of the Easter date, Columbanus expresses his gratitude for the teaching of his masters (ibid., p. 364) He also declares that he comes from the end of the world, where heresy and schism never occurred (ibid., p. 366-7). Leso's observation on the newly acquired role of the Irish church can be found in ibid., p. 382.

<sup>64</sup> M. Richter, *Bobbio in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 35-8.

<sup>65</sup> A. O'Hara, 'Patria, Peregrinatio, and Paenitentia', p. 118.

<sup>66</sup> F. Nuvolone, *Colman, Columba, Giona* (Bobbio: Edizioni Pontegobbo, 2015) pp.18-20.

Monasticism in Ireland in the fifth century had flourished, partly on the basis of their freedom to spread the Christian message without the interference of other religious institutions, such as Bishoprics. In this respect, local monks enjoyed an unprecedented degree of autonomy. A population growth was boosted by the advent of new technologies, such as corn drying kilns and horizontal mills. Excavations have uncovered traces of many new settlements from the end of the fifth to the seventh century. A range of vessels for transporting the Irish monasteries' surplus produce abroad, which was mainly grain, in exchange for Mediterranean imported goods has been discovered. The presence of *amphorae* in different Irish archaeological sites has revealed a thriving wine trade. At the top end, trade involved precious minerals for MS illumination, such as orpiment from Vesuvius discovered in Argyll.<sup>67</sup> Commerce took place by sea and river. The wine trade routes along the Rhône in the Loire Valley towards Nantes and Tours created the infrastructure for what later would become, with the development of the cult of relics, increasingly busy pilgrim trails.<sup>68</sup> Travel from Ireland to mainland Britain and continental Europe increased because of the newly acquired affluence. Missionaries sent from the British Isles rather than from Rome carried out the conversion of many European countries to Catholicism between the fifth and seventh centuries. This is reflected in the high number of early medieval saints with Irish origin who used to be worshipped on the Continent: 115 estimated for Germany, 45 for France, 44 for England, 36 for Belgium and 18 for Italy.<sup>69</sup>

*Peregrinatio pro Christi*, that is, the voluntary exile from one's country (and consequently, the loss of material comforts and social support network) to spread the 'authentic' Christian message, was a form of atonement in Irish society.<sup>70</sup> As Jonas specifies, Columbanus had to seek the permission of Comgall before leaving Bangor Abbey. Von der Nahmer observes that Jonas in the *VC* uses *coepit*, the third person singular of the verb *coepere*, which conveys a sense of 'acceptance' of the pilgrimage rather than a desire or a wish to leave.<sup>71</sup>

The term *peregrinatio* had a nuance of meanings, ranging from shameful expulsion from the community to a way to repent from sin and attain spiritual perfection. In some cases, it could become a travel privilege granted to Church leaders. Exceptional findings such as the tombstone of

<sup>67</sup> The volcanic rock was probably for the Iona community in the Inner Hebrides. C. Loveluck & A. O'Sullivan 'Travel, Transport and Communication to and from Ireland c. 400-1100' in *The Irish in Early Medieval Europe*, Flechner, R. & Meeder, S. (eds), p. 27.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>69</sup> Panzeri, G., *San Colombano Evangelizzatore dell'Europa* (Turin: Elledici, 2015), p. 1.

<sup>70</sup> *Exile in the Middle Ages*, Napran & Van Hours (eds) in A. O'Hara, 'Patria, Peregrinatio, and Paenitentia', p. 92.

<sup>71</sup> D. von der Nahmer, *AgioGRAFIA altomedievale e uso della Bibbia*, p. 235.

Abbot Cumian (dated to the first half of the eighth century) in Bobbio's cathedral hints to the possibility that senior insular church figures were allowed to spend their final years away from their original monastery.<sup>72</sup>

According to the Jonas' account of the encounter between Columbanus and the Irish anchoress, *peregrinatio* was not available to women, whose only option of spiritual salvation was isolating in secluded places.<sup>73</sup> The biographer points out that by becoming a monk, the teenage Columbanus is able to escape from female attention.<sup>74</sup> The fact that he was the target of explicit sex offers just on the basis of his good looks is rather far-fetched and reinforces the idea that he might have been wealthy and therefore a 'good catch'. However, he would have not been able to fulfil his life's ambitions if he had been tied up to a woman and children.<sup>75</sup> The driving force behind *peregrinatio* seems to be religious fervour, particularly at the beginning. Later on, other considerations such as Viking attacks, the concentration of scriptoria in a few larger monasteries and the rise of Irish asceticism might have played a part.<sup>76</sup> It cannot be completely ruled out that, like in the case of Saint Columba of Iona, Columbanus' exile might have been politically motivated.<sup>77</sup> The status of a missionary was akin to that of a king or a Bishop, thus enabling Columbanus to target royal courts, where he offered spiritual advice in exchange for patronage and protection.<sup>78</sup> Once he was given financial support, he chose as sites for his monasteries areas as far away as possible from those very courts.<sup>79</sup> Insular evangelisation was a top-down phenomenon, a form of re-Christianisation, which has little in common with the contemporary notion of missionary work. This explains why there were pagan *gentes* that Columbanus and other insular monks never set out to convert, such as the Avars and the Slavs.<sup>80</sup> Although *peregrinatio* did not necessarily involve a long journey to the continent, there is evidence that many monks went far afield.<sup>81</sup> Unfortunately, the exact nature of the links between the Irish missionaries and the monasteries they left behind is still unknown.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>72</sup> For more information on St Cumian's tombstone, commissioned by the Lombard King Liutprand, see E. De Stefanis, *Il monastero di Bobbio in età altomedioevale* (Florence: All'insegna del Giglio, 2002), pp. 51-53.

<sup>73</sup> D. von der Nahmer, D., *Agiografia altomedievale e uso della Bibbia*, p. 233.

<sup>74</sup> "lascivarum puellarum in eum suscitare t amores" Jonas, *Vita Columbani*, I, 3.22, p. 155, available at <https://archive.org/stream/ionaevitaesancto00jona#page/154/search/148> (Accessed January 21st, 2017).

<sup>75</sup> The observations are mine.

<sup>76</sup> *The Irish in Early Medieval Europe*, Flechner, R. & Meeder, S. (eds), p. 5.

<sup>77</sup> A. O'Hara, *Columbanus and the People of Post-Roman Europe*, pp. 10 and 58.

<sup>78</sup> A. O'Hara, 'Patria, Peregrinatio, and Paenitentia', p. 98.

<sup>79</sup> A. O'Hara, *Columbanus and the People of Post-Roman Europe*, p. 6.

<sup>80</sup> H. Wolfram, 'Columbanus and the Missions to the Bavarians and the Slavs in the Seventh century' in A. O'Hara, *Columbanus and the People of Post-Roman Europe*, pp. 10 and 58.

<sup>81</sup> A. O'Hara, 'Patria, Peregrinatio, and Paenitentia', p. 93.

<sup>82</sup> *The Irish in Early Medieval Europe*, Flechner, R. & Meeder, S. (eds), p. 5.

Jonas gives the impression that when Columbanus and his fellow monks set off from Ireland in 590-1 they did not have a specific destination in mind.<sup>83</sup> In reality, Columbanus in Gaul seems to have followed the path of British monks with king Guntram (561-592).<sup>84</sup> Although *peregrinatio* was neither a new, nor an exclusively Irish practice, it became a characteristic of Irish monasticism between the sixth and eighth centuries.<sup>85</sup>

## 2.2. The attributes of the Christian Warrior

Columbanus is not mentioned in any old Irish sources and the only mention that he had spent his formative years first in Cleenish monastery in County Fermanagh and subsequently in Bangor monastery in County Down is in the *VC*.<sup>86</sup> Nuvolone's table of the 'compression' of the events narrated in the *VC* is a clear indication that Jonas' audience would not have been too interested or would not have understood much about Columbanus' Irish past.<sup>87</sup> Jonas contradicts himself by writing that before emigrating, Columbanus spent '*annorum multorum circulis*' in Ireland and that he departed in his *vicensimum* year.<sup>88</sup> Whether this is a copyist's mistake or a detail based on an unreliable oral tradition, it is logical to assume that a man of 20 would not have possessed the necessary experience to carry out missionary work abroad. On the other hand, the accepted assumption that the monk left Ireland in his fifties - at a time when people's life span was much shorter than today - calls for a leap of the imagination. Judging from the details provided by hagiographies and tombstones, it appears that those few saints who chose martyrdom in the form of *peregrinatio* lived to a ripe old age. Compared to others, Columbanus was relatively young when he died at 75. His closest companion Gallus died at 96 and his namesake Columba of Iona at 86. St. Cumian, an Irish Abbot who came to Bobbio at the end of the eighth century, died at 95. It is very likely that Irish monastic life was, despite its rigour, a recipe for a very active and long life.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>83</sup> A. O'Hara, 'Patria, Peregrinatio, and Paenitentia, p. 35.

<sup>84</sup> E. Johnston, 'A. O' Hara, *Columbanus and the People of Post-Roman Europe*, p. 97.

<sup>85</sup> A. O'Hara, 'Patria, Peregrinatio, and Paenitentia, p. 97.

<sup>86</sup> D. A. Bullough, '*Colombano, Santo*', p. 7.

<sup>87</sup> F. Nuvolone, *Colman, Columba, Giona*, p.29.. Dunn makes the same point when she calls the *VC* an "elliptical piece of writing". M. Dunn, 'Columbanus, Charisma and the Revolt of the Monks in Bobbio', p. 2.

<sup>88</sup> Jonas, *Vita Columbani*, B. Krusch (ed), I, 4.6, p. 160, available at

<https://archive.org/stream/ionaevitaesancto00jona#page/154/search/148> (Accessed January 21st, 2017)

<sup>89</sup> The observations are mine.

Further chronological confusion is caused by Jonas' assertion that, when Columbanus arrived in France, he was met by King Sigibert, under whose patronage he founded his first French monastery, Luxeuil. Columbanus writes in his letter to the Bishops at the Synod of Chalon between 612 and 614 that he had lived in France for twenty years, that is, since 590 or 591. This information rules out having ever met Sigibert, who had died and had been succeeded by his son Childebert in 575. Moreover, Jonas describes Sigibert as the King of both Burgundy and Austrasia, whereas he was only the King of Burgundy. It was Sigibert's son who united the two kingdoms after having inherited Austrasia from his uncle.<sup>90</sup>

Travelling long distances fourteen centuries ago was a perilous enterprise. Accommodation and nourishment were hard to come by. Columbanus and his companions had to contend with bandits and wild animals. Irish missionaries brought to continental Europe a series of practical skills they had acquired from their monasteries' oral tradition, which extended from agricultural innovation to healing.<sup>91</sup> These "Christian warriors" were forged in austere Irish monasteries and belonged to the Irish aristocracy. Among their recruits were the offspring of the Continental nobility.<sup>92</sup> In the first of his *Ep.*, Columbanus defines himself as 'bar-Jonah', Irish for the son of Jonah, the Old Testament prophet who was sent to the East but went to the West instead. Like Jonah, Columbanus survived a shipwreck.<sup>93</sup> His new continental identity as an *alienus* gave him the freedom to interact freely with aristocrats and senior members of the Church. At the same time, his marginal status gave him the power of *parrhesia*, that is, to speak candidly about any topic, including sensitive ones.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>90</sup> A. O'Hara, 'Columbanus ad Locum', pp. 146-7.- The Metz MSS were unknown to Krusch. In Metz, Gran Seminaire I, the name of the king met by Columbanus on his arrival in France is Hydelbert. Only the eleventh century MS Metz Biblioteque Municipale 523 refers to Childebert. Mentioning Sigibert in lieu of the actual king had an added value, since he did not have any connections with Brunhild's disgraced side of the family. Jonas, *Vita Sancti Columbani*, translated by A. O'Hara and I. Wood, p. 21.

<sup>91</sup> A. Van Arsdall, *Medieval Herbal Remedies. The Old English Herbarium and Anglo-Saxon Medicine* (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 82.

<sup>92</sup> A. O'Hara, *Saint Columbanus. Selected Writings* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2015) p. 24.

<sup>93</sup> A. O'Hara, 'Patria, Peregrinatio and Paenitentia', p. 109.

<sup>94</sup> M. Dunn, 'Columbanus, Charisma and the Revolt of the Monks in Bobbio', p. 4.

While Columbanus' defiance made him very unpopular with the Frankish clergy, his community prospered under the initial protection of the Merovingian.<sup>95</sup> This was, however, not destined to last. Columbanus' refusal to christen King Theudeeric II's illegitimate children was an astounding decision for many reasons. Firstly, denying baptism to a child born out of wedlock, although left to the discretion of the priests, was, and is, extremely uncommon and, in this case, they were the children of a royal dynasty who had welcomed and financed him for many years. Despite realizing the dire consequences of his act, Columbanus would not compromise.<sup>96</sup> The inheritance of the kingdom by the 'legitimate' first born was a practice that had not been fully embraced by Germanic rulers in the seventh century.<sup>97</sup> Besides, the power of the regent Brunhild would have been threatened if her grandson Theudeeric had married. Paradoxically, whereas the Irish man did not expect secular power to interfere in the management of his monasteries, he publicly meddled with Merovingian dynastic matters. Eventually, in 610, Theudeeric II expelled him and other senior members of his community on ethnic grounds, that is, for his unwillingness to conform to local practices.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>95</sup> M. Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism* (Maiden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), p. 159

<sup>96</sup> Columbanus' disapproval of the King's private life is in line with the misogyny that permeates the VC. Women were rated only as bearer of heirs. In all other instance, they represented a hindrance, e.g. Columbanus' mother pleading him not to go away, a temptation or plain evil, as in the case of Brunhild, who wanted her illegitimate grandchildren to inherit the throne and becomes Jonas' scapegoat (Rosenwein, B., *Emotional Communities in the early middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 197, available at <http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/3826/>. (Accessed on April 21st, 2017). On the other hand, it must have been difficult for Columbanus to keep his Merovingian sponsors happy. The time he spent in Gaul was characterized by bloody family feuds where legitimacy of birth and succession always played a part. (I. Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751* (Harlow: Longman, 1994), pp. 91-93. On a different note, Columban monasticism gave heiresses the opportunity to become independent by choosing of founding a nunnery instead of getting married (Y. Fox, *Power and Religion in Merovingian Gaul*, p. 25). My observation is that Brunhild's son hadn't married yet because she was still on the lookout for a wife who could fit into her plans.

<sup>97</sup> Like the Franks, at the beginning of the seventh century the Lombard had not fully embraced the concept of a hereditary monarchy. Agilulf and Theodolinda broke new ground. However, after eight years' regency with his mother, Adaloald was craftily disposed of. The observation is mine.

<sup>98</sup> A. O'Hara, 'Patria, Peregrinatio and Paenitentia', p. 91.

Dunn and Rosenwein underline the key role played by the Irishman's charisma within his monastic community. Although the affectionate letter he wrote to the brothers he had to leave behind in Luxeuil contains some clichés, his feelings still come across as genuine.<sup>99</sup> Columbanus' authority was the result of the 'emotional' community he had built and did not need to be underpinned by a written rule. The Irish 'emotional' form of communal relationship did not suit continental monasticism.<sup>100</sup>

Columbanus had high expectations of his monks and no interest in establishing a hierarchical relationship, which would break the informal rapport between senior and junior members based on admiration, imitation and mutual respect. The supreme entity for the Benedictine Rule was God, followed by the Rule itself, whereas for the Columban Rule it was the Abbot.<sup>101</sup> Once Columbanus left Gaul, his monastic regime proved difficult to administrate for Athala, whom he had appointed as the second abbot of Luxeuil. Perhaps more of a zealous bureaucrat than an inspirational figure, he experienced difficulties in keeping discipline and eventually departed Luxeuil and headed for Bobbio.<sup>102</sup> Athala, who took control of Bobbio from 615 to 626, probably at some stage started to integrate the Columban rule with others to avoid the revolts similar to those that had occurred in France.<sup>103</sup>

### **2.3 Columbanus' activity in Milan**

The information supplied by Jonas on Columbanus' activities in Gaul are more detailed and reliable than his accounts of the Saint's life in Ireland and Italy.<sup>104</sup> In the Krusch edition of the *VC*, only three paragraphs out of 61 are dedicated to the monk's arrival in Italy. These are the last 82 lines of the text and include nearly as many digressions as factual content.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>99</sup> B. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 160.

<sup>100</sup> M. Dunn, 'Columbanus, Charisma and the Revolt of the Monks in Bobbio', pp 15- 6.

<sup>101</sup> *ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>102</sup> *ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>103</sup> Scholars have provided various explanations on which rule/rules Athala might have chosen to integrate the *RC*.

<sup>104</sup> M. Richter, *Bobbio in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 26.

<sup>105</sup> The observation is mine.

According to Jonas, the monk's journey from Burgundy to Milan was rather tortuous and lasted approximately two years. The direction he took towards East was very likely influenced by the existence of a Luxeuil cell on the island of Herrenchiemsee in Bavaria.<sup>106</sup> In late 613 Theudebert II, Columbanus' sponsor, died and was replaced by the hostile Theudeeric II. In the light of this, Columbanus considered moving further East to preach the pagan Wendish Slavs. The intervention of an angel in a dream made him change his mind.<sup>107</sup> There are no sources confirming that Rome was to be his final destination, other than the admiration for the city of Saint Peter he expressed in his letters.<sup>107</sup> Jonas only mentions 'Italy' as his next destination.<sup>108</sup>

The most popular route from Bregenz to Milan has for centuries been via Bellinzona in the Canton Ticino.<sup>110</sup> When Columbanus reached Milan, the majority of northern Italy was ruled by the Lombards, an abbreviation for Longobards, literally meaning '(men with) long beards'. This was a composite ethnic group, made up of different tribes and ruled by Agilulf, second husband of Theodolinda, a Bavarian noblewoman. It is pertinent to note that Theodolinda's first husband, the Lombard King Authari, might have been poisoned and she was advised to remarry Agilulf, Duke of Turin. Theodolinda played an instrumental role in Early Medieval Italian history. As in the case of Merovingian queens, her position of power was not an institutional one and depended almost entirely on personal circumstances.<sup>111</sup> Theodolinda and her daughter from her first marriage, Gundeberga, established hereditary regency in the Lombard Kingdom.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>106</sup> The cell in Bavaria is an example of how a religious mission could become part of a greater plan of Merovingian expansion. A. Y. Fox, 'Between Metz and Überlingen: Columbanus and Gallus in Alemannia' *Columbanus and the Peoples of Post-Roman Europe*, p. 219.

<sup>107</sup> Evangelisation was very important to Columbanus and the members of his *familia*; hence the angel could be a literary device Jonas employed to justify why Columbanus did not stay in Bregenz or head east.

<sup>108</sup> A. O'Hara, *Jonas of Bobbio and the Legacy of Columbanus*, p. 251.

<sup>109</sup> A. O'Hara, 'Columbanus ad Locum', p. 167.

<sup>110</sup> The old Roman road led from Bregenz to Chur, the capital of the Graubünden canton. From here, the easiest way into Italy was through the Splügen Pass and the Little St. Bernard Pass onto Bellinzona in the Canton Ticino (D. A. Bullough, 'Colombano, Santo', p. 15).

<sup>111</sup> E. Johnston, 'Movers and Shakers? How women shaped the Career of Columbanus', in *Columbanus and the People of Post-Roman Europe*, p. 77.



Italy's religious situation was intrinsically linked to its political one and just as problematic. Since 584, the rest of the Italian peninsula had been in the hands of the different exarchs appointed by the Byzantine Empire governing from Ravenna, the former capital of the Roman Western Empire. The bishops and the pope, officially the fifth patriarch, answered to the Byzantine Emperor. When Agilulf was confirmed King after having married Authari's widow in 590, he could only count on the support of the Neustria dukes in the northwest of the Po Valley. Hence, he took the decision to rule from Milan rather than from the original Lombard royal capital of Pavia, where he would have been unsafe.<sup>113</sup> In the following 20 years Agilulf successfully managed to secure the Lombard power in Italy by fending off his enemies and forming alliances with the Franks and the Ravenna Exarchate. Taking advantage of the Franks' temporary weakness due to the Merovingian dynastic crisis and the threat of being invaded by the Avars, Agilulf concentrated on establishing his authority over the feuding Lombard dukes.<sup>114</sup> In the winter of 593 Lombard troops patrolling the Holy See border besieged poorly defended Rome.<sup>115</sup> Pope Gregory the Great had no choice but to pay Agilulf 500 gold pounds yearly in order to save the city.<sup>116</sup> A very expensive three-year peace was also sought by the Exarch of Ravenna in 606. A series of truces between the Lombards and the Byzantines ensured a sort of *amicitia*, a parenthesis of relative stability until 625.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, Agilulf effectively curbed the power of the Lombard aristocracy by continuing the policy started by Rothari, who entrusted paid officials directly responsible to the king called *gastaldi* with the administration of the royal *demesne*.<sup>118</sup>

<sup>113</sup> G. Arnosti, 'Il regno di Milano 591-616'. in *Cenita Feliciter* [E Book], available at [https://www.academia.edu/30625190/Il\\_regno\\_longobardo\\_di\\_Milano\\_e\\_re\\_Agilulfo\\_aa.591-616\\_.in\\_academia.edu\\_2016\\_](https://www.academia.edu/30625190/Il_regno_longobardo_di_Milano_e_re_Agilulfo_aa.591-616_.in_academia.edu_2016_). (Accessed on November 5th, 2016), p. 1.

<sup>114</sup> *ibid.* p. 2. The Lombard *gens* were a heterogeneous mix of *farae*, military and social units who migrated from Pannonia (Hungary, western Austria and parts of Slovenia and Croatia) to northern Italy. They had an oligarchic ruling system, where decisions were taken by the *arimanni* (freemen who could fight) in an assembly. The *farae* were headed by different, often rival, families. Central authority was often challenged by Lombard dukes through alliances with Byzantium or the Franks. E. Bardella, *Il monastero di San Colombano di Bobbio dalla sua fondazione (614) alla creazione della diocesi bobbiese* (1014,) p. 33. Although previous Lombard kings had tried unsuccessfully to reign long-term, Agilulf was the first to succeed. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>115</sup> *ibid.* p. 3. The payment of the *militaris roga* of the Pope's army was overdue. This seems to be the case also for the Lombard troops in Umbria, hence their restlessness and raid of Rome.

<sup>116</sup> *ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>117</sup> *ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>118</sup> G. Musina, *Le campagne di Piacenza tra VII e IX secolo*, Dottorato di Ricerca Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna, 2012, p. 30, available at <http://amsdottorato.unibo.it/5080/> (Accessed September 17th, 2016).

From the second half of the sixth century, some Northern Italian bishops became involved with the Three Chapters Controversy. It started in 553, when the bishop of Aquileia in the North East of Italy, near the current border with Slovenia, proclaimed himself as a ‘patriarch’, thus entering in conflict with Rome. The schism reached other areas in Northern Italy, such as the regions now known as Liguria, Emilia-Romagna and Lombardy. Even though the friction between the supporters of the Three Chapters and the Papacy diminished over the decades, it was not officially settled until the Synod of Aquileia in 698.<sup>119</sup> Columbanus was well aware of these tensions before his arrival. This can be inferred from his fifth letter, presumed to be written in 613 and addressed to Boniface IV. Here, he claims that Agilulf and Theodolinda had ‘insisted’ he wrote to the Pope.<sup>120</sup> There is no evidence that the Lombard King ever converted to Catholicism, while his consort was a schismatic follower. Hence, their alleged resolve to eradicate religious unorthodoxy can be viewed as an opportunity to strengthen the Lombard relationship with Rome rather than having a genuine theological concern.<sup>121</sup> In Lombard society different faiths appear to have peacefully coexisted, as suggested by the presence in Verona and Pavia of both a Roman Catholic and an Arian cathedral.<sup>122</sup> Arianism is hardly mentioned by Paul the Deacon.<sup>123</sup>

In his fifth *Epistula*, Columbanus recalls having received a letter from the Three Chapter schismatic Agrippinus lamenting the fact that the Arian heresy thrived locally and denouncing Pope Boniface’s laissez faire attitude. He adds not having replied to Agrippinus yet and offers to attach his answer to the letter should the Pope make some amendments for the sake of the truth.<sup>124</sup>

<sup>119</sup> This was a theological dispute started in 543. ‘Three Chapters’ referred to early fifth century texts written by three bishops belonging to the Turkish theological school of Antioch, stressing the distinction between the human and divine nature of Jesus. Their doctrines were condemned by the Chalcedon Council in 451. ‘Tre Capitoli’, available at <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/tre-capitoli/> (Accessed March 17th, 2017).

<sup>120</sup> N. Wright, ‘Columbanus’ Epistulae’ in M. Lapidge, *Columbanus: Studies on the Latin Writings* pp.29-92, p. 29.

<sup>121</sup> P. Majocchi, ‘Arianorum abolevit heresen’, *Arianism: Roman Heresy and Barbarian Creed*, p. 121. The translation of the Bible into Gothic by Ulfila in 277 contributed to spread the Arian creed to several Germanic tribes. The eradication of the Arian heresy gave the Byzantine Emperor Justinian a moral justification for reconquering the West from the ‘Barbarians’. Arianism eventually became a unifying factor for Germanic people. Otherness of faith became an important instrument for forging alliances and fighting enemies. Mirsanu, D., ‘The Imperial Policy of Otherness: Justinian and the Arianism of Barbarians as a Motive for the Recovery of the West’ in *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*, 84; 4, 477-498, p. 495. In the particular case of the Lombards, practical considerations appear to have been prioritized on matters of religion. Suffice to say that the Lombard King Alboin, who conquered Northern Italy between 568 and 572, had converted to Arianism in order to reinforce the bond between the various Germanic tribes he led. After a tumultuous coup d’état, Alboin was eventually followed by Cleph, whose son and successor Authari would strategically marry the Bavarian Catholic Queen Theodolinda in 589. Mirsanu believes that Authari’s controversial verbal ban on Catholic baptisms, which was on the rise, was motivated by the need to curb the influence of Italic bishops rather than by a religious conviction. *Ibid.*, p.495.

<sup>122</sup> *ibid.*, p. 232.

<sup>123</sup> C. Falluomini, ‘Arianism: Roman Heresy and Barbarian Creed’, *Aevum* 91, 1 (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2017), pp. 277-9.

<sup>124</sup> F. Nuvolone, *Colman, Columba, Giona*, p. 90.

Unfortunately, the correspondence between the Bishop of Como and Columbanus cited here has been lost. A close reading of Columbanus' prose has highlighted that on one occasion he contradicts himself, hence casting doubt that he had fully grasped the subtleties of the Controversy.<sup>125</sup> More likely, he preferred to maintain the position of 'external observer'.<sup>126</sup> The second hypothesis would make more sense, given that what was really at stake, rather than an erudite debate on the nature of the Trinity, was the autonomy of the Italic bishops from the Pope and the independence of the Papacy from Byzantium.<sup>127</sup>

Columbanus and his companions arrived in Milan after the death of Theodoric II (believed to be in late 613) and that they spent one year there before moving on to Bobbio.<sup>128</sup> Zironi puts forward that Arian or Pagan Lombard military troops, whose camps were just outside Milan, were his target for conversion.<sup>129</sup> This would tally with Jonas' reference to a treatise against Arianism allegedly penned by Columbanus during his time in Milan, a "*libellum florenti scientia*", with the intention of "*hereseorum fraudes id est Arriane perfidie, Scripturarum cauterio discerni*".<sup>130</sup> The booklet, originally identified as the sermon *De Fidel*, is not Columbanus' work.<sup>131</sup> In any case, it is highly unlikely that the Lombard army could have been the intended audience of the booklet's theoretical arguments.<sup>132</sup> The fact that Columbanus' dear friend Gallus did not follow him to Italy is intriguing. The cross-referencing of St. Gall's biography has helped to establish the date and grounds on which Gallus and Columbanus parted and the date of the latter's death. Wettli claims that Columbanus was angry at Gall's refusal to go to Italy with him and had excommunicated him, while Walahfrid does not mention it. Only the *Vetustissima* refers to Columbanus releasing Gallus from excommunication on his deathbed.<sup>133</sup>

<sup>125</sup> M. Tosi, *La liturgia di San Colombano a Bobbio*, 1-6, p. 1, available at [http://www.saintcolumban.eu/sito/b-il\\_santo/b\\_09-liturgia/documenti/13-la\\_liturgia\\_di\\_san\\_colombano\\_a\\_bobbio.pdf](http://www.saintcolumban.eu/sito/b-il_santo/b_09-liturgia/documenti/13-la_liturgia_di_san_colombano_a_bobbio.pdf) (Accessed September 17th, 2016).

<sup>126</sup> T. Leso, 'Columbanus in Europe: the evidence from the Epistulae', p. 379.

<sup>127</sup> The observation is mine. S. Gasparri also remarks that supporting the schism was a way to stand up to Byzantium (S. Gasparri, 'Columbanus, Bobbio and the Lombards', *Columbanus and the Peoples of Post-Roman Europe*, p. 251).

<sup>128</sup> M. Tosi, 'La liturgia di San Colombano a Bobbio', p. 1.

<sup>129</sup> Zironi mentions the appearance in the immediate periphery of Milan of new churches, some built from scratch and some where there were ruins of older churches, like in the case of S. Giovanni in Conca (Zironi, A., *Il monastero longobardo di Bobbio* (Spoleto: Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 2004), p. 16).

<sup>130</sup> Jonas, *Vita Columbani*, B. Krusch (ed) I, 30, 4-5, p. 221, available at <https://archive.org/stream/ionaevitaesancto00jona#page/154/search/148> (Accessed January 21st, 2017).

<sup>131</sup> D. A. Bullough, 'The Career of Columbanus' in Lapidge, M., *Columbanus: Studies on the Latin Writings*, 1.28, pp. 23-4.

<sup>132</sup> The observation is mine. Soldiers must have been illiterate/unable/unwilling to grasp the subtleties of the Arian debate.

<sup>133</sup> L. S. van Raaij, 'Reviving the Cult of St. Gallus', pp. 1-29, p. 27.

[https://www.academia.edu/20054065/The\\_Revival\\_of\\_the\\_Cult\\_of\\_St.\\_Gallus\\_unpublished\\_paper\\_](https://www.academia.edu/20054065/The_Revival_of_the_Cult_of_St._Gallus_unpublished_paper_)

### **Chapter 3- The choice of Bobbio as the site for an Abbey and the factors contributing to its “spectacular development”**<sup>134</sup>

#### **3.1. Bobbio and its surrounding area under Lombard rule**

Today, with its 3,500 inhabitants, Bobbio is a small municipality in the province of Piacenza, the least densely populated of Emilia-Romagna’s nine provinces with less than 300,000 inhabitants. Bobbio lies on the bank of the river Trebbia, at the edge of the Apennine Mountains. Even though its altitude is a mere 892 feet, it is surrounded by peaks five times its height. Bologna, the capital of the region of Emilia-Romagna, is nearly 100 miles away. Bobbio is in fact much closer to the administrative capitals of Lombardy (Milan is 50 miles away) and Liguria (Genoa is 33 miles away). It enjoys a pleasant climate: the proximity to the Tyrrhenian sea mitigates the temperature in the winter and the summer months.<sup>135</sup>

The two maps in Figs. 1 and 2 in the Appendix illustrate how quickly the Lombards had taken hold of Northern Italy.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, at the death of Agilulf, the military presence of the Byzantine army on the Eastern and Western borders of the Lombard kingdom was still a constant threat. In addition, the *Provincia Castellorum*, or ‘Ravenna-Rome corridor’ (a strip of land that ran from the North of Emilia Romagna to the North of Rome) prevented the Lombard Kingdom from having a much-coveted direct access to the Holy See for Agilulf and his son, who had worked on developing an amicable relationship with Pope Gregory since the end of the 590’s.<sup>136</sup>

<sup>135</sup> In accordance with the Köppen scale Bobbio’s is classified as CFA (humid subtropical climate), available at <https://it.climate-data.org/location/115966/> (Accessed August 17th, 2017).

<sup>136</sup> After Agilulf’s death, the support of Pope Honorius I was not enough to prevent the replacement of his legitimateson Adaloald with his step-brother in law, duke Arioald. Quite revealing is the fact that Honorius accepted the authority of new Lombard King Arioald, although it had been achieved with violent means by calling him *excellentissimum Lombardorum vir*. This is a clear indication of how necessary the Lombard cooperation was to the Papacy; Arioald was however much less interested in networking with the Pope than his predecessors were. D. Azzara *L’ideologia* pp. 170-1 in E. De Stefanis, *Il monastero di Bobbio sulle vie del pellegrinaggio altomedioevale*, Proceedings of the 2010 Giornata di studio Pellegrinaggi e monachesimo celtico, 59-108, available at [http://opac.regesta-imperii.de/lang\\_de/anzeige.php?sammelwerk=Pellegrinaggi+e+monachesimo+celtico.+Dall%27Irlanda+alle+sponde+d+el+Mediterraneo](http://opac.regesta-imperii.de/lang_de/anzeige.php?sammelwerk=Pellegrinaggi+e+monachesimo+celtico.+Dall%27Irlanda+alle+sponde+d+el+Mediterraneo). (Accessed June 10th, 2017) p. 65.

### 3.2 Columbanus' relationship with the Lombard King and Queen

As the Irishman stated in the last paragraph of his fifth letter to Boniface, his encounter with the ambitious royal couple keen to restore Northern Italy to the authority of Rome was 'miraculous'.<sup>137</sup> While their motivation differed, their intent was the same. Columbanus' swan song, the foundation of his last abbey one year before his death, is nothing short of extraordinary. While Jonas claims that Columbanus did not depart Burgundy on his own, there is no trustworthy indication of how many companions left France with him and if any of them stayed behind with Gallus in Switzerland and did not follow him as far as Milan. At the time the Irish monk had to flee Luxeuil, the Abbey had a sizeable community of roughly 220 monks.<sup>138</sup> Zironi has conducted an exhaustive philological analysis of the proper nouns mentioned in Jonas in an attempt to discover the ethnicity of the monks who followed Columbanus.<sup>139</sup> His claim that Columbanus' followers were likely to come from the Frankish Rhineland rather than being of Roman origin or from the British Isles is made more plausible by the recent findings in graves in Southern Bavaria of objects that might have belonged to Burgundian clerics.<sup>140</sup> Although the names mentioned in the VC are not many, there are reasons to think that the monastic cohort travelling with Columbanus was fairly large. Many hands would have been required to restore the dilapidated church Columbanus was given by the royals and to construct the outbuildings necessary to accommodate the monks, their animals and their agricultural tools. There is also the possibility that the king's men helped them. This could imply that some former Lombard soldiers were settled in the area, permanently or temporarily and might have been converted by the monks.<sup>131</sup>

Jonas reveals that Agilulf invited Columbanus to settle wherever he saw fit. At this point, somebody with the name of *Iocundus* ('pleasant, agreeable man'), in practice an intermediary, arrives at court

<sup>137</sup> see note 1

<sup>128</sup> M. Richter, *Bobbio in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 32.

<sup>139</sup> Zironi, A., *Il monastero longobardo di Bobbio*, pp. 28-46.

<sup>140</sup> The findings were in the vicinity of Herrenchiemsee Abbey in Southern Bavaria and on the grounds of the Abbey of St. Ulrich and Saint Afra in Augsburg. Y. Fox, *Power and Religion in Merovingian Gaul*, p. 35.

<sup>141</sup> The observations are mine

extolling the marvels of Bobbio, a relatively new acquisition by the Crown.<sup>142</sup> In the *VC* it is described as an isolated but fertile place where the ruins of a basilica dedicated to St. Peter stood.<sup>143</sup> *Iocundus* is a name of Latin origin. De Stefanis maintains that *Iocondus* was one of the wealthy Italic landowners who ingratiated himself with the Lombard invaders in order to keep their status, taking advantage of the Lombards' strategy of having local advisers at court in order to smooth integration.<sup>144</sup> It is curious that Jonas recalls a tiny detail such as the name of the Lombard courtier involved in the transaction between Agilulf and Columbanus. Richter observed a marked similarity at the lexical level between the first donation charter and Jonas' narration, suggesting that the biographer had access to the original document.<sup>145</sup> Alongside the land, Agilulf put at the monks' disposal a salt mine (*puteus*), whose profits were to be shared with the 'vir magnificus' Sundarit's, the King's right hand, who had probably conquered the area.<sup>146</sup> The fact that the salt mine is mentioned in each of the first three charters relating to the foundation of the Abbey highlights the fact that they must have been a very lucrative asset.<sup>147</sup>

Jonas' narrative after this point wanders. 'Bobium' is cited as the area where Hannibal's horses and elephants died when his troops had to stop over the winter. This episode is contained in Caesar's *Gallic Wars*, a text Jonas must have been familiar with.<sup>148</sup> In reality, when the battle resumed, Hannibal was victorious, and it was the Romans who suffered great losses in the Po Valley.<sup>149</sup> Jonas' reference has been explained as an expression of pride for his Roman ancestry. Despite the fact that his native town Susa is very near the current French border, his learned upbringing could have made his emotional ties with classical culture stronger.<sup>150</sup> Furthermore, the Hannibal digression could be seen as the biographer's deliberate attempt to warn those who did not follow Columbanus' path.<sup>151</sup> By choosing to emphasize the location's historical connections, Jonas may be trying to appeal to his readers' classicising taste.<sup>152</sup>

<sup>142</sup> D. A. Bullough, 'Colombano, Santo, Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani', p. 25.

<sup>143</sup> Jonas describes Bobbio in a much more positive way than Luxeuil and Annegray, which were rife with paganism. A. O'Hara, 'Columbanus ad Locum', p.168.

<sup>144</sup> E. De Stefanis, *Materiali lapidei e fittili di età altomedioevale da Bobbio*, p. 28.

<sup>145</sup> M. Richter, *Bobbio in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 21.

<sup>146</sup> A. Attolini, *Il monastero di San Colombano in Bobbio* (Modena: Mucchi, 2001), p. 13

<sup>147</sup> M. Richter, *Bobbio in the Early Middle Age*, p. 31.

<sup>148</sup> Jonas, *Vita Sancti Columbani*, translated by O'Hara, A. and Wood, I. (Liverpool: ULP, 2017), p. 33

<sup>149</sup> 'The Second Punic War', *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2016, available at <https://www.britannica.com/event/Second-Punic-War> (Accessed December 29th, 2016).

<sup>150</sup> A. O'Hara, 'Patria, Peregrinatio and Paenitentia', p.104.

<sup>151</sup> The observation is mine

<sup>152</sup> Jonas, *Vita Sancti Columbani*, translated by A. O'Hara and I. Wood, pp. 31-33.

### 3.3 Bobbio's unique legal status

The four main documents pertinent to Bobbio's foundation are three precepts issued from the Lombard royals to Bobbio's abbots and a 628 papal exemption making the Abbey directly accountable to the Holy See. The first precept is from King Agilulf to Columbanus; the second from King Agilulf's son, Adaloald, to Columbanus' successor and Bobbio's second abbot, Athala and the third from Adaloald to Bertulf, Bobbio's third abbot. Although all three of the precepts show signs of alterations, their content is thought to be substantially similar to the original one.<sup>153</sup> Later modifications are likely to have been made in order to retain the concessions the Abbey had enjoyed for the first three hundred years of its life.<sup>154</sup> The fact that over the centuries original documents were tampered with or destroyed and replaced by new ones highlights the fragility of Bobbio's exceptional legal position.<sup>155</sup> Fifteen years after the foundation of the Abbey, the papal privilege by Pope Honorius I in favour of Bertulf secured Bobbio the *libertas monasteri*, freeing the Abbey from the interference of the nearby dioceses of Piacenza and Tortona, 30 and 41 miles away respectively.<sup>156</sup> Bobbio's unique legal status ensured that the Abbey grew quickly from the onset. However, the concession of *emunitas* from royal families to monasteries and churches was not a novel practice. It was, in fact, started by the Merovingian dynasty in the first half of the fifth century.<sup>157</sup> Nonetheless; Bobbio's privilege set the standards for all future papal concessions to monasteries in the Early Middle Ages.<sup>158</sup>

<sup>153</sup> E. Bardella, *Il monastero di San Colombano di Bobbio dalla sua fondazione (614) alla creazione della diocesi bobbiese* (1014), p. 41.

<sup>154</sup> M. Richter, *Bobbio in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 13

<sup>155</sup> E. Bardella, *Il monastero di San Colombano di Bobbio dalla sua fondazione (614) alla creazione della diocesi bobbiese* (1014), p. 41.

<sup>156</sup> The Abbey and the nearby dioceses, in particular Piacenza's, fought over the jurisdiction of churches and chapels, the authority of baptizing children and ordaining priests and, last but not least, tithes. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>157</sup> D. A. Bullough, 'The Career of Columbanus' in M. Lapidge, (ed) *Columbanus: Studies on the Latin Writings*, p. 12.

<sup>158</sup> A. O'Hara, *Jonas of Bobbio and the Legacy of Columbanus*, p. 106.

The foundation act of the Abbey has survived in a ninth or tenth century copy. Bardella draws attention to how clearly this document shows the division of power in the *Regnum Longobardorum* among the king, the warring aristocracy and the clergy. Sundarit is referred to as *belator* (a warrior), while Columbanus is an *orator* (a public speaker). The second act, also a copy, witnesses the donation by Theodolinda to the monastery of nearby Monte Penice. The third, also not an original, is by Adaloald, Agilulf's son and reconfirms his mother Theodolinda's gift of Monte Pernice and his father's previous grants.<sup>159</sup> All legal documents pertinent to the transactions between the Abbey and the Lombard royalty are in Latin, confirming that the latter had opted from the start to embrace Roman law and intended to record any decisions concerning Bobbio. The Abbey did not own any of its lands, which had been given by the Lombard royal family *ad possidendum*. The foundation act specifies that the abbatial right to use the properties is unlimited. The actual Latin expression employed in the document is *perpetuo tempore*. In practice, the extant trail of documents suggests that, with every new king, such right needed to be reconfirmed. There are no sources indicating that Lombard kings ever interfered in the management of the Abbey.<sup>160</sup> Agilulf was the first Lombard king to write a legal document recording a royal gift to a monastery. The Lombards did not have written legislation until the 643 *Edictum Rothari*, which takes on from Roman civil law the distinction between *possessio* and *dominium*.<sup>161</sup> It is not certain whether or not the Lombards applied the same rigid distinction between possession and ownership as stated in Roman law.<sup>162</sup>

The fact that the grant of half of the salt mine to Sundarit is mentioned in all of the first three precepts makes one wonder whether King Agilulf had to be reminded by his clerk, of having lands by the river Trebbia<sup>163</sup> The actual words used by Jonas when narrating that Jocundus had presented Columbanus and Agilulf with 'a suitable place' (*optio loci*) corroborates the hypothesis that the Lombard king had deliberately asked one of his courtiers to look for a location.<sup>164</sup>

<sup>159</sup> E. Bardella, *Il monastero di San Colombano di Bobbio dalla sua fondazione (614) alla creazione della diocesi bobbiese (1014)*, p. 33. All donations are believed to have taken place in 613. Bardella estimates that there were also seven precepts mentioned in later documents that have been lost: from the first one from Agilulf to Athala, the Abbey's second abbot and all others from Lombard kings (Rothari, Grimoald, Cunipert, Liutprand, Aistulf and Desiderius. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>160</sup> *ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>161</sup> *ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>162</sup> M. Richter, *Bobbio in the Early Middle Ages*, p.13.

<sup>163</sup> *ibid.*, p. 27 and E. De Stefanis, *Il monastero di Bobbio sulle vie del pellegrinaggio altomedioevale*, p. 53.

<sup>164</sup> Jonas, *Vita Columbani*, B. Krusch (ed), I, 30.5, p. 221, available at

<https://archive.org/stream/ionaevitaesancto00jona#page/154/search/148> (Accessed January 21st, 2017).



Founding a monastery was a blatant demonstration of Agilulf's commitment to Catholicism<sup>165</sup>. He was the longest reigning Lombard monarch and the first who ruled for 25 years without succumbing to a political plot. He had his son, Adaloald, very publicly baptized in the church of St. John the Baptist built by his wife Theodolinda in Monza in 603. A year later, he was associated to the Lombard throne in accordance with the late Roman succession system and betrothed to Theudeberic II's daughter.<sup>166</sup> A year later, Adaloald was appointed as his associate to the throne in Milan (a practice he took from the late Romans) and betrothed to one of the daughters of Theodebert II securing peace with the Franks.<sup>167</sup> When Agilulf, died in 616, the 15-year-old Adaloald governed with his mother until his brother-in-law, Duke Ariold, took over ten to twelve years later.<sup>168</sup>

The eagerness of the Lombard royal family to entrust "irksome" Columbanus to found an abbey in their kingdom poses a few questions.<sup>169</sup> O'Hara claims that, in the same way as he had operated in Gaul twenty years beforehand, Columbanus "made a beeline for the Lombard court of Agilulf upon his arrival in Italy".<sup>170</sup> Although the advantages were plentiful for both parties, the grants only stipulate that the monks pray for the prosperity and stability of the Lombard kingdom, day and night.<sup>171</sup> Certainly, the role of the Abbey as a military watchdog must have influenced the choice of the location. Nevertheless, what the Lombard King wanted above all was to assert his power over the Lombard nobility. Paul the Deacon in his *Historia*, states that the inscription on the iron crown of Agilulf, now lost, pointed out he was the King of All Italy: AGILULF GRATIA DEI VIR GLORIOSUS REX TOTIUS ITALIAE.<sup>172</sup> Columbanus' zeal and rigor gave him 'impeccable Catholic credentials' that would validate the existence of a King of Lombardy, a *primus inter pares* who could rule over 35 feuding duchies.<sup>173</sup>

<sup>165</sup> M. Richter, *Bobbio in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 21.

<sup>166</sup> G. Arnosti, 'Il regno di Milano 591-616', p. 11.

<sup>167</sup> G. Arnosti, *Il regno longobardo di Milano, da Teodolinda a Gundeberga (aa.616-636)*, p. 1 (in academia.edu, 2016) [https://www.academia.edu/30628272/Il\\_regno\\_longobardo\\_di\\_Milano\\_da\\_Teodolinda\\_a\\_Gundeberga\\_aa](https://www.academia.edu/30628272/Il_regno_longobardo_di_Milano_da_Teodolinda_a_Gundeberga_aa).

<sup>168</sup> D. A. Bullough, 'Colombano, Santo', pp. 625-6.

<sup>169</sup> E. T. Dailey, 'Confinement and exclusion in the monasteries of sixth century Gaul', *Early Medieval Europe*, 22, 3, 304-35 (Oxford: John Wiley, 2014) p. 319.

<sup>170</sup> A. O'Hara, 'The Vita Colombani in Merovingian Gaul', p. 139.

<sup>171</sup> A. Attolini, *Il monastero di San Colombano in Bobbio*, p. 73.

<sup>172</sup> M. Gazzini, 'La rete ospedaliera di Bobbio tra alto e basso medioevo', p. 499

<sup>173</sup> M. Richter, *Bobbio in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 21.

Recent archaeological discoveries in the North Western Apennines and a new interpretation of known sources, such as the *Chronicon Novalicence*, have enabled scholars to redefine the view of the upper Trebbia Valley as a 'border'. Byzantium ruled in Liguria on the Tyrrhenian coast and the Lombards in Western Piedmont and central Emilia-Romagna. The areas on the Byzantine-Lombard border had been populated throughout the Early Middle Ages. Albeit contacts between inhabitants on the two sides of the river must have diminished because of the war between Byzantium and the Lombards, they did not cease. The 2006 discovery by the *Associazione Archeologica Pandora* of some Byzantine monetary weights in Val Tidone, a valley 25 kilometres southwest of Piacenza is a sign that trade in the area continued to take place despite the war. Since the finding took place in what used to be Lombard territory, it can be deduced that Lombard administration had borrowed Byzantine customs.<sup>174</sup>

<sup>174</sup> 'Quattro visite guidate agli scavi archeologici della Piana di San Martino a Pianello Val Tidone', PortaleTuristico Pianello Val Tidone [online]. Available at <http://www.pianellovaltidone.net/news-e-media/news-eventi-valtidone/338-quattro-visite-guidate-agli-scavi-archeologiche-della-piana-di-san-martino-a-pianello-val-tidone> (Accessed June 10th, 2017).

### 3.4 On Location

Contemporary archaeological evidence has revealed that Jonas' depiction of Bobbio as remote and bordered by forests is not entirely credible. Firstly, Jonas contradicts himself with the remark that the place was *ubertate fecunda*, implying that the lands nearby had been, at some stage, cultivated.<sup>175</sup> Secondly, in the wording of the first precept from Agilulf to Columbanus the size of the area is indicated as *per in circuito miliaria quator seu culto vel inculto* (a four-mile circumference of cultivated and uncultivated lands).<sup>176</sup>

The *topos* of how ordinary men could be invested with divine power in order to tame the landscape is borrowed from the Patristic tradition.<sup>177</sup> Hence, the image of Columbanus' monks turning into alacritous lumberjacks because of the sacredness of the area gives them extraordinary powers. The discovery of votive offerings to the Roman goddess Minerva Medica at Caverzago di Travo (a village situated at 20 minutes' walk from Bobbio) indicates that the site had been a centre of worship for a long time.<sup>178</sup> The unearthing of a certain type of pottery customarily used by town people signals that the area had been attracting visitors from different Italian towns.<sup>179</sup> The oldest pottery unearthed dates back to the early Roman Empire. An altar of Diana has been excavated in Bobbio and is now kept in its museum.<sup>180</sup> It is believed that the area was originally christianised in the fifth century. The nearest Diocese of Tortona or *Dioecesis Derthonensis* is thought to have been established in the second century; its first documented bishop is Bishop Innocent in the first half of the fourth century. It is therefore plausible that a church was built in Bobbio under the diocese of Tortona, and later on its use changed from a religious building to a rural one.<sup>181</sup>

<sup>175</sup> E. De Stefanis, *Il monastero di Bobbio in età altomedioevale*, p. 28

<sup>176</sup> *ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>177</sup> *ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>178</sup> Travo was a Lombard settlement on the river Trebbia between Bobbio and Piacenza. A. O'Hara, 'Bobbio ad Locum', p. 169.

<sup>179</sup> The red and shiny Aco ceramics, from the name of their first manufacturer in Arezzo, Tuscany, dating from the first century BC. E. De Stefanis, *Il monastero di Bobbio in età altomedioevale*, p. 83.

<sup>180</sup> A. O'Hara, 'Bobbio ad locum', p. 169.

<sup>181</sup> E. De Stefanis, *Il monastero di Bobbio in età altomedioevale*, p. 25.

Columban monasteries were founded as far as possible from the seats of Episcopal power.<sup>182</sup>

O'Hara emphasizes that all sites chosen by Columbanus for his monasteries are 'liminal', in the sense given to the adjective by the Church Fathers that is, situated in a wasteland or in the desert. It was necessary to establish a metaphorical border separating Christianity from paganism, which at the time coexisted in rural folklore.<sup>183</sup> Because of the therapeutic properties of their waters; these places had been and probably still were, to some extent, linked to pagan divinities. Annegray was associated with the cult of Diana; statuettes indicating Pagan religious practices have also been found in Luxeuil and Fontaines.<sup>184</sup>

O'Hara puts forward that the reason for founding three monasteries so near each other could have been the intention of eradicating ancient spring cults. Moreover, Columbanus' later decision to settle in Bregenz, by Lake Constance, could have been motivated by the presence of springs.<sup>185</sup> In this last case, the parallels and dissimilarities between the mid-ninth century Carolingian re-writings of the *Vita Galli* by Wetti and Walahfrid Strabo and a ca. 680's version of the VC highlight the friction that the evangelisation could cause. The medical powers of the waters and the divinities that had become associated with them had served the local population well for centuries; it was to be expected that any change would have been met with strong resistance.<sup>186</sup>

The toponymic appears to originate from the Boii Gauls tribe, who lived there in the fourth century BC. The Roman *Bobium*, or *Ebovium*, was a centre of trade in Roman times. Archaeology confirms place names with remains of *villae* and of paths connecting them. It is thought that a bridge across the Trebbia River already existed. Excavations have brought to light an epigraph dated to no later than the first half of the first century near the thermal source of Salsominore bearing the names of the two Roman administrators in charge of it. In addition, tombs of retired Roman soldiers of different ranks and boundaries of plots of land of variable sizes have been found.<sup>187</sup> On the roofs of some of the buildings surrounding the Abbey recycled Roman tiles have also been recovered.<sup>188</sup>

<sup>182</sup> A. O'Hara, *Jonas of Bobbio and the Legacy of Columbanus*, p. 52.

<sup>183</sup> A. O'Hara, 'Columbanus ad Locum', p. 156.

<sup>184</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 151-5.

<sup>185</sup> *ibid.*, p. 166.

<sup>186</sup> Walahfrid, *Vita sancti Galli* in *ibid.* pp. 165-6.

<sup>187</sup> E. De Stefanis, *Il monastero di Bobbio in età altomedioevale*, pp. 15-20.

<sup>188</sup> E. De Stefanis, *Materiali lapidei e fittili di età altomedioevale da Bobbio*, pp. 28-9.

De Stefanis points out the absence of sixth and seventh centuries remains, a clear sign of a marked decrease in the population whose cause can only be speculated and range from a fall in the number of births due to natural calamities, such as epidemics, earthquakes, floods or landslides to the threat posed by migrating Germanic tribes. That said, archaeologists have found no conclusive evidence that Bobbio was populated at the time of Columbanus' arrival.<sup>189</sup> The scholar also maintains that if the *puteus* was so important somebody involved in the salt trade must have been living in the vicinity.<sup>190</sup> The valley of the river Trebbia was the natural route that joined the Po Valley to the Tyrrhenian Sea together with the parallel Taro valley in the province of Parma. It formed part of the route connecting the modern Italian regions of Lombardy and Liguria, used by merchants carrying wool and weaponry in exchange for valuable salt used in food preservation and in the tanning and dyeing of leather. This connected the western coast of central Italy to the lakes north of Milan, Venice and the Adriatic coast.<sup>191</sup>

Most of the MSS of the *VC* indicate November 23<sup>rd</sup> as the date of his death, while in some it is not specified; hence Krusch in his 1905 edition settled for that particular date. Wettino reports in the biography of Gall that Columbanus died on a Sunday. Only in 615 and not in any of the years immediately before and after, November 23<sup>rd</sup> fell on a Sunday. Although Wettino's *Vita Galli* is commonly acknowledged as the confirmation that Columbanus' death was indeed on November 23<sup>rd</sup>, the passing away of a saint on Sunday, the day dedicated to the Lord, is a hagiographical cliché. The *VC* tells that Bobbio was visited by the ambassador of Clothar II, who had conquered the whole of the Frank kingdom in 613, when Columbanus was still alive. If one accepts the current dating, the ambassador must have visited the Abbey before November 23<sup>rd</sup>.<sup>181</sup> Jonas relates that the existing *basilica semirutam* at Bobium had stone walls. Given that the majority of buildings at the time were made of wood, the fact that stone was used in this case hints at a former significant status, regardless of the function it actually served at the time of Columbanus' arrival. For the Romans, a *basilica* was an important public space of a non-religious nature. By the time Columbanus got to Bobbio, it had been used for rural purposes, possibly for storage. This does not necessarily imply that the local inhabitants had gone back to Paganism.<sup>193</sup>

<sup>189</sup> E. De Stefanis, *Il monastero di Bobbio in età altomedioevale*, p. 23.

<sup>190</sup> *ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>191</sup> O. F. Wood, 'Salt, History of use', available at <https://www.britannica.com/science/salt#toc53230>. The 'salt mine' was a place where salty and smelly water (hence, *puteus*) was left to evaporate, leaving salt as a residue. For the salt trade route, see E. De Stefanis, *Il monastero di Bobbio sulle vie del pellegrinaggio altomedioevale*, p.63.

<sup>192</sup> *ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>193</sup> *ibid.*, p. 33.

Notwithstanding the fact that the Abbey was built on the ruins of a derelict church, the assertion that such building was devoted to S. Peter places Columbanus on the shoulder of giants.<sup>194</sup>

We only get a glimpse of the set-up of the original early medieval Abbey built by Columbanus and his companions because of a radical re-organization of the different abbatial outbuildings by the Benedictines from 1448 onwards until its dissolution in 1801.<sup>195</sup> There is enough evidence to support the fact that the current Church of S. Columbanus was built on top of the Early Medieval ‘basilica’. Firstly, there are no written sources suggesting its location was moved. Secondly, in medieval continental Europe the transfer of an abbey from its original site has been recorded only in a few very exceptional cases.<sup>196</sup> By looking at a nineteenth century map of Bobbio, De Stefani and her team have been able to trace the original perimeter of the first Abbey’s walls, now hidden by more recent buildings.<sup>197</sup> The anonymous author of the *Miracula*, when describing the *translatio* of the body of Saint Columbanus from the Bobbio to Pavia, describes the monks descending into a crypt in order to exhume his remains.<sup>198</sup>

Excavations in 2015 have brought to life the entrance of an early medieval stone church, which, according to the *Miracula*, was dedicated to the Holy Mary and must have been built as part of extensive renovation works carried out by Abbot Agilulf on the spot of Columbanus’ original church. The bell tower was added at a later stage. No church furnishings dating to the Lombard period have been retrieved; there is, however, evidence that during the Carolingian era the tombs were re-organised.<sup>199</sup> As the archaeological sites of other contemporary monasteries have shown, communal life seemed to take place in shared spaces like a church and the refectory, rather than in residential ones.<sup>200</sup>

<sup>194</sup> the observation is mine.

<sup>195</sup> E. De Stefanis, *Il monastero di Bobbio in età altomedioevale*, p. 33.

<sup>196</sup> *ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>187</sup> *ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>198</sup> E. De Stefanis, *Materiali lapidei e fittili di età altomedioevale da Bobbio*, p. 130. The *translatio* is believed to have been orchestrated by Bobbio’s monks in order to remind to the newly elected king Hugh of the prestige of Abbey and of his duty to protect it from the threats of Tortona and Piacenza bishoprics and of nearby landowners. A. Attolini, *Il monastero di San Colombano in Bobbio*, p. 39.

<sup>199</sup> *ibid.*, pp.124-6.

<sup>200</sup> E. De Stefanis, *Il monastero di Bobbio sulle vie del pellegrinaggio altomedioevale*, p. 84.

A reconstruction of the Abbey presupposing that its fifteenth century trapeze- shaped cloister, which is now located to the South of the current church, used to be in the centre. The *coenobium* and the residence of the abbot were to the West, while the library and dormitories were to the East and the workshops and a mill to the South.<sup>201</sup> Both the *Regulae* and the *Penitentiale* make reference to the existence of bathing areas; according to De Stefanis, it is plausible that Bobbio, like other Columban monasteries, also had one.<sup>202</sup> The *Vita Athala* mentions a fence separating the Abbey from the outside world.<sup>203</sup>

As was customary, artisans' dwellings started being built around the Abbey. Abbot Wala's *Breve Memoriationis*, written in the mid-830s, provides a hint of how fast the lay community around the Abbey grew when he mentions a *magister carpentarius*, who must have been managing other labourers.<sup>204</sup>

<sup>201</sup> E. De Stefanis, *Il monastero di Bobbio in età altomedioevale*, pp. 35-6.

<sup>202</sup> *ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>203</sup> *ibid.*, p.36.

<sup>204</sup> *ibid.*, p. 38.

#### **4. The impact of Columbanus and Bobbio Abbey in the Early Medieval Italian peninsula**

##### **4.1. The political role of Bobbio Abbey in the Early Middle Ages**

The largest majority of the VC MSS has been discovered outside of Italy. The popularity of Columbanus' first hagiography is one of factors to take into consideration when evaluating how the Columban monastic 'brand' affected continental Europe. Unlike in the case of Francia, there no specific studies on the dissemination of the VC in Italy. Yet, it is possible to draw some conclusions by comparing the political status quo and social milieu of the two countries in the seventh century. Lombards did not have a compact and established aristocratic ruling class like the Merovingian one. When Bobbio was founded, the Lombard monarchy was still in its infancy. Ruling over his often-rebellious dukes was Agilulf's priority. It is unlikely that the Early Medieval Abbey fostered a new breed of upper-class churchmen on a scale remotely similar to the French one.<sup>205</sup> The new monasteries founded after Bobbio in Northern Italy were all Lombard and, later on, Carolingian, rather than 'Columban'.<sup>206</sup> Most of Bobbio's properties were acquired during the Lombard, rather than Carolingian era. Bobbio prospered over the first three generations of abbots.<sup>207</sup> Simultaneously, it would become dependent on its benefactors, just like their French counterparts did. Bobbio's success at the expense of the pre-existing bishoprics was phenomenal, albeit built on shaky ground, as demonstrated by the monks' incessant need to reconfirm royal privileges, the forgeries and, ad extremis, the 929 *translatio* of Columbanus' body to Pavia. The dog bit its own tail in both countries. By the eighth century Bobbio had fundamentally become a, where the abbot was selected and controlled by the Lombards.<sup>208</sup> Columbanus' statement of independence when denying the Merovingian king Theudeeric access to the *septa secretioria* lost all significance once the royal influence had seeped in from within. The partnership between Lombard kings and Bobbio outlasted both Agilulf and Columbanus. The growth of the Lombard kingdom and the Abbey went hand in hand during the relatively short Lombard rule of Northern Italy spanning from the siege of Pavia originally elected as their capital in 572 to its loss to Charlemagne in 774 and went on to maintain a vital role under the Carolingians.<sup>209</sup>

<sup>205</sup> The observation is mine

<sup>206</sup> A. O'Hara, 'The Vita Columbani in Merovingian Gaul', p. 134

<sup>207</sup> A. O'Hara & F. Taylor, 'Aristocratic and Monastic Conflict in Tenth-Century Italy', *Viator*, 2013, 4.3, 43-61, p.46, available at

<https://www.academia.edu/people/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&q=O%E2%80%99Hara%2C+A.%26+Taylor%2C+D.+Aristocratic+and+Monastic+Conflict+in+Tenth-Century+Italy++>. (Accessed August 14th, 2017).

<sup>208</sup> *ibid.*, p. 47

<sup>209</sup> " *Quo in loco et multae possessiones a singulis principibus sive Langobardis largitae sunt, et magna ibi facta est congregatio monachorum*". Liber IV, 41, available at <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/pauldeacon/hist4.shtml>



Columbanus clashed with well-established Gallo-Roman ecclesiastical institutions in both countries. In Italy, however, friction was not as great. At some level, the Abbey even acted as a pacifier between schismatic bishops and Rome. At the end of the ninth and beginning of the tenth century the conflict between the Abbey and the nearby Bishoprics became more intense, especially with the one in Piacenza.<sup>210</sup>

#### 4.2. Bobbio as a pilgrimage centre and its hospitality network

Bobbio's monks did not convert many Arians, as this type of evangelical activity took place in urban, rather than rural areas.<sup>211</sup> However, they embarked on a capillary eradication of paganism from Italy's remotest areas. At the same time, they promoted a radical transformation of the territory. The reputation of Columban monks as perpetrators of an idealized form of monasticism lingered on and was crucial in rendering Bobbio an obligatory stop on the Northern Europe- Rome – Jerusalem pilgrim route. The 53rd chapter of the *BR* included hospitality to *peregrini* and *pauperes* among the Christian duties. In 773 Charlemagne, who was inspired by a passage in Matthew's Gospel cited in the Justinian code, made the *officium hospitalitatis* one of the obligations of Holy Roman Emperors.<sup>212</sup>

In time, catering for pilgrims would create vital communication points for managing the Lombard territorial acquisitions after the death of Agilulf.<sup>213</sup> Archaeological studies have substantiated the role of the Abbey as a meeting point for different men and cultures. The presence of a bricked door in the western wall of the southern transept as described by Segagni Malacart could indicate that there was a need to ease the flow of pilgrims in and out of the building.<sup>214</sup> Bobbio quickly became a pilgrimage centre in its own right. The visit of Queen Theodolinda and her son Arioald related in the second royal donation to the Abbey was a symbolic first pilgrimage *devotionis causa pro*

<sup>210</sup> see note 156

<sup>211</sup> G. Musina, *Le campagne di Piacenza tra VII e IX secolo*, p. 64.

<sup>212</sup> A. Zironi, *Il monastero longobardo di Bobbio*, p. 13.

<sup>213</sup> M. Gazzini, 'La rete ospedaliera di Bobbio fra alto e basso Medioevo', p. 484.

<sup>214</sup> The observation is mine, while the reference to the bricked door is in A. Segagni Malacart, 'La cattedrale di Bobbio nel secolo XI: la struttura architettonica', De Stefanis E. (ed), *La diocesi di Bobbio. Formazione e sviluppo di un'istituzione millenaria*, p. 335.

<sup>215</sup> E. De Stefanis, *Il monastero di Bobbio sulle vie del pellegrinaggio altomedioevale*, pp. 60 and. 68.

<sup>216</sup> *ibid.*, pp.60-1.

*nostris facinoribus deprecandu*<sup>215</sup> According to the text, Theodolinda walked up Monte Penice, a mountain near the Abbey. There she encouraged her son to give his lands to the Abbey, *ad istum locum providendum*, literally, in order to ‘look after the place’ (the Abbey). The spiritual connotation of her climb is reinforced by the use of verb *ascendere*.<sup>216</sup>

The documents preserved in the Turin Archive demonstrate that all later abbatial land acquisitions would be located along the routes that connected Bobbio to Rome, the so called *Via Francigena*.<sup>217</sup> For travellers and pilgrims to Rome and to the South of Italy, wars between the Byzantines and the Lombards had made peripheral routes safer than the *Via Emilia*, the old Roman road that crossed the Northern Italian plain from Piacenza to Rimini in a direct line but was strewn with military checkpoints.<sup>218</sup> Because of the threat of pirates in the Mediterranean at the end of the eighth century, some pilgrims from Northern Europe preferred disembarking in Genoa, on the lakes North of Milan or Venice or on the Adriatic Sea, and then proceeded to Rome or to the South of Italy by land.<sup>219</sup> Even though, as O’Hara has noted, in the VC there is no specific mention of relics, archaeological findings exhibited in Bobbio Abbey’s museum show that, at a later stage, it fully participated to the early medieval relic cult.<sup>220</sup>

In its role as a stopping point for pilgrims going back to Northern Europe, the Abbey also became a truly international cultural centre. During restoration work to the current crypt in 1910, an array of relics and their containers in clay, stone, bone and fabric (woven baskets) were excavated. Some of these originate from Palestine and date to the time before Jerusalem was taken from the Byzantine Empire by the Rashidun Caliphate in 637. Several votive offerings in Byzantine style, widespread in the whole of Eastern Europe, were also unearthed, showing that some pilgrims were on their return journey from the Holy Land.<sup>221</sup> Another find exhibited at the Abbey museum is the tombstone of St. Cumian, an Irish monk who spent the last years of his life in Bobbio, the only detail hinting that that Bobbio could have gained a reputation as a holy place in Ireland.<sup>222</sup>

<sup>217</sup> Although the Old Italian term *via* meant ‘road’ (and *Via Francigena* was literally, ‘the road from France’) the term actually refers to a geographic area where different routes would join, depart and in some cases join again, rather than to a specific itinerary. The existence of a so-called *via degli abati* (‘The Abbots’ Path’) joining Bobbio to Rome has now been disproven. Gazzini, M. ‘La rete ospedaliera di Bobbio fra alto e basso Medioevo’, p. 482.

<sup>218</sup> *ibid.*, p. 500.

<sup>219</sup> A. Zironi, *Il monastero longobardo di Bobbio*, p. 89.

<sup>220</sup> E. De Stefanis, *Il monastero di Bobbio sulle vie del pellegrinaggio altomedioevale*, p. 69.

<sup>221</sup> *ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>222</sup> R. Flechner & S. Meeder (eds), *The Irish in Early Medieval Europe*, p. 22.

The archaeological proof of the existence of a network of *xenodochia* and *hospitalia* linked to the Abbey and catering for the poor, the sick and for pilgrims is not matched by any documentary evidence until the Carolingian era.<sup>223</sup> The first historical source shedding some light on the abbatial estate is the inventory by Abbot Wala in 833. Here, it is confirmed that the Abbey funded and controlled three hostels. In the 862 and the 863 inventory seven additional hospitality structures are mentioned. Archaeological surveys show that the highest number of hostels linked to Bobbio Abbey is 13.<sup>224</sup> The fact that the abbatial property was organised in *curtes* reflects that up to the mid-ninth century all land donations had been public rather than private.<sup>225</sup> The multi-functional character of such shelters implies that they might have also have a mill.<sup>226</sup> As the Lombard kingdom expanded, some of the new hostels were built farther away from the Abbey on the pilgrim routes leading to Rome.<sup>227</sup> A few centuries later, when the political situation changed, new centres on alternative routes. Bobbio's hospitality network gradually lost its importance.<sup>228</sup> From the eleventh to the twelfth century, parish churches replaced monasteries as the main point of reference of rural communities and opened their own institutions in order to provide shelter, charity and education.<sup>229</sup>

#### 4.2. The development of a localised cult of Saint Columbanus

The City of Bobbio is proud of its Irish heritage and Saint Columbanus has been dedicated a portal.<sup>230</sup> It can be inferred that the *VC* was also written for the Italian Columban family because Jonas takes the trouble to explain where the Neustrian Gauls lived.<sup>231</sup> Albrecht Diem has noted that with the *VC*, Jonas transfers sanctity from the man (Columbanus) to the institution (Bobbio in

<sup>223</sup> E. Bardella, *Il monastero di San Colombano di Bobbio dalla sua fondazione (614) alla creazione della diocesi bobbiese (1014)*, p. 37. When analysing the structures providing hospitality, there is some lexical confusion. In fact, structures having the same generic goal of helping vulnerable people went under different names. M. Gazzini 'La rete ospedaliera di Bobbio fra alto e basso Medioevo', p. 484.

<sup>224</sup> M. Gazzini 'La rete ospedaliera di Bobbio fra alto e basso Medioevo', p. 493.

<sup>225</sup> S. Gasparri, 'Columbanus, Bobbio and the Lombards', *Columbanus and the Peoples of Post-Roman Europe*, p. 249.

<sup>226</sup> E. De Stefanis, *Il monastero di Bobbio sulle vie del pellegrinaggio altomedioevale*, p. 99.

<sup>227</sup> *ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>228</sup> M. Gazzini 'La rete ospedaliera di Bobbio fra alto e basso Medioevo', p. 483.

<sup>229</sup> *ibid.*, p. 484.

<sup>230</sup> In 2002, it honoured Cardinal Daly with the Freedom of the City for his outstanding contribution to the Irish peace process. *Freedom of the City of Bobbio (Italy) conferred on Cardinal Cahal Daly*, available at <http://www.catholicbishops.ie/2002/11/22/freedom-city-bobbio-italy-conferred-cardinal-cahal-daly/> (Accessed June 20th, 2017).

<sup>231</sup> A. O' Hara, 'Patria, Peregrinatio and Paenitentia', p.107.

this specific case).<sup>232</sup> O'Hara suggests that the VC trickled down in some form to the peasants who worked on his monasteries' land.<sup>233</sup> Philology, archaeology and toponymy concord on the fact that Columbanus' popularity started early. Following his death, pilgrims started to take a slight detour, clambering on the path that led from the Abbey to the *Spelonca* or *Eremo of San Michele*, a monastic retreat five miles uphill, where to Columbanus was said to have spent the last months of his life.<sup>234</sup> An interactive Google map of all the numerous Italian religious institution bearing the name of Saint Columbanus is provided at the following link:

[https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1QMjYHxYN7YvUcjtVrqN8N\\_pWn8Y&ll=45.02028672825857%2C9.88990965000005&z=7](https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1QMjYHxYN7YvUcjtVrqN8N_pWn8Y&ll=45.02028672825857%2C9.88990965000005&z=7)

The link has been integrated with a grid (Fig. 3) in the Appendix, which contains the 53 Italian religious institutions still in existence named in his honour. These have been listed according to the modern Italian division in regions and provinces. This research has revealed an outstanding variety, both in the locations and approximate times of foundation of the churches, chapels, hostels, monastic cells and monasteries. They share, however, two features: they are all in Northern Italy and, although some of the buildings are relatively modern, it has been possible to establish that they are the reconstructions of churches built in the seventh or eighth century. Lombardy has the highest number of religious sites dedicated to Columbanus (13). Slightly below are both Piedmont (with 11) and Emilia Romagna (with 10). Liguria and Tuscany have eight each, while Veneto has two and Trentino Alto Adige one. The one nearer to the Abbey is a mere 9km away, while the furthest is to be found in the province of Treviso in the Veneto, 327 km away. There is great potential for further research on some of the elements emerged from the grid. Some of the churches stand in what are now remote locations. The properties of the Abbey were mostly mountainous and often controlling the intricate Northern Italy waterway system, a secure option for travelling. By the eighth century, monks had obtained the rights to transit freely on the Po and Ticino rivers<sup>235</sup>

<sup>232</sup> A. Diem, 'Monks, Kings and the Transformation of Sanctity', *Columbanus and the People of Post-Roman Europe* pp. 521-29 and I. Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751*, p. 133.

<sup>233</sup> A. O'Hara, 'The Vita Columbani in Merovingian Gaul', p. 147.

<sup>234</sup> There is ample proof that a local cult of Columbanus developed in the areas where pilgrims transited. E. De Stefanis, *Il monastero di Bobbio sulle vie del pellegrinaggio altomedioevale*, p. 78. Neither the VC nor the *Miracula* say that Columbanus actually died outside Bobbio Abbey. The *Miracula* do, however, refer that before he died he had retreated in a cave near Coli, which today is a small village less than 4 Km from Bobbio. Jonas, *Vita Sancti Columbani*, translated by A. O'Hara & I. Wood, p. 27. As recently as in 2014, an article in Bobbio's local newspaper signalled another cave worth investigating in a private plot of land in Barberino di Bobbio, much closer to the Abbey, available at <http://www.liberta.it/2014/06/24/mano-di-san-colombano-scolpita-in-una-grotta-a-bobbio-recuperiamola/> (Accessed September 17th, 2016).

<sup>235</sup> M. di Gianfrancesco, 'Per una storia della navigazione pagana dal medioevo alla vigilia del Risorgimento', *Quaderni storici*, 10, 28, 1, 199-226, p. 200.

Quite a few of these institutions were built on monastic land, others on pilgrimage routes. Occasionally, they are just believed to be places where Columbanus went through while descending on Milan or where he was involved in miracles. Of particular interest is the recently discovered crypt of the *Oratorio di San Colombano* in Bologna, whose Bishop Piero used to be Columbanus' pupil. The approximate date of its foundation (610-616) reveals that it was built well before Columbanus had acquired saint status.<sup>236</sup> The grid could be integrated with churches previously dedicated to Columbanus that have subsequently changed their name and with places containing a chapel dedicated to the Saint or his iconic representation in the form of a fresco or a statue. In addition, a few toponyms allude to former abbeys and churches that have now disappeared.

#### 4.4 The Regula Columbani fades away

In his two latest publications, O'Hara addresses Jonas' silence with regards to the *RB*, which is never brought up in the *VC* in spite of having become very popular by the time Columbanus' hagiography was written.<sup>237</sup> The scholar points to another oddity, that is, the relative scarcity of miracles when compared to other texts of the same genre. O'Hara's claim that Jonas did not want to detract his readers' attention from Columbanus fits well within his general argument that the *VC* was conceived to boost Columbanus' reputation by hanging on to a nostalgic claim of Irishness. Hence, Jonas is voicing the apprehension for the new changes among some of the members of the Columban *familia* like himself.<sup>238</sup> Columbanus' monastic rules do not address the day to day management of his abbeys. In all likelihood, the lack of specific directions would have been fairly insignificant when the monastic groups were small. Nonetheless, it is very likely that *RB* started to be adopted gradually in Bobbio as the number of men and properties grew and the abbey became more powerful and wealthy.<sup>239</sup> Dunn estimates that, by the end of the 620's, the *BR* was used in all the Columban houses.<sup>240</sup> Ian Wood observes that there is evidence that even at Luxeuil the *RC* was probably never used much on its own but was integrated with other rules. Many studies have been carried out trying to establish when the use of the *RC* was abandoned in Columban monasteries and with what other rule or rules it was replaced or integrated with. This matter is quite complex, particularly because abbots and abbesses exercised a certain discretion when managing their communities and mixed and matched elements from different rules in order to respond to the needs of their communities.<sup>241</sup>

<sup>236</sup> *San Colombano* (Bologna: Genus Bononiae, 2012)

<sup>237</sup> Jonas, *Vita Sancti Columbani*, translated by O'Hara, A. and Wood, I., p. 42.

<sup>238</sup> A. O'Hara, *Jonas of Bobbio and the Legacy of Columbanus*, p.21.

<sup>239</sup> The observation is mine.

<sup>240</sup> M. Dunn, 'Columbanus, charisma and the revolt of the monks in Bobbio', p. 26.

<sup>241</sup> I. Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751*, p. 188.

Two documents have been used to corroborate the adoption of the *RB* at Bobbio. One is the 643 Papal Bull from Theodore I to Abbot Bobolenus. Even though it is generally acknowledged to be a fake, scholars agree on viewing its framework as substantially similar to the original.<sup>239</sup> Here it is stated that Bobbio's monks lived *sub regula sancte memorie Benedicti vel reverentissimi Columbani fundatori loci illius conversari videntur*.<sup>240</sup> The other written source is Wala's inventory showing a well-established hierarchy within the Abbey.<sup>241</sup> The posit that Bobbio might have been observing the *RC* and the *RB* at the same time is not far-fetched. On one hand, the *RB* ensured a smooth management of the Abbey. On the other, hanging on to some of the diktats stipulated by their founder enabled the monks to retain a heritage of which they were proud.<sup>242</sup> The *RC* rule was not officially abrogated by Pope Nicholas V until 1448.<sup>243</sup>

The most striking feature of the *RC* is its severity. Elva Johnston speculates that Columbanus could have been a first generation catholic, hence more inclined to intransigence.<sup>244</sup> Although it was admirable, at least for the sheer strength of self-control it required, his monastic regime was too punishing for his French brethren, as shown by the infighting that took place in Gaul.<sup>245</sup> In the second book of the *VC* dedicated to the life of Athala, Jonas refers to Bobbio's monks' rebellion against the strict discipline the abbot enforced on his community and the *penitentiae medicamenta* employed for those who had challenged the authority of the abbot.<sup>246</sup> In his fourth letter to the brothers he left behind in Luxeuil, Columbanus discloses that the community unrest under Athala had caused him concern. Columbanus warns Athala that other rebellions might be

<sup>242</sup> E. Bardella, *Il monastero di San Colombano di Bobbio dalla sua fondazione (614) alla creazione della diocesi bobbiese (1014)*, pp. 59-60.

<sup>243</sup> M. Gazzini, 'La rete ospedaliera di Bobbio fra alto e basso Medioevo', p. 493.

Penco, G., *Storia del monachesimo italiano* (Milan: Jaca Books, 1995), p. 101.

<sup>244</sup> E. Johnston., 'Movers and Shakers? How women shaped the Career of Columbanus', *Columbanus and the Peoples of Post-Roman Europe*, p. 72.

<sup>245</sup> F. Nuvolone, *Colman, Columba, Giona*, p. 80.

<sup>246</sup> I. Wood, 'Frankish World. Columbanus in Brittany', *Columbanus and the Peoples of Post-Roman Europe*, p. 143.

looming.<sup>247</sup> It is probably because of his lack of success in maintaining the discipline at Luxeuil that Athala eventually left and joined Columbanus in Bobbio.<sup>248</sup> Whether the *RC* was relaxed or not, it surely held its appeal for a long time, as disclosed by the inscription carved on the tombstone of Cumian commissioned by the Lombard King Liutprand in the early eight century.<sup>249</sup>

Lastly, it must be pointed out that, at the time, the distinction between a layman and a monk could be blurred. Some clerics never had the intention of committing themselves fully to monastic life but enjoyed the status and privileges attached to their role.<sup>250</sup> This could explain their reluctance to accept a harsh routine. Camporesi comments that monastic tasks were not as hard as those “driving pre-industrial paupers to apathy”, that is, the daily tasks of peasant folk.<sup>251</sup> Jonas alludes that Athala had servants in a matter-of-fact guise, suggesting that it was normal practice for monks to rely on other people’s help.<sup>252</sup> Nuvolone refers to the presence in Bobbio of a space reserved as accommodation for servants.<sup>253</sup> In *The Regula cuiusdam patris*, a stricter offshoot of the *RC*, it is recommended that healthy monks should not travel on horseback or in a cart, revealing that this practice must have been quite normal.<sup>254</sup>

Columbanus’ (and Jonas’) preoccupation with food is also worth investigating. In his *Regula Caenobialis* Columbanus states that eating is necessary in order to perform monastic duties.<sup>255</sup> In other words monks are expected to eat to live instead of living to eat. The *topos* of lack of food and its subsequent miraculous appearance is repeated often in the *VC*.<sup>256</sup> Abstinence in the *RC* is a form of punishment for having sinned. Deprivation, however, only makes sense if people have access to a varied and abundant diet. Hence, the monks must have had relatively easy access to a wide-ranging source of nourishment. Montanari has studied the gestures employed by some fraternities in order to communicate while maintaining the vow of silence. Among his findings are

<sup>247</sup> Columbanus Hibernus, *Letters of Columbanus*, Corpus of Electronic Texts Edition, Ep. IV, 2, p. 22, available at <http://celt.ucc.ie/published/L201054/index.html> (Accessed September 17th, 2017).

<sup>248</sup> The observation is mine.

<sup>249</sup> UBI VENERANDO DOGMA COLUMBANI SERVANDO. E. De Stefanis, *Materiali lapidei e fittili di età altomedioevale da Bobbio*, p. 173.

<sup>250</sup> The observation is mine.

<sup>251</sup> P. Camporesi, *Bread of Dreams* (Chicago: Polity, 1989), p. 127.

<sup>252</sup> The observation is mine.

<sup>253</sup> F. Nuvolone, *Colman, Columba, Giona*, p. 118

<sup>254</sup> A. Diem, ‘Disputing Columbanus’s Heritage: The Regula cuiusdam patris’, *Columbanus and the Peoples of Post-Roman Europe*, p. 268.

<sup>255</sup> M. Richter, *Bobbio in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 41.

<sup>256</sup> The observation is mine.

many gestures referring to animals and plants. Monks must have possessed a detailed knowledge of the natural world and had easy access to it.<sup>257</sup> There are indications that in the ninth century Bobbio's monastery had fishing rights in Lake Garda.<sup>258</sup> The voluntary choice of refraining from eating meat means that for monks, unlike for the rest of the population, it was widely available. Montanari claims that the act of giving up meat, one of the most common forms of penance, represented a symbolic rejection of the warring world some members of the nobility had left behind in order to engage in monastic life.<sup>259</sup> Therefore, prohibition was more stringent in Northern Europe, where meat was commonly consumed. Even though the duality between body and spirit is not part of the original Christian doctrine, the concept of depriving the body in order to enrich the spirit has constantly recurred over time in many monastic orders.<sup>260</sup> Paradoxically, abstaining from the food perceived by the monastic class as 'normal' was one of the elements making up a monk's identity.<sup>261</sup> In fact, monks did sometimes break the rules. Besides, exceptions to the diet could be made in special cases. The *RB*, for example, allowed brothers engaged in heavy labour to eat a larger ration of bread. Perhaps it is because monks were among the medieval social classes at risk of starvation, that the *VC* highlights the fact that Columban monks had to struggle to feed themselves when they first settled in Burgundy. The episode is also recalled by Columbanus himself: according to *Ep.* 2.1.16, seventeen brothers died of malnutrition in the first twelve years.<sup>262</sup>

The Irish traditional way of calculating the day of Easter was also destined to be abandoned in Columban monasteries by the 620's.<sup>263</sup> In theory, Columbanus was convinced of the moral superiority of monks to monastic clergy and did not tolerate any deviance from the Scriptures. Nonetheless, the practice he advocated was localised and, as such, did not receive an answer from Gregory, who was perhaps inclined to view the matter as of secondary importance.<sup>264</sup>

<sup>257</sup> M. Montanari, *Monastic Cooking*, (NY: Columbia University Press, 2015), p. 11.

<sup>258</sup> *ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>259</sup> *ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>260</sup> *ibid.* p. 4. The avoidance of spicy food, believed to increase sexual desire, went hand in hand with sexual abstinence.

<sup>261</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>262</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 7-8. The observation about Jonas stressing that the Luxeuil monks struggle to get food is in A. O'Hara, *Jonas of Bobbio and the Legacy of Columbanus*. p. 64.

<sup>263</sup> T. Leso, 'Columbanus in Europe: the evidence from the *Epistulae*', p. 369.

<sup>264</sup> *ibid.* p. 371.



#### 4.5 Bobbio as a cultural beacon

The parameters used in this work to elucidate the cultural prominence of Bobbio are: its library, and the Abbey Shrine, one of the most famous exhibits at Bobbio's. The story of Bobbio Abbey's library is difficult to piece together because its books are scattered all over Italy.<sup>265</sup> It reached its peak at the end of the seventh century but continued to thrive during the Carolingian period up until the twelfth century. Thereafter, it went into a state of decline and, by the time Humanists re-discovered it in 1493, many of the medieval MSS had already disappeared.<sup>266</sup> A lack of interest and care meant that more MSS would vanish during the course of the following centuries. Napoleon administered the library the coup de grace by ordering the suppression of the Abbey and the sale at auction of the remaining books.<sup>267</sup> While the reputation of the scriptorium at Bobbio Abbey used to be so great to have inspired Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, it is difficult to assess how many actual books were produced in situ or just transited there.<sup>268</sup> It appears that initially the activity of the abbey was limited at binding and storing MSS given by the Lombard crown. In the section of the VC dedicated to Bobbio's third abbot Athala, the activity of binding MSS (*libro legaminibus*) is mentioned.<sup>269</sup> The growing of a shrub used for tanning leather in one of Bobbio's cell gives further credit to this hypothesis.<sup>270</sup> Wala's inventory a couple of centuries afterward provides more information, listing among the staff members a librarian responsible for the scriptorium and the reading room.<sup>271</sup> The expansion of the library, especially under Bobulenus, is recorded by the ex libris found on some MSS originating from Bobbio's Library, where they are recorded to come from a box or bookcase (*arca*) that he had built. Other ex libris suggests that also later abbots had to increase storage space.<sup>272</sup> As far as the production of documents is concerned, it has been possible to ascertain that Bobbio's scriptorium started early on to specialise in the production of legal documents in order to satisfy the needs of the Lombard crown.<sup>273</sup>

<sup>265</sup> A. Attolini, *Il monastero di San Colombano in Bobbio*, p. 83. A whole list of Codices originating from Bobbio Abbey is provided in the Appendix to A. Zironi, *Il monastero longobardo di Bobbio*.

<sup>266</sup> G. Panzeri, *San Colombano Evangelizzatore dell'Europa*, p. 34.

<sup>267</sup> A. Attolini, *Il monastero di San Colombano in Bobbio*, p. 82.

<sup>268</sup> M. Rovelli, *Luoghi nei libri*, available at

<https://luoghineilibri.wordpress.com/?s=il+nome+della+rosa&submit=Search> (Accessed April 24th, 2017).

<sup>269</sup> E. De Stefanis, *Il monastero di Bobbio in età altomedioevale*, p. 85. Lapidge, however, claims that book production in Bobbio started with its second abbot, the learned Burgundian Athala. M. Lapidge, (ed) *Columbanus: Studies on the Latin Writings*, p. 26. Lapidge, M., *Columbanus: Studies on the Latin Writings*

<sup>270</sup> At the monastic cell of San Colombano in Bardolino the shrub *rhus cotinus* was grown and turned it into a powder used for tanning leather. E. De Stefanis, *Il monastero di Bobbio sulle vie del pellegrinaggio altomedioevale*, p. 85.

<sup>271</sup> E. De Stefanis, *Materiali lapidei e fittili di età altomedioevale da Bobbio*, p. 133

<sup>272</sup> *Vat. lat. 5758*, for instance, bears the inscription: "Liber de arca dom(ini) Bobuleni". A. Pratesi, BOBOLENO, santo. - Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani - 10 (1968), available at [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/santo-boboleno\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/santo-boboleno_(Dizionario-Biografico)/) (Accessed August 14th, 2018).

<sup>273</sup> A. Attolini, *Il monastero di San Colombano in Bobbio* p. 37.

The Abbey's position on the Via Francigena was ideal for the circulation of a variety of MSS from wide ranging sources. Evidence points to frequent book exchanges with other Lombardian monasteries, especially Luxeuil and St. Gall.<sup>274</sup> The abbreviations used in Bobbio's MSS are sometimes Northern Italian and other times insular, confirming that the Abbey was open to different iconographic influences.<sup>275</sup>

Zironi discovered a link between Bobbio and Irish monasteries by looking at Irish glosses on Bobbio's MSS, whose majority of reached Bobbio from Ireland already glossed during the Carolingian era. All Bobbio's MSS in insular writing appear to be written after the end of the seventh century. The earliest surviving MS made in Bobbio the ninth century.<sup>276</sup> Zironi laments that the fame of Montecassino's library has obscured Bobbio's because of the difficulty in gathering information.<sup>277</sup> However, in the last 50 years, palaeographers and philologists have demonstrated that the quantity of manuscripts produced in Bobbio's scriptorium, was extraordinary for various reasons. The erudition of Irish monks was such that they were able to translate into Latin for the first time old Greek texts. Moreover, all remaining texts in the Gothic language aside from the Codex Argenteus passed, at some point, through Bobbio's scriptorium. Interestingly, Bobbio's library became a centre for forgery. Over the centuries, an array of false documents attesting old privileges was produced to fight off claims to the Abbey's estate by local lords and bishops. Forgeries were equally produced by the Abbey's antagonists.<sup>278</sup>

The only artwork in Bobbio Abbey with a potential Irish provenance is the Bobbio shrine, found in 1910. It was discovered inside a sarcophagus, in a damp wooden box that contained many other objects. Among these, there were mica and rock crystal vials that held relics; hence the object was originally thought to be a reliquary. The curvilinear patterns and arc shape indicate that it was manufactured in Ireland at the end of the seventh century.<sup>279</sup> The casket was in pieces or, as the

<sup>274</sup> A. O'Hara, *Columbanus and the People of Post-Roman Europe*, p. 8.

<sup>275</sup> E. De Stefanis, *Materiali lapidei e fittili di età altomedievale da Bobbio*, p. 154.

<sup>276</sup> A. Zironi, *Il monastero longobardo di Bobbio*, p. 115.

<sup>277</sup> *ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>278</sup> G. Musina, *Le campagne di Piacenza tra VII e IX secolo*, pp. 64-5.

<sup>279</sup> [columbanus15](https://columbanus15.wordpress.com/2013/06/28/examination-of-the-bobbio-reliquarychrismal/), 'Examination of the Bobbio Reliquary/Chrismal', *Columbanus Life and Legacy*, 2013, available at <https://columbanus2015.wordpress.com/2013/06/28/examination-of-the-bobbio-reliquarychrismal/> (Accessed August 25<sup>th</sup>, 2018).

Director of the Dublin National Museum Michael Ryan put it “several copper-alloy decorated plates with a white metal coating”.<sup>280</sup> When the box was re-assembled in 2013 by members of the NUIG Archaeology Department and underwent microscopic examination, it was observed that it was used on a daily basis. In fact, its rear was thinner than the other parts as a consequence of being in contact with the owner’s body when carried around on a chain or a strap dangling from his neck. Pilgrims believed that the relics they were carrying would protect them. Nevertheless, the notion that Bobbio shrine was simply a reliquary was later superseded. The fact that one of the piano hinges of the Bobbio shrine is worn out suggests that its lid was opened frequently in order to administer the *viaticum*.<sup>281</sup>

Between 1990 and 2001 various fragments of a casket dated to the years 600 to 650 were found in the silt of the river Blackwater. These formed part of what is now known as the Clonmore Shrine and considered to be the earliest example of Christian metalwork in Ireland. Once all the pieces were assembled, the box revealed its similarity to Bobbio’s. At the time the Clonmore Shrine was manufactured, County Armagh was a popular destination for pilgrims and artisans alike. The gables in both containers are missing and it is therefore supposed that they were made of wood.<sup>283</sup> The discovery of the Clonmore Shrine initially suggested that Bobbio Shrine was manufactured in Ireland.<sup>282</sup> On the other hand, according to Ryan, the presence of tiny, decorative crystals on the Bobbio’s box is not a feature of insular metalwork. It could be likely, then, that it was made on the continent, perhaps in the workshop of Luxeuil, under Irish supervision.<sup>283</sup> The discovery of a few analogous house shaped caskets in other parts of Continental Europe supports the belief that insular monks introduced the practice to carry a chrismal containing the Eucharist.<sup>284</sup>

<sup>280</sup> M. Ryan, ‘Decorated metalwork in the Museo dell’Abbazia, Bobbio, Italy’, *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 1991, 120, pp. 102-11.

<sup>281</sup> ‘Shrine from Bobbio’, *Medieval Histories*, 2015, available at <https://www.medieval.eu/shrine-from-bobbio/> (Accessed July 30th, 2018).

<sup>282</sup> L. Siggins, *NUIG students discover church linked to St Columbanus in Italy*.

<sup>283</sup> Ochota, M., *Britain's Secret Treasures*, p. 258-60 (London: The British Library, 2013).

<sup>284</sup> [columbanus15](https://columbanus2015.wordpress.com/2013/06/28/examination-of-the-bobbio-reliquarychrismal/), ‘Examination of the Bobbio Reliquary/Chrismal’, *Columbanus Life and Legacy*, 2013, available at <https://columbanus2015.wordpress.com/2013/06/28/examination-of-the-bobbio-reliquarychrismal/> (Accessed August 25<sup>th</sup>, 2018) and A. O’Hara, *Jonas of Bobbio and the Legacy of Columbanus*, p. 224.

## **5. Conclusion**

In spite of the gap in written sources, such as the lack of an epistolary exchange between Columbanus and the Lombard royal couple, the findings of this dissertation tend to agree with Yaniv Fox's assertion that *peregrinatio* was "meticulously organized both by host and guest".<sup>285</sup> The tenet that insular missionaries let God guide them to their destination does not rule out the fact that they were well informed, prepared and, above all, connected. The analysis of all concurrent historical facts clearly points out all the advantages that cooperation between Columbanus, Agilulf and Theodolinda would bring to all parties. In the first instance, the political circumstances in Alemannia in 612 were volatile. Columbanus had lost the support of King Theudebert II.<sup>286</sup> Secondly, his presence had proven too disruptive for Count Gunzo, the Merovingian administrator of Bregenz, to allow him to continue to live there. Gallus, on the other hand, who did not represent such a threat, chose not to leave with his companion and carry on successfully his work of evangelisation among the local people.<sup>287</sup> Columbanus' refusal to baptize the Merovingian illegitimate children had caused a stir in Francia. The Italian situation was reversed. Here the leaders of different gens, who had familial ties with Merovingian, were trying to achieve what had not been accomplished before: the creation of a hereditary monarchy that could rule unchallenged. They knew they could count on Columbanus support. Agilulf belonged to the most powerful branch of the Agillolflings, a family who controlled a large part of Europe through strategic allegiances and arranged marriages.<sup>288</sup> To establish their primacy, Agilulf and Theodolinda needed to curb the power of the Lombard aristocracy, fight the Byzantines and strengthen their relationship with the Papacy, which was starting to be identified as the custodian of the true Christian message. Columbanus could help on all fronts. Theodolinda had relied for years on a schismatic spiritual counsellor, the courtier monk

<sup>285</sup> Y. Fox, 'Between Metz and Überlingen: Columbanus and Gallus in Alemannia' *Columbanus and the Peoples of Post-Roman Europe*, p. 207.

<sup>286</sup> Jonas, *Vita Sancti Columbani*, translated by a. O'Hara and I Wood., pp. 25-6.

<sup>287</sup> A. O'Hara, 'Columbanus ad Locum', pp. 166 -7.

<sup>288</sup> Y. Fox, *Power and Religion in Merovingian Gaul*, p. 61.

Secundus of Non.<sup>289</sup> It was he who masterminded and presided to her son's Adaloald Catholic baptism.<sup>290</sup> Once Secundus had died, Columbanus visited the Lombard court, in accordance with what Fox has called his *modus operandi*.<sup>291</sup>

By showing his uncompromising nature, Columbanus reinforced the perception that the message he carried was unadulterated. Besides, he had a successful track record of founding and running monastic institutions. His unique status of ascetic exile gave him leverage in delicate negotiations.<sup>292</sup> His French monasteries prospered because they enjoyed unparalleled independence.<sup>293</sup> Agilulf and Theodolinda were aware that, albeit risky, a partnership with him had the potential of being extremely successful. Learning from their Merovingian cousins, the Lombards started founding abbeys at the periphery of their kingdom in order to control border territories.<sup>294</sup> Initially, Bobbio acted as a buffer both against the Byzantine army and the scheming Lombard dukes. Quite revealing is the fact that Agilulf chose to share the profits of a salt mine between his most loyal warrior, Sundarit, and the Abbey. The former had always been the King's staunchest and most valuable supporter and yet the latter was adamant in preventing him from acquiring too much power.<sup>295</sup> In this respect, an abbey like Bobbio can be viewed as an alternative lordship to a castle, having a symbolic military function at the edge of the crown's latest land acquisitions. In exchange, Columban monks would pray for the royal family and for the prosperity of the Regnum Italicum, providing the Lombards what Taylor has defined as a 'higher ideology'.<sup>296</sup> The need to reconfirm the abbatial benefits with every change of king/abbot highlights the 'personal' relationship between Bobbio and the Lombard monarchy.<sup>297</sup> At the same time, the kings' willingness to reconfirm old gifts gave them moral prestige.<sup>298</sup> In time, their special relationship would prove counterproductive because, by undermining the freedom of the abbey, the Lombard royalty prevented it from achieving the very purposes for which it had been founded.

<sup>289</sup> Further information on the influence of Secundus can be found in R. Cervani, 'La fonte tridentina dell'*Historia Longobardorum*', p. 99.

<sup>290</sup> The significant role played by Queen Theodolinda is argued in E. Johnston, 'Movers and Shakers? How women shaped the Career of Columbanus', *Columbanus and the People of Post-Roman Europe*, p. 79.

<sup>291</sup> Y. Fox, *Power and Religion in Merovingian Gaul*, p. 61

<sup>292</sup> Jonas, *Vita Sancti Columbani*, translated by O'Hara, A. and Wood, I., p. 24.

<sup>293</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 14 and 27.

<sup>294</sup> A. O'Hara, 'Columbanus and Europe', *Columbanus and the People of Post-Roman Europe*, p. 6.

<sup>295</sup> The observation is mine.

<sup>296</sup> F. Taylor, PhD Thesis *Miracula, Saints' Cults and Socio-political Landscapes. Bobbio, Conques and Post-Carolingian Society*, The University of Nottingham, 2012, p. 24.

<sup>297</sup> *ibid.*, p. 32-5.

<sup>298</sup> *ibid.*, p. 38.

Jonas' hagiography supplied the narrative for the crown and Columbanus' joint venture. In his attempt to rehabilitate the image of the Irish monk, Jonas covered its tracks very carefully. For instance, the *VC* gives the murder of the two missionaries in the Constance Lake area as one of the motivations for Columbanus to leave. Maybe the local inhabitants' anger was driven by an infringement of their hunting rights rather than to hostility to the Christian belief. Whatever the reason, there was, for sure, a real threat to the monastic community.<sup>299</sup> Possibly doubtful that his readers, who were told of Columbanus' miracles beforehand, would not consider this episode a strong enough cause for Columbanus to leave Bregenz, Jonas added that when the monk started contemplating going east to preach to Slavs pagan tribes, the vision of an angel in a dream made him change his mind.<sup>300</sup> The Gallus affair is glossed over and it is only later, thanks to one of Gallus' hagiographies that we get an inkling of what might have happened when the two friends parted. Converting pagans and Arians was not the priority of insular monasticism.<sup>301</sup> Even though some scholars have labelled the Early Medieval European residue of paganism as 'modest', insular monks carried out an extensive re-Christianisation of parts of continental Europe that had formerly belonged to the Roman Empire.<sup>302</sup> The presence of churches dedicated to 'foreign' saints on the land of Bobbio Abbey confirms that Columban monks were sent to preach the Gospel to the local population.<sup>303</sup>

It is understandable that their choice of sites gifted with thermal, healing waters was determined by the fact that such places were pockets of paganism. The places where Columbanus' first and second monasteries were founded, Luxeuil and Annegray, had natural springs and were located on the border of Merovingians territories.<sup>304</sup> In the specific case of Bobbio, archaeological findings show

<sup>299</sup> A. O'Hara, 'Columbanus ad Locum', p. 166.

<sup>300</sup> Y. Fox, 'Between Metz and Überlingen: Columbanus and Gallus in Alemannia', *Columbanus and the Peoples of Post-Roman Europe*, p.207.

<sup>301</sup> H. Wolfram, 'Columbanus and the Mission to the Bavarians and the Slavs in the Seventh Century', *Columbanus and the Peoples of Post-Roman Europe*, p. 167.

<sup>302</sup> A. Diem, 'Disputing Columbanus's Heritage: The Regula cuiusdam patris', *Columbanus and the Peoples of Post-Roman Europe*, p. 256.

<sup>303</sup> A. Lucioni, 'Cura animarum e presenze culturali nell'Appennino piacentino dall'alto medioevo agli albori dell'età moderna', in E. De Stefanis, *Il monastero di Bobbio sulle vie del pellegrinaggio altomedioevale*, p. 64.

<sup>304</sup> A. O'Hara, 'Columbanus ad Locum', p. 149.

evidence of an ancient local cult of the Roman goddesses Minerva and Diana, which had attracted pilgrims from Roman urban centres. The offshoot of Columbanus Italian monastic mission was tied up with a development of the countryside, which had been previously cultivated by retired Roman soldiers but subsequently abandoned. The activity of re-colonisation of the land was aided by serfs and gave a boost to the local economy and population growth.

Re-Christianisation often implied a re-appropriation of the space reserved for offerings and ritual feasting. Old pagan temples were destroyed and replaced with religious institutions that could provide hospitality to pilgrims.<sup>305</sup> In a short space of time, the fame of the deceased Columbanus turned Bobbio into a stopover point on the route from Northern Europe to Rome and Jerusalem. The establishment of a safe pilgrimage network incentivised the movement of men and goods and linked Bobbio with other Columban monasteries, transforming it into a culture hub.

Columban monasticism was a top-down phenomenon. His monasteries provided education and influential social positions to high-born males who did not inherit the family estate or to wealthy, unmarried or widowed females. As a consequence, they were able to secure the influence of specific families within a world where secular and religious power rubbed shoulders. Their presence redefined the organisation of Northern Italic territory, generating new centres of authority to rival or replace the late Roman *civitas* and local bishoprics.<sup>306</sup> The ‘*puberta nobilis*’ Jonas attributed to Columbanus, although not to be interpreted necessarily in the literal sense, gave the latter the innate confidence to deal with the contemporary social elite.<sup>307</sup> When he reached a destination, he went straight to the king in search of protection and, on the grounds of the special treatment reserved to Irish missionaries, he obtained it. In exchange, his monks offered Germanic settlers a new, orthodox identity and justification to rule Europe. Rid of their undistinguished, rough invaders’ image and lured by the prestige of the Roman army subtly recycled by early monastic rhetoric, Lombard aristocrats fostered the Christian cause in a new, and still changing, European landscape.<sup>308</sup>

<sup>305</sup> A. O’Hara, ‘Columbanus ad Locum’, p. 158.

<sup>306</sup> E. Bardella, *Il monastero di San Colombano di Bobbio dalla sua fondazione (614) alla creazione della diocesi bobbiese (1014)*, p. 13.

<sup>307</sup> D. A. Bullough, ‘The Career of Columbanus’ in Lapidge, M., *Columbanus: Studies on the Latin Writings*, p.3.

This synergy led to the strengthening of national monarchies by granting them a more dependable strategy for managing conquered lands than merely distributing them among their feudatories. Another player was appearing on the scene in the form of the Holy See, which by the seventh century had tightened its grip and taken on unrivalled the leadership of the Western Church.<sup>309</sup> Agilulf and Theodolinda were the first Lombard sovereigns to realize that they needed Papal recognition in order to establish a hereditary monarchy.<sup>310</sup>

When Agilulf died in 616 the temporary balance of power he had created would continue into the years of Theodolinda's regency.<sup>311</sup> Nevertheless, his son Adaloald's openness towards the Papacy and the Byzantines concerned the most conservative fringe of Lombard dukes, who claimed that the young man had gone insane and poisoned him.<sup>312</sup> A state of relative peace and unity did not return until the advent of King Rotary in 636. In the meantime, the Aquilean schism eventually fizzled out while the Lombard monarchy funded the construction of more monasteries, restoring Northern Italy to some form of stability.<sup>313</sup> The ascetic Columban rule, exported to continental Europe "from the edge" of the Western world, commanded respect and set new standards for an idealized and inspirational form of monasticism.<sup>314</sup> O'Hara argues that Bobbio was more conservative than Columbanus' Burgundian monasteries, because the senior figures of the community had been forced to leave France.<sup>315</sup> Even so, the *RC* was too harsh and not articulate enough to have a medium to long term practical application in continental Europe.<sup>316</sup> The expansion of Bobbio Abbey relied on the integration of the *RC* with norms that could be applied and appealed to large monastic communities. At the same time, the rise of the cult of St. Columbanus ensured that his monks could keep their pristine reputation.

<sup>308</sup> A. O'Hara, *Columbanus and the People of Post-Roman Europe*, pp. viii-ix.

<sup>309</sup> A. O'Hara, 'Patria, Peregrinatio and Paenitentia', pp. 16-7.

<sup>310</sup> A. O'Hara, *Columbanus and the People of Post-Roman Europe*, p. 9.

<sup>311</sup> G. Arnosti, *Il regno longobardo di Milano, da Teodolinda a Gundeberga (aa.616-636)*, p. 1 (in academia.edu, 2016] [https://www.academia.edu/30628272/Il\\_regno\\_longobardo\\_di\\_Milano\\_da\\_Teodolinda\\_a\\_Gundeberga\\_aa.](https://www.academia.edu/30628272/Il_regno_longobardo_di_Milano_da_Teodolinda_a_Gundeberga_aa.)

<sup>312, 313</sup> G. Arnosti, 'Il regno di Milano 591-616'. p. 10.

<sup>314</sup> A. O' Hara, *Jonas of Bobbio and the Legacy of Columbanus*, p. 2.

<sup>315</sup> *ibid.*, p. 291.

<sup>316</sup> The observation is mine.



Although the Columban Christian warriors had lost their reason to fight, they still carried the same unadulterated message of their founder. Regardless of the fact that Columbanus' presence in Italy was much shorter than in France, the monastery he founded in Bobbio was to become a stronghold of power for both Lombard and Carolingian kingdoms. The settlement of the Lombards in Italy was accelerated by the embracement of local customs and of the Roman Christian tradition. Ironically, the same 'people' who, in 577, had sacked Montecassino Abbey compelling its monks to flee to Rome with the copy of the *RB* started building their own monasteries less than fifty years later.

## 6. Appendix

6.1 and 6.2 below show the Italian territories conquered by the Lombards in 568 and the size of the Lombard kingdom by the end of the seventh century.<sup>317</sup>





<sup>317</sup> the maps are available at <http://www.langbardland.info/regno.html> (Accessed on August 14<sup>th</sup>, 2016)

### 6.3 Grid of Italian churches, monasteries, oratories and chapels dedicated to Saint Columbanus with pictures, locations and some historical details.

LOMBARDY	PIEDMONT	EMILIA ROMAGNA	LIGURIA	TUSCANY	VENETO	TRENTINO ALTO ADIGE
 <p><b>1. Chiesa di San Colombano in Valtesse</b> (province of Bergamo) - distance from Bobbio 55.4 km – mentioned for the first time in a 1108 document. The old medieval church was demolished in 1750. The configuration of the church, where the main altar is dedicated to Saint Columbanus and the two side altars to Saint Peter and Saint Mary, is similar to those of Luxeuil and Bobbio. Some reports of bishops' visit to Valtesse over the centuries further reinforce its connection with the Columban cult.</p>	  <p><b>14. Chiesa della Natività di Maria Vergine e San Colombano in Belforte Monferrato</b> (province of Alessandria) – - distance from Bobbio 162km. The church in Picture 2 was built when the local community moved from the valley to the hills for safety reasons. Picture 1 shows the ruins of Faldelino, an early medieval cell of Bobbio Abbey.</p>	<p><b>ABBAZIA DI SAN COLOMBANO DI BOBBIO (PROVINCE OF PIACENZA)</b></p>	<p><b>35. Chiesa di San Colombano di Casarza Ligure</b> (province of Genoa) - distance from Bobbio 113km- Founded on land given to Bobbio by Charlemagne in a 774 grant – only ruins remain, photo not available. On the main merchant route between the West Coast and central Italy.</p>	 <p><b>45. Chiesa di San Colombano, Posara di Fivizzano</b> (province of Massa Carrara) - distance from Bobbio 201km - mentioned for the first time in a 15-16C document.</p>	 <p><b>51. Chiesa di San Colombano di Bardolino</b> (province of Verona) - distance from Bobbio 183km – in existence since Lombard times. The Church stands on the ruins of a Priory on the shores of Bardolino lake</p>  <p><b>52. Chiesa dei Santi Colombano e Giuseppe in Pero di Breda di Piave</b> (province of Treviso) - distance from Bobbio 327km</p>	 <p><b>53. Eremo di San Colombano Trambileno</b> (province of Trent) - distance from Bobbio 235km – It was founded in 753 to commemorate the place where Columbanus slew the dragon preventing children from being baptized in the local stream.</p>
 <p><b>2. Chiesa di San Colombano di Parzanica</b> ( province of Bergamo) – Distance from Bobbio 91km – the hamlet of Parzarica,</p>	 <p><b>15. Oratorio dei Santi Colombano e Bernardo in Ciglione di Ponzone</b> (province of Alessandria) -</p>	 <p><b>25. Eremo di San Michele di Coli</b> (otherwise called <i>Spelonca di San Michele</i>– province of Piacenza) – distance from</p>	 <p><b>36. Chiesa di San Colombano in Cogorno</b> (province of Genoa) - distance from Bobbio 99.5km - sources claim the church was founded</p>	 <p><b>46. Chiesa dei Santi Giovanni e Colombano di Pontremoli</b> (province of Massa Carrara) - distance from Bobbio 169km.</p>		

built on the mountain overlooking Lake Iseo, used to be isolated until 1957, when a road was built. 20 years later a bell tower containing a statue of S. Columbanus was added to the church.

**distance from Bobbio 179km.** It appears to go back to the beginning of the 8C. It was founded by Columban monks. Next to a cemetery.

**Bobbio 24km.** It can be reached walking on a footpath from the village of Coli or on other local footpaths. Allegedly the place where Saint Columbanus went on a retreat for Lent in the last year of his life. The current building dates to the 11C. Contrary to popular belief, there is no evidence he died there on November 23, 615. The cave and the nearby small church (the existing building dates to the 16C, but there the original was much older) soon became a pilgrimage destination in their own right, a detour for pilgrims travelling from Northern Europe to Rome via Bobbio. It is still a favourite spot for pilgrims and hikers.

by Columban monks in the 9C on abbatial land. It became a parish church in the 13C.

- according to tradition, the church was founded in 1219 by Saint Francis and enlarged twice, in the 15 and 18C. Between the 14 and 16C it was a popular burial spot for local people.



**4. Chiesa di Santi Gottardo e Colombano in Arlate di Calco (province of Lecco) – distance from Bobbio 152km - a 12-13C building in Romanesque style.**



**16. Chiesa di San Colombano in Variana di Grondona (province of Alessandria) - distance from Bobbio 185 km - the 17C church bell tower seems to have had both a religious and military function**



**26. Ottone Soprano (in the province of Piacenza) – distance from Bobbio 29km - the presence of a church here is documented since the beginning of the 18C. The current church was built at the beginning of the**



**37. Chiesa di San Colombano, Davagna (province of Genova) - distance from Bobbio 67km - mentioned for the first time in 1206.**



**47. Chiesa di San Colombano in San Colombano di Capannori (province of Lucca) – distance from Bobbio 323km**

20C.



**5. Chiesa dei Santi Pietro, Paolo e Colombano di Fombio** (province of Lodi) – distance from Bobbio 62km - this parish church dedicated to Saint Peter, Paul and Columbanus was built in 1390 by Alberto Scotti.



**17. Chiesa dei Santi Pietro e Colombano in Pagno** (province of Cuneo) - distance from Bobbio 150km - its construction on Bobbio's land was commissioned by the Lombard King Aistulf (749-756).



**27. Chiesa di San Colombano in Lusurasco di Alseno** (province of Piacenza) - distance from Bobbio 69.8km - the current church is a 17C building located on the site of a two century older religious building.



**38. Chiesa di San Colombano in Vignale di San Colombano Certenoli** (province of Genoa) - distance from Bobbio 78km - the locality, originally called Brembella, used to be a cell of Bobbio since the 9C



**48. Chiesa dei Santi Clemente e Colombano in Terrinca di Stazzema** (province of Lucca) distance from Bobbio 247km – founded by Columban monks in the 9C.



**6. Chiesa di San Colombano in San Colombano al Lambro** (province of Milan) – distance from Bobbio 64km – the modern church was built at the end of the 15C using the material of a former, older church attached to the ruins of a Lombard castle on Bobbio Abbey's land.



**18. Chiesa di San Colombano di Pezzolo Valle Uzzone** (province of Cuneo) – distance from Bobbio 220km - built in the 18C.



**28. Chiesa di San Maurizio e San Colombano di Pianello Val Tidone** (province of Piacenza) - distance from Bobbio 29km – built in 1250.



**39. Santuario dei Santi Cosima and Damiano, in Gavenola, Borghetto d'Aroschia** (province of Imperia) – distance from Bobbio 276km - the current church was built in the 19C where an 18C tower had been standing. The site, at the top of a 1069m hill, was originally inhabited by Columban monks and represented a vital communication point between Liguria and Piedmont.



**49. Chiesa dei Santi Matteo e Colombano a Pietrabuona di Pescia** (province of Pistoia) - distance from Bobbio 288km- founded under Lombard rule on Bobbio's land.



**7. Chiesa di San**



**19. Chiesa di S.**








**29. Chiesa di**



**40. Concattedrale**



**50. Chiesa dei**

<p><b>Colombano in Riva Suzzara</b> (province of Mantua) - distance from Bobbio 156km – dates back to Lombard times and it is believed to be located in a strategic position, allowing Columban monks to control the local waterways (a safer alternative to the Via Aemilia).</p>	<p><b>Maria del Rosario e San Colombano di Monchiero</b> (province of Cuneo) - distance from Bobbio 216. - this church was built on a hill for safety reasons; there are ruins of an older 8C church in the valley below.</p>	<p><b>San Colombano in Muradello di Pontenure</b> (province of Piacenza) - distance from Bobbio 53km - built on Bobbio Abbey's land.</p>	<p><b>di S. Pietro, Lorenzo e Colombano di Brugnato</b> (province of La Spezia)- distance from Bobbio 117km - an early Christian site later occupied by Columban monks.</p>	<p><b>Santi Matteo e Colombano a Pietrabuona di Pescia</b> (province of Pistoia) - distance from Bobbio 288km- founded under the Lombards on Bobbio's land.</p>
 <p><b>8. Chiesa di San Colombano in Santa Giuletta</b> (province of Pavia) - distance from Bobbio 88km – mentioned for the first time in a 11C document. It has been altered many times. It appears that a religious building dedicated to the early Christian martyr Saint Giuletta had existed on this site since the 4C.</p>	 <p><b>20. Chiesa di San Colombano di Biandrate</b> (province of Novara) - distance from Bobbio 180km – the original part of the church is Romanesque. The place was on a pilgrim route. Marseilles' Bishop Serenus is thought to having died here on his way to visit Gregory the Great in Rome.</p>	  <p><b>30. Chiesa di San Colombano in Vernasca</b> (province of Piacenza) - distance from Bobbio 70km- located on the <i>Via Francigena</i>, it replaces the old 12C <i>pieve</i> in the picture on the right after the latter was partly destroyed by a landslide.</p>	 <p><b>41. Chiesa di San Colombano in Cornice di Sesta Godano</b> (province of La Spezia) distance from Bobbio 124km- founded in the 12C by Columban monks.</p>	 <p><b>49. Chiesa dei Santi Matteo e Colombano a Pietrabuona di Pescia</b> (province of Pistoia) - distance from Bobbio 288km- founded under Lombard rule on Bobbio's land.</p>
 <p><b>9. Chiesa di San Colombano in Torremenapace, Voghera</b> (province of Pavia) - distance from Bobbio 63km- documents attest that it was founded in 1304 and in 1533 it was already dedicated to Saint Columbanus.</p>	 <p><b>21. Chiesa dei Santi Lorenzo e Colombano a Oga di Valdisotto</b> (province of Sondrio) - distance from Bobbio 307km.</p>	 <p><b>31. Chiesa di San Colombano a Vicobarone di Ziano Piacentino</b> (province of Piacenza) - distance from Bobbio 60km – the original church dates to the 12C, when this area belonged to Bobbio Abbey.</p>	 <p><b>42. Chiesa di San Colombano in Lodisio di Piana Crixia</b> (province of Savona) – distance from Bobbio 216 km. Although the present church was built in 1806, its origin is believed to be early medieval.</p>	 <p><b>50. Chiesa dei Santi Matteo e Colombano a Pietrabuona di Pescia</b> (province of Pistoia) - distance from Bobbio 288km- founded under the Lombards on Bobbio's land.</p>



**10. Chiesa di San Giacomo in Menconico** (province of Pavia) – distance from Bobbio 20km – the modern church was re- built on the site of the original one, which was dedicated to Columbanus and had been built on land given to Bobbio by Queen Theodolinda. It is believed the original church replaced a pagan temple. Nearby there was a pilgrim hostel (Oratorio di S. Maria in Branzola).



**22. Chiesa dei Santi Marco, Colombano e Gregorio in Mantello** - (province of Sondrio) - distance from Bobbio 215km. According to legend, Columbanus stopped briefly here on his way to Italy and met Theodolinda, who used to escape the Milan summer heat in Domofole Castle (in nearby Mello). In reality, the Lombard castle of Domofole seems to be the castle where Gundeberga, Teodolinda's daughter, was kept captive for some time.



**32. Chiesa di San Colombano in San Colombano di Meldola** (province of Forli Cesema) - distance from Bobbio 277km – founded in the 18C- said to contain Columbanus' sackcloth.



**11..Chiesa di San Colombano a Monteforte di Varzi** (province of Pavia) – distance from Bobbio 33km. Although the original church is estimated to be much older, it is mentioned for the first time only in 1016. Founded on a salt trade route by Columban monks.



**23.Chiesa di San Colombano a Campo Mezzola di Novate Mezzola** (province of Sondrio) - distance from Bobbio 219km – founded by Columban monks under the Lombards



**33. Oratorio di San Colombano di Bologna** – distance from Bobbio 195km - built by Piero, Bishop of Bologna, in memory of his former teacher Columbanus. The early medieval crypt was discovered by chance in 2007 underneath the current church during restoration work.





**12. Chiesa di San Colombano di Vaprio d'Adda** - (province of Milan) - distance from Bobbio 135 km. The actual building dates to the 12C. It is thought to have been built on the site of a pagan temple shortly after the foundation of Bobbio Abbey.



**24. Chiesa e Convento di San Colombano a San Colombano Belmonte** (province of Turin) - distance from Bobbio 259km – founded by Columban monks.



**34. Chiesa di San Colombano a Fogliano** (province of Reggio Emilia) - distance from Bobbio 140km.



**13. Chiesa dei Santi Marziano e Colombano in Corbesassi di Brallo di Pregola** (province of Pavia) - distance from Bobbio 23km – Saint Martinianus was the first Bishop of Tortona.

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