The Church and the Alps: A Search for Patterns of Dissemination

by Vladimir Ivanovici

In this article I review written and material sources to consider whether there was an episcopal strategy to spread the Christian faith in the area of the southern Alps in the fourth and fifth centuries CE. In other words, I ponder if we can speak of 'Christianisation' in this area and period.[1] A nuanced analysis that does justice to the strategies available for disseminating the faith would require the space of a monograph. Instead, I focus on identifying the backbone of the process represented by the network of baptisteries.

Since the right to baptise was becoming an episcopal prerogative in this period, the existence of baptisteries typically implies the presence of a bishop, or of a priest to whom the right was mandated by a bishop.[2] Thus, along with an intention to proselytise, baptisteries attest to the presence of episcopal authority, and their locations help us trace its advancement into a given territory. For the area between Milan and the Alpine passes, the locations of several baptisteries vis-à-vis episcopal centres follow a pattern mentioned by written sources in relation to bishop Ambrose of Milan (sed. 374–397). Thus, this brief analysis argues first that, thanks to the efforts of Ambrose, the area from Trent to Novara was covered by a closely knit episcopal network whose bishops followed the policies introduced by the Milanese bishop. This is followed by a review of existing textual and material information on clerical efforts to spread the Christian faith in this area. In closing, the article considers whether a coherent episcopal strategy to disseminate the faith can be identified.

Ambrose of Milan and the 'Church of the North'

The arrival of Christianity in the area just south of the Alps is shrouded in legend. Despite later traditions that ascribe the founding of the community in Aquileia to the apostle Mark and relate Milan's first bishop to the apostle Peter, it is not until the early fourth century that we have solid proof of a Christian presence in the area.[3] Situated at the crossroad between the western and eastern provinces of the Roman Empire, and between the Italian peninsula and the provinces beyond the Alps, the area was both economically and strategically important.[4] Merchants and soldiers crossed it, thriving cities rose at the intersection of its main arteries, and smaller settlements crystallised along the main routes. The countryside was divided into estates owned by rural gentry or local aristocrats who resided in the cities. Often, Christianity and other religions originating in the eastern parts of the Empire were spread by soldiers and merchants.[5] Thus, the fifth-century tradition regarding an Egyptian legion martyred at the order of Emperor Maximian (r. 286–305) at Agaunus (now Saint-Maurice, Valais) might contain a kernel of truth, even if its details have been adapted to fit hagiographic narratives that exaggerated historical events in order to render events more impactful.[6]

Written sources are silent regarding the first three centuries. In addition, the absence of a distinctively Christian material culture in this period makes it difficult to individuate a Christian presence through archaeological finds. The earliest secure testimonies come from the presence of bishops from the area at Church councils held in Rome (313), Arles (314), and Serdica (343), as well as from the cultic complex at Aquileia, whose earliest phase can be ascribed to the 320s.[7] Both the organisation of certain communities into bishoprics in the early fourth century and the Aquileian Christians' capacity to build an impressive basilica within a decade of the religion's legalisation point to the existence of dynamic Christian communities in the urban centres. The presence of the imperial court in Milan (as imperial capital from 284 to 402) stimulated an influx of people from around the Empire.[8] Since the emperors were Christian for most of this period, their physical presence likely contributed to the popularity of the faith among those in the area. Thus, by the middle of the fourth century, most of those living in Milan seem to have adopted one or another form of Christianity, and shared the city with smaller groups of polytheists and Jews.[9] Along with the city's imperial status, the rapid spread of the faith within the city enhanced the local bishop's prestige. The process was further stimulated through the activity of Ambrose, who made the Church in Milan the de facto leader of churches in the area.

Arriving in Milan in 370 as governor of Aemilia-Liguria, Ambrose was appointed bishop through public acclamation four years later.[10] Ambrose brought to the episcopate the instruments of authority commonly used by late Roman aristocrats, using a combination of personal relations, charisma and power to establish Milan as a spiritual capital.[11] His efforts led to the consolidation of the Church in the area south of the Alps, which he tied into a network

of patronal relations that had Milan as nexus. During the almost twenty-three years of his episcopate, Ambrose created new dioceses and sowed the seeds of others. As a result, in the wake of his office the number of episcopal centres almost doubled (Fig. 1).[12] Ambrose appointed his protégées as bishops in both existing dioceses and in those he had created, thus assuring his influence over their policies.[13] Extant letters to and from Milan attest to the fact that these bishops turned to Ambrose for spiritual and administrative counselling.[14] In addition, by sending to these and other bishops relics of the Milanese martyrs, Ambrose reinforced the spiritual patronage of his city over other Christian centres.[15] As a result, during Ambrose's episcopate and the years that followed it, bishops from the area followed several of the policies established by the bishops of Milan.

Ambrose's project for a unified Church in the northern part of the Italian peninsula invites us to ignore modern divisions of the territory and look at the area holistically. This approach sheds light on both the success of Ambrose's endeavour and on the coherent way in which bishops of the late fourth and fifth centuries approached the spread of the Christian faith outside the walls of their cities. Attested by written testimonies and confirmed by archaeological data, the strategy attests to the importance of Alpine passes for local bishops.

Recurrent Patterns: Textual Sources

The writings of Ambrose, Zeno of Verona (*sed.* 362–380), Gaudentius of Brescia (*sed.* ca. 387–410), Vigilius of Trent (*sed.* 385–405), Chromatius of Aquileia (*sed.* 387–407), and Maximus of Turin (d. ca. 423) document the complex issues faced by bishops in the area. With Roman society changing at a fast pace, bishops had to negotiate the Church's (and their own) status.[16] In addition, they had to deal with the persistence of polytheistic beliefs and local customs, as well as with competing versions of Christianity (see Fig. 2, Introduction).[17] Given the complicated situation, bishops typically left the Christianisation of rural areas in the hands of private landowners.[18] Nevertheless, a close look at the phenomenon shows that sporadic yet coherent efforts to spread the faith were also made by the bishops, in particular in areas leading towards and across the Alps.

Although written sources document only three such missions, they do offer key details on the process. The first case regards Como – the Roman city located at the southernmost point of the large lake of the same name. There, Ambrose appointed his friend Felix (*sed.* 386–390) as the first bishop of the town, thus creating a new diocese.[19] Como controlled a wide area towards the north that included Lake Como, Ticino, Valtellina, and the Alpine passes of Spluga and Settimo. Extant letters between Ambrose and Felix attest to the newly appointed bishop's missionary activity, with Ambrose congratulating him for the conversions his activity catalysed in the city.[20] Ambrose admits that he cannot send people to help Felix but expresses his faith that God will soon reveal local Christians who will assist Felix. As we have seen, establishing new dioceses and appointing spiritual sons as bishops was one of Ambrose's strategies. If Como is typical, these first bishops had little support, at first, in carrying out their missionary activities. It is, nevertheless, other details about the new bishopric that prove essential to this analysis, such as the location of the new bishopric to the north of the 'mother' episcopal see, on a route leading across the Alps, and on water.

The second instance brings us to Trent. Born in a patri-

Fig. 1 Episcopal sees before and after the episcopate of Ambrose of Milan. Milan is indicated in red, dioceses preceding Ambrose are in indicated in orange, new ones in green.
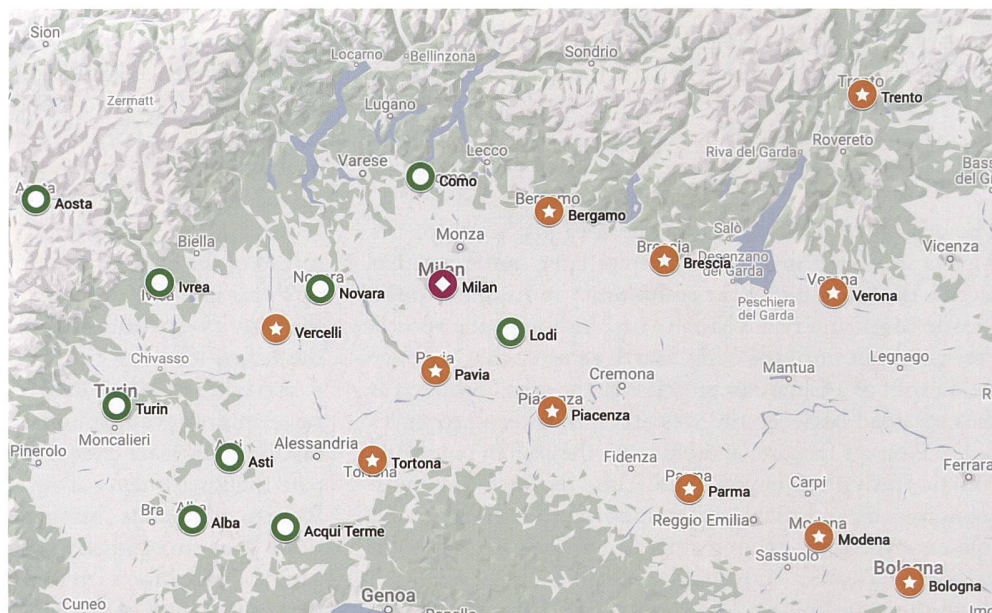
Fig. 2   Location of proselytising missions mentioned in written sources.

cian family and educated in Athens, Vigilius of Trent was in contact with Ambrose, who had written a letter of advice upon Vigilius' nomination as bishop.[21] Vigilius' letters to Ambrose's successor, Simplician (*sed*. 397–ca. 401) and to the archbishop of Constantinople, John Chrysostom (ca. 347–407), inform us that three missionaries in the Trent diocese had been martyred.[22] Sisinnius, a deacon, Martyrius, a lector, and his brother Alexander, who had the low clerical function of door-keeper, had arrived at Trent from Milan – possibly at Ambrose's initiative or at least with his mediation. Vigilius' phrasing leads us to believe that the three came in contact with several communities but had settled in Anaunia, some forty kilometres north of Trent, on the Via Claudia Augusta that led across the Alps to Rhaetia. There, they had built a church and were eventually killed because they prevented a new convert from contributing to sacrifices to the old gods.[23] As in the case of Felix, we see a bishop sending clergy members a day's travel north of his episcopal centre, on an Alpine pass, in a locality on or close to water – the Non Valley (where Sisinnius, Martyrius, and Alexander fulfilled their mission) is coextensive with the Noce River that unites Trent with the Alpine Lake of St. Giustina (Fig. 2).

The third and last case regards the mission of brothers Julius and Julian, a priest and a presbyter, respectively, and is less reliable in its details.[24] Said to be from Thessaly (Greece), the brothers supposedly obtained from Emperor Theodosius I (r. 379–395) the right to spread the Christian faith and destroy polytheistic shrines. On their way to Rome and then travelling further north, the brothers are said by their eighth-century vita to have destroyed several temples and established dozens of churches. The text documenting (and romanticising) their deeds has Julian die and be interred in the ninety-ninth church the brothers founded. Continuing further north, Julius established the one-hundredth church on a small island on Lake Orta in the newly founded diocese of Novara (Fig. 3).[25] On the island, which now carries his name, Julius died and was buried inside the church. This embellished legend contains elements that reference the late fourth/early fifth century situation – a date confirmed by the analysis of materials used in the church's initial phase.[26] Again, there is a connection to Milan, although less direct than in the first two cases. Emperor Theodosius resided in Milan for part of his rule. His mention, thus, could be read as a connection with the city of Ambrose. In addition, the brothers' legend mentions their relationship with the senator and *vir magnificus* Audentius, who had interests and connections in Milan. Finally, the opus sectile decoration in the church on the island bears both stylistic and material similarities to that used in Ambrose's Milan (Fig. 4).[27] Thus, although presented as a private endeavour with imperial support, the mission of Julius and Julian follows the pattern of episcopal missions in the area.

Several elements occur in all three textual instances, which indicate a pattern: a connection to Milan, a mission established roughly 50 kilometres north of the 'mother' episcopal centre, on an Alpine route, and on a body of water. Since the rivers and lakes in the area were used for commercial travel, it seems that the Church sought to

Fig. 3   San Giulio Island, Lake Orta, Piedmont.

Fig. 4   Late antique opus sectile fragments. Church of San Giulio, San Giulio Island, Lake Orta.

establish its presence in key locations on the paths leading north.[28] Although the wide chronological and geographical span in focus and the few surviving accounts limit the relevance of this pattern found in written testimonies, it is confirmed by archaeological remains attesting to episcopal interventions in the area.

Recurrent Patterns: Material Sources

As argued in the opening paragraph, in Late Antiquity baptisteries signalled the direct involvement of a bishop, as well as an intention to proselytise. Thus, their presence helps us trace the advancement of both the Church and the faith. The area from Trent to Novara is particularly rich in late antique baptisteries in various states of conservation.[29] Unfortunately, most of them lack precise dating, with

scholars relying on architectural features, decorative style or the presence of funerary inventories.[30] As a result, it is difficult to establish the chronology of these buildings in absolute terms. In addition, since there were no formal differences between the churches and baptisteries built by Catholic and Arian Christians, we cannot ascribe with certainty the remains of these spaces to either of the communities that cohabitated in this area throughout the period.[31] The Arian dogma – a type of Christianity that subordinated Jesus to God the Father – was popular among the Goth and Lombard populations that settled in the peninsula in various stages during the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries. Their arrival added to the overall number of Christians in the area, but also complicated the reading of the archaeological data, since one effect of their settlement was the doubling of cultic structures. Clearer inside larger cities where two cathedrals and baptisteries can be seen to have functioned simultaneously, the distinction is more difficult to make in smaller localities. Nevertheless, for our present goal of identifying concerted attempts to support the advancing of the faith into the territory, it makes little difference whether the initiative was Catholic or Arian.

The pattern we found in written sources offers an interpretative lens through which to reassess the archaeological data, allowing us to propose a solution to the imprecise dating of these buildings. A closer look at the relationship between episcopal centres and baptismal churches – that is, churches that had a baptistery – reveals that several of these churches followed the pattern we found in written sources: namely, they are located a day's travel north of the episcopal see, on a commercial route, and often on the water (Fig. 5).

In the western part of the area in focus here, in the diocese of Vercelli, a baptistery is attested at Lenta.[32] Found next to the Sesia River that connects Vercelli with the Alps, the small locality is halfway between the episcopal see and the southern shore of Lake Orta. Traces of a baptistery are also found on the other side of the Sesia river
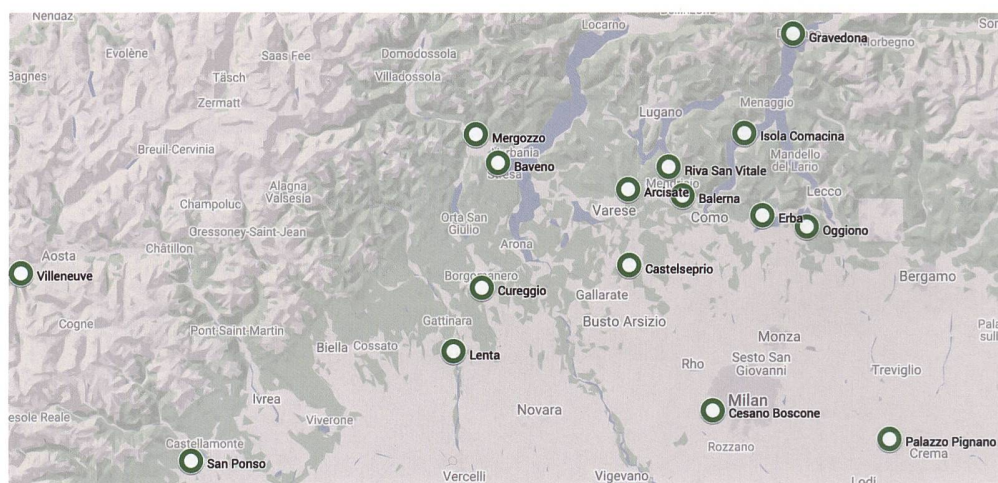

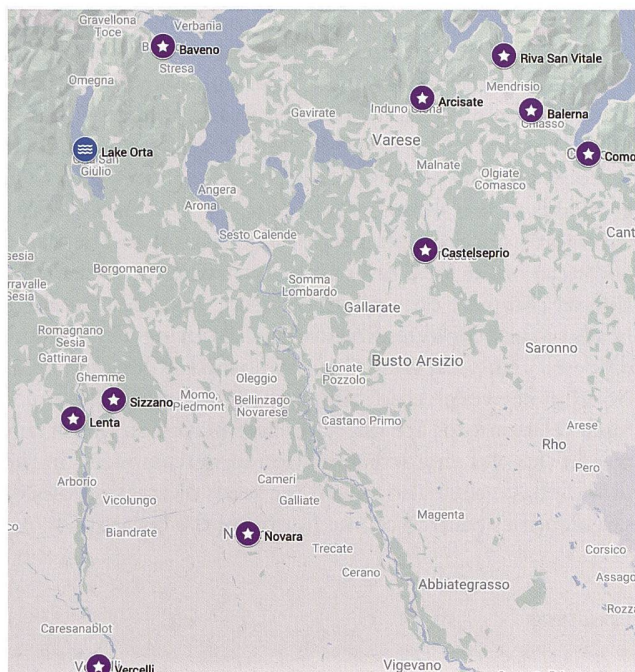Fig. 5   Location of rural baptisteries.

Fig. 6   Baptisteries in the dioceses of Vercelli and Novara.

and parallel to Lenta, in Sizzano.[33] Sizzano is midway between the episcopal see of Novara and Lake Orta – the same spatial relationship found in the case of Vercelli-Lenta. When considered in a 'vertical', north-south dynamic, the location of the two baptisteries points to them being used as bridgeheads to connect their respective episcopal centres to Lake Orta and the route to the north. Their proximity could also be read as the establishing of competing Catholic and Arian baptisteries in the

same area. The baptistery network continues northward with Baveno, on the western shore of Lake Maggiore, at the point where those travelling north on Lake Orta would have crossed on land to change lakes and continue on water. It also continues east, towards Lakes Lugano and Como, with the baptisteries at Castelseprio and Arcisate (Fig. 6).[34]

Lakes Lugano and Como were in the diocese of Como and show a similar strategy. On the southernmost point of Lake Lugano we find the baptistery of Riva San Vitale.[35] Another baptistery is attested midway between Riva San Vitale and Como, at Balerna.[36] On Lake Como there are late antique baptisteries on Comacina Island and at Gravedona – two important points that connect the southernmost shore, where Como is located, with the Alpine passes beginning north of the lake.[37] Finally, the baptisteries at Erba and Oggiono, set thirteen kilometres from Como and from each other, connect the episcopal centre with the eastern arm of Lake Como using the small lakes system in between (Fig. 7).[38]

The last diocesan 'system' I will look at is that of Brescia, an episcopal centre located south of and in between Lakes Iseo and Garda. On the point closest to Brescia on Lake Iseo a church dedicated to St. Andrew was commissioned by bishop Vigilius of Brescia (late fifth century), as indicated by his burial inside.[39] Although the church does not preserve a baptistery, the dedication of a nearby church to St. John the Baptist could indicate the presence of a baptistery that was later converted into a church but maintained its original dedication to the Baptist.[40] In the other direction, towards Lake Garda, the Pieve Vecchia church at Manerba is located in a similar position on the shore closest to Brescia and had a baptistery.[41] Finally, a church with baptistery was excavated at Bedizzole, halfway
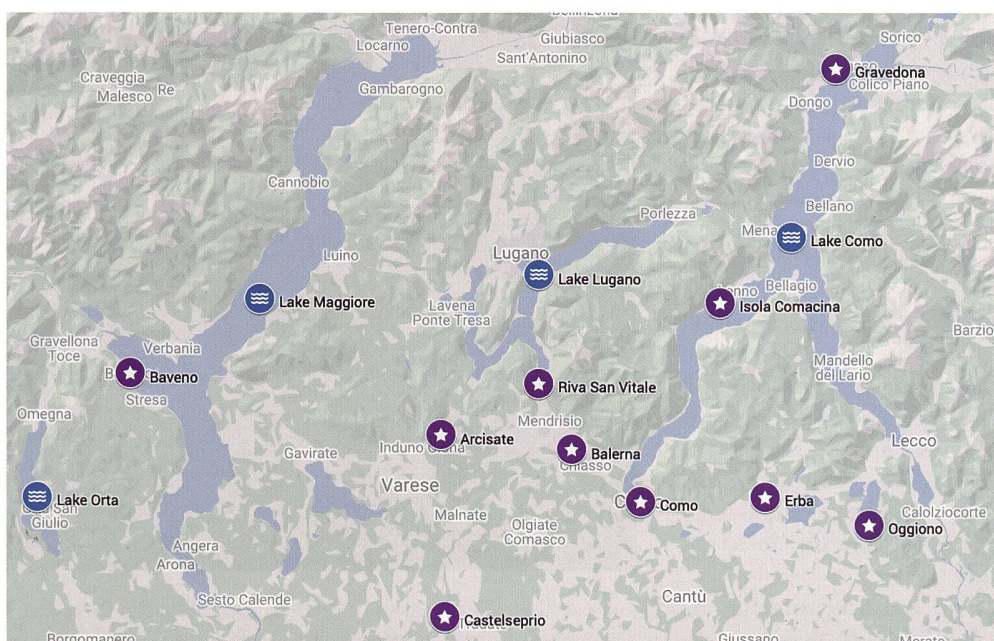

Fig. 7   Baptisteries around Lakes Maggiore, Lugano, and Como.

Fig. 8   Sites attested in the diocese of Brescia.

between Brescia and Lake Garda, at the intersection between the River Chiese and the Roman street going to Verona (Fig. 8).[42]

The bottom of the late antique font at Bedizzole was decorated with high quality mosaic. Against a white background a circle embellished with stylised wave motifs inscribes a large, jewelled cross from whose arms hang an A and Ω (Fig. 9).[43] The high quality of the mosaic points to artisans sent from Brescia, an assumption confirmed by the presence of a stamped brick discovered in the masonry of the church. As pointed out by Gian Pietro Brogiolo, the stamp is identical to those found on bricks used to build the cathedral in Brescia.[44] It thus appears that materials left over from the construction of the cathedral were sent to help with the construction of the Bedizzole ecclesiastic complex, which attests to its importance for the local bishop.

It is tempting to see this capillary network of baptismal churches extending northward in chronological fashion, and thus to date the sites that are closer to the episcopal centres earlier. However, this might not always be the case. It could be that bishops focused initially on key locations that would have functioned as bridgeheads, connecting important localities with the episcopal centre and signalling that the commercial route belongs to the diocese. Over time, as the Christian presence in the area grew as more people were initiated, additional baptisteries could have been erected in other locations both on and between the same north-south axes, thus creating a network that covered the territory. The presence of baptisteries not only in traditional Roman centres on these routes, but also in new settlements such as Castelseprio (which emerged in this period as a result of political and demographic changes) attests to the Church carefully selecting the most appropriate locations.[45]

Baptismal churches fulfilled several functions for the Church. The baptistery signalled visually that the area belonged to a diocese led by the bishop. In addition, the nocturnal setting of the ritual in these centuries meant that baptisteries functioned like lighthouses that announced the presence of the divine and called people to salvation, as the light inside poured out through their windows. Their placing in highly visible locations, such as islands or lakeshores enhanced the effect (Fig. 10). Furthermore, since priests performed baptism in the name and stead of the local bishop, the initiation was often considered complete only after the bishop anointed the foreheads of the neophytes (the *consignatio*) during a visit to the diocese. Thus, baptism also established a personal relationship between those joining the faith and the bishop.[46] Such relationships are likely to have played an important role in the zeal and determination of new converts in the initial phase; they also sowed the seeds of creating diocesan identities centred on the figures of the bishops.

Conclusion

In their 2001 analysis of the spread of Christianity in "agglomerati secondari", Gisella Cantino Wataghin, Vincenzo Fiocchi Nicolai, and Giuliano Volpe pointed out the need to further elucidate whether episcopal foundations outside diocesan centres were part of a strategy of "territorial occupation".[47] As we have seen, the notion of

Fig. 9   Mosaic decoration of late antique baptistery font, Santa Maria Annunciata, Pontenove di Bedizzole.

Fig. 10   Riva San Vitale seen from Monte Generoso. The fifth-century baptistery is located in the vicinity of the shore.

'occupation' does not seem to apply to this phase, which appears characterised by coordinated but very limited interventions in diocesan territory. Nevertheless, despite the slow pace and sporadic character of these initiatives, the following of a clear strategy indicates that contrary to previous beliefs, baptismal churches erected in this area in the period between the late fourth and the sixth centuries constituted an ecclesiastic network.[48] If the present analysis is correct, baptismal churches represented episcopal bridgeheads into the territory, which served as the backbone for further advances of both the faith and the Church, and tied the various types of religious spaces found in the territory – i.e., parish churches, martyr shrines, family chapels – into a network leading back to the episcopal centres.

Taken together, the material and written sources attest to the existence of an institutional strategy to spread the Christian faith in the area. The location of baptisteries confirms the pattern emerging from the few written sources. Ambrose of Milan's policy of creating bishoprics and sending missionaries to key locations seems to have been adopted by other bishops in the area, both in Ambro-

se's time and later. The main features of this strategy appear to be the establishment of bishoprics or baptismal churches around 50 km north of the 'mother' dioceses, on routes leading north and typically on the water.

Recognition of this pattern provides us with an underlying structure of the process of 'Christianisation', timid and slow as it was. If the cases of Felix and the Val di Non missionaries are indicative, both bishops and clergy members in these newly established Christian centres relied on personal efforts. Thus, at the core of the 'Christianisation' process lies the 'Christianness' of individuals. The ways in which each of these individuals embodied and performed the faith emerges as essential to the spread of the faith in this period, with institutional support limited to training in the mother diocese, conferring to them the right to proselytise and baptise and, in cases such as Bedizzole, helping with the erection of the church and baptistery.

If the dating of the baptisteries in the area under examination here is correct, we are looking at a slow process, with the Church advancing in the territory roughly 50 km every half a century. Considering that this is the period when the bulk of the population was adopting the

Christian faith in the Mediterranean provinces of the empire, the pace is particularly slow, attesting perhaps to the deeply rooted nature of local cults and beliefs. While the presence of these baptisteries and their strategic locations attest to the existence of a strategy to disseminate the faith in the Alpine regions, the slowness of the process points to the resistance of the population and to the limited number of clerical members involved in the process – both elements attested by the sources.[49] Thus, although documented, it appears inaccurate to speak of 'Christianisation' of the area.

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NOTES

[1] The spread of the Christian faith outside Roman cities was studied by province, which hindered recognition of recurrent patterns. On Lombardy, see e.g., Marco Sannazzaro, *La cristianizzazione delle aree rurali della Lombardia (IV–VI sec.). Testimonianze scritte e materiali*, Milan, 1990; id., *Costituzione e sviluppo di centri religiosi cristiani nelle campagne lombarde: problemi topografici e archeologici*, in: Il territorio tra tardoantico e altomedioevo. Metodi di indagine e risultati, 3. Seminario sul tardoantico e l'altomedioevo nell'area alpina e padana, Monte Barro-Galbiate (Como) 1991, eds. Gian Pietro Brogiolo / Sauro Gelichi, Florence 1992, pp. 61–71. On Piedmont, see e.g., Franco Bolgiani, *La penetrazione del Cristianesimo in Piemonte*, in: Atti del V Congresso Nazionale di Archeologia Cristiana, Torino-Valle di Susa-Cuneo-Asti-Valle d'Aosta-Novara, 22–29.9.1979, I, Roma-Aosta-Novara, 1982, pp. 37–61; Giovanni Mennella, *La cristianizzazione rurale in Piemonte: il contributo dell'epigrafia*, in: Archeologia in Piemonte. Il medioevo, eds. Liliana Mercando / Egle Micheletto, Torino, 1998, pp. 151–160; Maria Silvia Lusuardi Siena / Bruno Taricco / Edoardo Gautier (eds.), *Il viaggio della fede. La cristianizzazione del Piemonte meridionale fra IV e VIII secolo*, Alba-Bra-Cherasco, 2013. For an overview of the process in the Italian peninsula, see Gisella Cantino Wataghin, *Christianisation et organisation ecclésiastique des campagnes: l'Italie du nord aux IVe–VIIIe siècles*, in: Towns and their Territories Between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, eds. Gian Pietro Brogiolo / Nancy Gauthier / Neil Christie (=The Transformation of the Roman World, vol. 9), Leiden, 2000, pp. 209–234; Gisella Cantino Wataghin / Vincenzo Fiocchi Nicolai / Giuliano Volpe, *Aspetti della cristianizzazione degli agglomerati secondari*, in: La cristianizzazione in Italia fra tardoantico e altomedioevo, Atti del IX Congresso Nazionale di Archeologia Cristiana (Agrigento, 20–25 novembre 2004), eds. Rosa Maria Bonacasa Cara / Emma Vitale, Palermo, 2007, pp. 85–134.

[2] On baptism during the first centuries, with an introduction to the main steps of the ritual, its evolution and available sources, see e.g., Victor Saxer, *Les rites de l'initiation chrétienne du IIe au VIe siècle. Esquisse historique et signification d'après leurs principaux témoins*, Spoleto, 1988; Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries*, Grand Rapids, 2009; David Hellholm, et al. (eds.), *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism: Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity*, 2 vols., New York, 2011; Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation*, Collegeville, 1999. On late antique baptisteries, see e.g., Maria Falla Castelfranchi, *Battistero*, in: Enciclopedia dell'arte medievale, vol. 3, 1992, pp. 214–217; Sebastian Ristow, *Frühchristliche Baptisterien*, Münster, 1998; Robin M. Jensen, *Living Water: Images, Symbols, and Settings of Early Christian Baptism*, Leiden, 2010; Olof Brandt, *Understanding the Structures of Early Christian Baptisteries*, in: Hellholm, et al. (eds.), pp. 1587–1609; id., *Battisteri oltre la pianta. Gli alzati di nove battisteri paleocristiani in Italia*, Città del Vaticano, 2012. On baptismal churches and baptisteries in the Italian peninsula in this period, see Daniela Gandolfi (ed.), *L'edificio battesimale in Italia. Aspetti e problemi. Atti dell'VIII Congresso nazionale di archeologia cristiana (Genova, Sarzana, Albenga, Finale Ligure, Ventimiglia, 21–26 settembre 1998)*, Bordighera, 2001. On baptisteries erected by private individuals and episcopal efforts to control the practice, see Cinzio Volante, *Le strutture organizzative della cura d'anime nelle campagne dell'Italia centrosettentrionale (secoli V–X)*, in: Cristianizzazione e organizzazione ecclesiastica delle campagne nell'alto medioevo: espansione e resistenze (=Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, vol. 28), Spoleto, 1982, pp. 963–1158; Luce Pietri, *Évergétisme chrétien et fondations privées dans*

l'Italie de l'antiquité tardive, in: Humana Sapit: études d'antiquité tardive ollerts à Lellia Cracco Ruggini, eds. JEAN-MICHEL CARRIÉ / RITA LIZZI TESTA (=Bibliothèque de l'Antiquité Tardive, vol. 3), Turnhout, 2002, pp. 253–263.

3   PAUL THE DEACON (d. 799), *Liber de Episcopis Mettensibus* 2.260–70 (ed. GEORG HEINRICH PERTZ, Stuttgart, 1890, p. 261, =Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptorum Tomus II); MARCO SANNAZZARO 1990 (see note 1), p. 9.

4   The area was organised as a separate administrative entity in 297 by Emperor Diocletian (r. 284–305), who divided the peninsula in two. *Italia Suburbicaria* comprised the centre and the south, while *Italia Annonaria* stretched from the Maritime Alps in the west to the Adriatic, and from Ravenna in the south to the north of the Swiss Alps.

5   See e.g., MARK HUMPHRIES, *Trading Gods in Northern Italy*, in: Trade, Traders and the Ancient City, eds. HELEN PARKINS / CHRISTOPHER SMITH, London, 1998, pp. 203–224.

6   EUCHERIUS OF LYON (ca. 450), *Passio Acaunensium Martyrum* (ed. BRUNO KRUSCH, Stuttgart, 1986, pp. 20–41, =Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores Merovingicarum III); DENIS VAN BERCHEM, *Le martyre de la légion Thébaine. Essai sur la formation d'une légende* (= Schweizerische Beiträge zur Altertumswissenschaft, vol. 8), Basel, 1956; THOMAS BAUER, *Thebäer*, in: Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon, 11, 1996, pp. 784–791; INGO RUNDE, *Thebäische Legion*, in: Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde 2.30, 2005, pp. 400–405; OTTO WERMELINGER / PHILIPPE BRUGGISSER / BEAT NÄF / JEAN-MICHEL ROESSLI (eds.), *Mauritius und die Thebäische Legion, Akten des internationalen Kolloquiums Freiburg, Saint-Maurice, Martigny, 17.–20. September 2003* (=Paradosis. Beiträge zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur und Theologie, vol. 49), Fribourg, 2005.

7   MARCO SANNAZZARO 1990 (see note 1), pp. 10–19. On the complex at Aquileia, see GIUSEPPE CUSCITO, *Cristianesimo antico ad Aquileia ed in Istria*, Trieste, 1977; id. (ed.), *La basilica di Aquileia: storia, archeologia ed arte. Atti della 40 Settimana di studi aquileiesi* (7–9 maggio 2009) (= Antichità altoadriatiche, vol. 69), Trieste, 2010.

8   On Milan and its culture in this period, see *Milano capitale dell'Impero Romano 286–402 d.C. Catalogo della mostra: Milano, Palazzo Reale gennaio-aprile 1990*, Milan, 1990.

9   LELLIA CRACCO RUGGINI, *Milano capitale: gruppi religiosi e conflitti fra IV e V secolo*, in: Annali di storia dell'esegesi, 26, 2009, pp. 7–22, at pp. 7–9.

10   On the life of Ambrose, see e.g., NEIL B. MCLYNN, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital*, Berkeley, 1994; JOHN H. W. G. LIEBESCHUETZ / CAROLE HILL, *Ambrose of Milan. Political Letters and Speeches* (=Translated Texts for Historians, vol. 43), Liverpool, 2005, pp. 3–26.

11   Other bishops of the time used similar means but were less tenacious and successful. On bishops in this period, see e.g., RITA LIZZI TESTA, *Il potere episcopale nell'Oriente romano. Rappresentazione ideologica e realtà politica (IV–V secolo d.C.)*, Urbino, 1987; CLAUDIA RAPP, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition* (=The Transformation of the Classical, vol. 37), Berkeley, 2005.

12   Milan, Brescia, Bergamo, Pavia, Modena, Bologna, Piacenza, Parma, Tortona, Trento, Vercelli, and Verona existed. Ambrose is credited with making Lodi, Como, Aosta, Novara and possibly Acqui, Alba, Asti, Ivrea and Turin. Cf. FRANCESCO LANZONI, *Le diocesi d'Italia dalle origini al principio del secolo VII* (an. 604) (=Studi e Testi, vol. 35.1–2), vol. 2, Faenza, 1927, pp. 767–820 and 1056–1071. According to a vita whose details remain uncertain, Gaudentius had been supported in his missionary activities by Ambrose but named bishop of Novara by Ambrose's successor, Simplicianus. Whether or not this is accurate, the seeds for making Novara into a diocese seem to have been planted by Ambrose. See GIANNI COLOMBO (ed.), *Vita sancti Gaudentii*, Novara, 1983.

13   This is documented by PAULINUS OF MILAN (ca. 340-ca. 429), *Vita Amb.* (ed. GABRIELE BANTERLE, *Le fonti latine su Sant'Ambrogio*, Rome, 1991, pp. 28–85). See RITA LIZZI TESTA, *Vescovi e strutture ecclesiastiche nella città tardoantica (L'Italia Annonaria nel IV–V secolo d.C.)*, Como, 1989, pp. 46–50, 97–109; ead., *Ambrose's Contemporaries and the Christianisation of Northern Italy*, in: The Journal of Roman Studies 80, 1990, pp. 156–173, at pp. 158–159; NEIL B. MCLYNN (see note 10), p. 284. On Ambrose gaining spiritual authority over these bishops, see RITA LIZZI TESTA 1989 (see above), pp. 15–28; CAMILLE GERZAGUET, *Pouvoirs épiscopal et luttes d'influence: Ambroise de Milan, le 'parrain' des évêques d'Italie du Nord*, in: Réseaux sociaux et contraintes dans l'Antiquité Tardive: Actes de la journée d'études (Université de Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense, 27 juin 2013) (=Revue des Études Tardoantiques Supplément, vol. 1), eds. ARIANE Brodin / TIPHAINE MOREAU, Paris, 2014, pp. 219–240.

14   Extant letters attest his correspondence with Trent, Como, Claterna, Vercelli, Verona, and Piacenza. Cf. RITA LIZZI TESTA 1990 (see note 13), p. 160; NEIL B. MCLYNN (see note 10), p. 125; CAMILLE GERZAGUET (see note 13), pp. 228–229, 282. Ambrose also wrote or responded to letters from bishops and prominent Christians from Gaul and Spain. On his Mediterranean-wide network and control of local bishops, see WILLIAM H. C. FREND, *St. Ambrose and Other Churches (Except Rome)*, in: Nec timeo mori. Atti del congresso internazionale di studi ambrosiani nel XVI centenario della morte di sant'Ambrogio, 4–11 Aprile 1997, eds. L. F. Pizzolato / M. Rizzi, Milan, 1998, pp. 161–180. On sending letters and relics as a "marketing strategy" meant to create a network with Milan as centre, see NEIL B. MCLYNN (see note 10), p. 284.

15   ALŽBĚTA FILIPOVÁ, *Milan sans frontières. Le culte et la circulation des reliques ambrosiennes, l'art et l'architecture (IVe–VIe siècle)* (=In Between. Images, Words and Objects, vol. 1), Rome, 2019.

16   On bishops and the issues they faced in this period, see e.g., RITA LIZZI TESTA (see note 11); CLAUDIA RAPP (see note 11); ÉRIC REBILLARD / CLAIRE SOTINEL (eds.), *L'évêque dans la cité du IVe au Ve siècle. Image et autorité* (=Publications de l'École française de Rome, vol. 248), Rome, 1998.

17   On polytheism, see MAXIMUS OF TURIN, *Serm.* 91 (ed. ALMUT MUTZENBECHER, *Maximus Taurinensis: Sermones*, Turnhout, 1962, p. 369, =Corpus christianorum, Series Latina, vol. 23) and FRANCESCO MASSA's contribution in this volume. On heresies, see e.g., LELLIA CRACCO RUGGINI (see note 9).

18   ZENO OF VERONA, *Tract.* 1.25.10–1 (ed. BENGT LÖFSTEDT, *Zenonis Veronensis Tractatus*, Turnhout, 1971, p. 75, =Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina, vol. 22); GAUDENTIUS OF BRESCIA, *Tract.* 13.23.28 (ed. AMBROSIUS GLÜCK, *Tractatus XXI. Gaudentius Brixiensis*, Vienna, 1936, pp. 120–122, =Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, vol. 68); MAXIMUS OF TURIN, *Serm.* 42.1, 63.2, 91, 98.2, 105–108 (ed. MUTZENBECHER 1962, =CCSL 23); MARCO SANNAZZARO 1990 (see note 1), pp. 20–28, 98; GIAN PIETRO BROGIOLO / SAURO GELICHI / GISELLA CANTINO WATAGHIN, *L'Italia settentrionale*, in: Alle origini della parrocchia rurale in Italia. Atti della giornata tematica dei Seminari di Archeologia Cristiana (École française de Rome 1998), ed. PHILIPPE PERGOLA (=Sussidi allo studio delle antichità cristiane, vol. 12), Città del Vaticano, 1999, pp. 487–540, at p. 535; GISELLA CANTINO WATAGHIN (see note 1), p. 216; KIM BOWES, *Private Worship, Public Values, and Religious Change in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge, 2008, p. 172.

19   On their friendship, see NEIL B. MCLYNN (see note 10), pp. 281–282.

20   AMBROSE, *Ep.* 3 and 4 (ed. J.-P. MIGNE, Patrologia Latina 16, Paris, 1845, coll. 888–891, =PL 16).

21   AMBROSE, *Ep.* 19 (ed. MIGNE, coll. 982–994, =PL 16). The details of Vigilius' life come from several later texts, mentioned in MARCO SANNAZZARO 1990 (see note 1), p. 38. Ambrose's letter,

which focused on Samson, proved providential since Vigilius eventually died while destroying temples.

22 Vigilius of Trent, *Ep.* 1 and 2 (ed. J.-P. Migne, Patrologia Latina 13, Paris, 1845, coll. 549–558, =PL 13); Rita Lizzi Testa 1989 (see note 13), pp. 59–96; ead., 1990 (see note 13), p. 171; Marco Sannazzaro 1990 (see note 1), pp. 35–38.

23 The episode is retold in a more dramatic fashion by Maximus of Turin, *Serm.* 105 and 106 (ed. Mutzenbecher 1962, pp. 414–419, =CCSL 23) and is mentioned by Gaudentius of Brescia, *Tract.* 17 (ed. Glück 1936, p. 144, =CSEL 68) and Augustine of Hippo (354–430), *Ep.* 139.2 (ed. J.-P. Migne, Patrologia Latina 33, Paris, 1865, coll. 535–536, =PL 33).

24 *Vita SS. Iulii et Iulianii* (ed. Socii Bollandiani, Brussels, 1898–1899, =Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina, vol. 5.1); Mario Perotti, *La legenda dei santi Giulio e Giuliano e gli inizi del Cristianesimo nel territorio novarese*, in: Novarien, 19, 1989, pp. 171–199; Lino Cerutti (ed.), *San Giulio e la sua isola nel XVI centenario di san Giulio*, Novara, 2000.

25 On the diocese, see note 12.

26 Pier Angelo Frigerio / Pier Giacomo Pisoni, *I ss. Giulio e Giuliano e l'evangelizzazione delle terre verbanesi e cusiane*, in: Verbanus, 9, 1988, pp. 215–277; Giancarlo Andenna, *Le istituzioni ecclesiastiche locali dal V al X sec.*, in: Storia religiosa della Lombardia. Diocesi di Milano, eds. Adriano Caprioli / Antonio Rimoldi / Luciano Vaccaro, Brescia-Gazzada, 1990, pp. 123–142, at pp. 125–126.

27 Luisella Pejrani Baricco, *Le fonti archeologiche per la storia dell'isola*, in: San Giulio e la sua isola nel XVI centenario di San Giulio, Novara, 2000, pp. 85–111.

28 Alexandra Chavarría Arnau, *Splendida sepulcra ut posteri audiant. Aristocrazie, mausolei e chiese nelle campagne tardo antiche*, in: Archeologia e società nell'Alto Medioevo. XI Seminario sul tardo antico e l'alto medioevo (Padova, settembre 2005) (=Documenti di Archeologia, vol. 44), eds. Gian Pietro Brogiolo / Alexandra Chavarría Arnau, Mantua, 2007, pp. 127–145 noted the location of rural churches in localities on the commercial routes and interprets that as fulfilling the needs of the local population, rather than indicating a strategy to proselytise.

29 On rural baptisteries, see Vincenzo Fiocchi Nicolai / Sauro Gelichi, *Battisteri e chiese rurali (IV-VII secolo)*, in: Daniela Gandolfi (ed.) (see note 2), pp. 303–384.

30 See e.g., the case of the best preserved one, namely the Riva San Vitale baptistery: Guido Borella, *Il Battistero di Riva San Vitale*, Lugano, 1976; Isidoro Marcionetti, *Battistero di Riva San Vitale: Storia, arte, liturgia*, Lugano, 1978; Rossana Cardani, *Il battistero di Riva San Vitale: l'architettura, i restauri e la decorazione pittorica*, Locarno, 1995; Sebastian Ristow (see note 2), p. 221.

31 On Arianism in this context, see Guido M. Berndt / Roland Steinacher, *Arianism: Roman Heresy and Barbarian Creed*, Farnham-Burlington, 2014; Thomas S. Brown, *The Role of Arianism in Ostrogothic Italy: The Evidence from Ravenna*, in: The Ostrogoths from the Migration Period to the 6th Century: An Ethnographic Perspective, eds. Samuel Barnish / Federico Marazzi, Woodbridge, 2007, pp. 417–426. On the difficulty to identify Arian churches using formal elements, see Bryan Ward Perkins, *Archaeology and Iconography of Germanic Arianism*, in: Religious Diversity in Late Antiquity, eds. David Morton Gwynn / Luke Lavan / Susanne Bangert, Leiden, 2010, pp. 265–269; Ralf Bockmann, *The Non-Archaeology of Arianism — What Comparing Cases in Carthage, Haïdra and Ravenna can tell us about 'Arian' Churches*, in: Arianism: Roman Heresy and Barbarian Creed, eds. Guido M. Berndt / Roland Steinacher, Farnham 2014, p. 201–218. The notable exception is represented by Ravenna. See Ian Wood, *Theoderic's Monuments in Ravenna*, in: Samuel Barnish / Federico Marazzi (eds.), pp. 249–277; Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge, 2010.

32 Elisabetta Gareri Caniati, *La pieve di Santo Stefano di Lenta: nota preliminare sui risultati dello scavo*, in: Arte e storia di Lenta. Atti del convegno di Studi (Vercelli 1981), dir. Maurizio Cassetti, Vercelli, 1986, pp. 229–242; Maria Teresa Sardo, *Lenta. Area limitrofa alla Pieve di S. Stefano. Insediamento tardo-antico*, in: Quaderni della Soprintendenza Archeologica del Piemonte, 7, 1988, pp. 107–108; id., *Lenta. Area limitrofa alla Pieve di S. Stefano. Insediamento tardo-antico*, in: Quaderni della Soprintendenza Archeologica del Piemonte, 8, 1989, p. 253; Sebastian Ristow (see note 2), p. 183; Vincenzo Fiocchi Nicolai / Sauro Gelichi (see note 29); Pejrani Baricco, *Chiese battesimali in Piemonte: scavi e scoperte*, in Daniela Gandolfi (ed.), (see note 2), pp. 541–588.

33 Franco Dessilani, *Sizzano. Un paese attraverso i secoli*, Novara, 1995; Gisella Cantino Wataghin / Vincenzo Fiocchi Nicolai / Giuliano Volpe (see note 1), p. 105.

34 On the baptistery at Baveno, see Sebastian Ristow (see note 2), p. 175; Vincenzo Fiocchi Nicolai / Sauro Gelichi (see note 29), pp. 324–325; Eleonora Cornaglia / Stefania Cornaglia, *Il battistero di Baveno: Lago Maggiore*, Verbania, 2009. On the baptistery at Castelseprio, see Mario Mirabella Roberti, *La basilica e il battistero di Castelseprio*, in: Ambrosius, 37.1, 1962, pp. 47–49; id., *Il battistero di Castelseprio*, in: Sibrium, 16, 1982, pp. 181–192; Sebastian Ristow (see note 2), p. 175; Vincenzo Fiocchi Nicolai / Sauro Gelichi (see note 29), p. 328. On the baptistery at Arcisate, see Mario Bertolone, *Un battistero del V secolo ad Arcisate*, in: Rassegna storica del Seprio, 1, 1938, p. 231; Sandro Mazza, *Il battistero di Arcisate*, in: Rivista della Società Storica Varesina, 13, 1977, pp. 93–112; Vincenzo Fiocchi Nicolai / Sauro Gelichi (see note 29), p. 328.

35 See above, note 30.

36 See the contribution by Rossana Cardani Vergani and Maria-Isabella Angelino in this volume.

37 On the baptistery on the island, see Marco Sannazzaro 1990 (see note 1), pp. 88–90; Sebastian Ristow (see note 2), p. 182; Vincenzo Fiocchi Nicolai / Sauro Gelichi (see note 29), p. 330. On the baptistery in Gravedona, see Sebastian Ristow (see note 2), p. 181; Fiocchi Nicolai / Gelichi 2001 (see note 29), p. 329.

38 On the baptistery at Oggiono, see Giuliana Bonelli / Roberto Spreafico, *Il battistero di Oggiono: lavori in corso*, in: Quaderni Oggionesi, 2.2, 1998, pp. 9–56; Fiocchi Nicolai / Gelichi 2001 (see note 29), pp. 332–333. On the baptistery at Erba, see Sauro Gelichi, *Il battistero di San Giovanni di Incino*, Erba, 2001; Vincenzo Fiocchi Nicolai / Sauro Gelichi (see note 29), pp. 330–331.

39 Paolo Guerrini, *La pieve di S. Andrea di Iseo*, in: Memorie storiche della diocesi di Brescia, 5, 1934, pp. 157–256; Gian Pietro Brogiolo, *Sant'Andrea*, in: Le chiese medievali del Garda Bresciano, ed. id., Arco, 2015, pp. 85–91.

40 See Dario Gallina, *La pieve di Sant'Andrea di Iseo (Bs). Dall'analisi stratigrafica e archeologica alla politica edilizia dell'episcopato bresciano tra XI e XII secolo*, in: Architettura dell'XI secolo nell'Italia del Nord. Storiografia e nuove ricerche. Atti del Convegno Internazionale (Pavia 8-10 aprile 2010), eds. Annamaria Segagni Malacart / Luigi Carlo Schiavi, Pisa, 2013, pp. 177–197, at p. 181.

41 Martin Oswald Hugh Carver / Serena Massa / Gian Pietro Brogiolo, *Sequenza insediativa romana e altomedievale alla Pieve di Manerba (BS)*, in: Archeologia Medievale, 9, 1982, pp. 237–298; Monica Ibsen, *Santa Maria (Pieve Vecchia)*, in: Gian Pietro Brogiolo (ed.), (see note 39), pp. 63–66.

42 Andrea Breda / Ivana Venturini, *La pieve di Pontenove di Bedizzole (BS)*, in: Daniela Gandolfi (ed.) (see note 2), pp. 631–646; Vincenzo Fiocchi Nicolai / Sauro Gelichi (see note 29), pp. 333–335; Gian Pietro Brogiolo, *La pieve di Pontenove di Bedizzole*, in: id. (ed.), (see note 39), pp. 76–78.

43 Andrea Breda / Ivana Venturini (see note 42).

44   GIAN PIETRO BROGIOLO, *Le chiese dal V al X secolo*, in: id. (ed.) (see note 39), p. 7.

45   On the new settlements and their relationship with the Church, see GISELLA CANTINO WATAGHIN / VINCENZO FIOCCHI NICOLAI / GIULIANO VOLPE (see note 1), pp. 102–103, with bibl.

46   On priests baptising for bishops, see e.g., GELASIUS I (*sed.* 492–496), *Ep.* 14 (ed. ANDREAS THIEL, *Epistolae Romanorum Pontificum* 1, Braunsberg, 1868, p. 377). On the *consignatio*, with bibl. and discussion of local sources on the ritual, see MATTEO BRACONI, *Una nuova lastra gradese con una singolare scena liturgica: per una iconografia paleocristiana della consignatio*, in: Rendiconti. Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia, 84, 2011–2012, pp. 121–154.

47   GISELLA CANTINO WATAGHIN / VINCENZO FIOCCHI NICOLAI / GIULIANO VOLPE (see note 1), p. 105.

48   GIAN PIETRO BROGIOLO (see note 42), p. 8 argued for the area of Brescia that "Le chiese battesimali tardoantiche, pur svolgendo un ruolo di forte solidarietà e coesione sociale, non costituivano una rigida rete ecclesiastica."

49   On the persistence of pre-Christian practices, see the contribution by FRANCESCO MASSA in this volume.

IMAGE CREDITS

RIASSUNTO

L'autore si chiede se sia esistita una strategia istituzionale coerente di diffusione della fede cristiana nelle aree delle Alpi meridionali. Attraverso l'uso combinato di fonti testuali e materiali *(fonti archeologiche)*, identifica un modello ricorrente, che prevedeva la creazione di chiese battesimali a nord delle sedi episcopali, in luoghi chiave della viabilità che tendeva al versante settentrionale delle Alpi. Dal momento che il diritto di battezzare apparteneva ai vescovi, e a coloro ai quali questi avevano conferito un mandato specifico, la presenza dei battisteri attesta una precisa iniziativa episcopale. L'ubicazione dei battisteri nell'area compresa tra Torino e Trento fornisce indicazioni sulle modalità di organizzazione vescovile dell'espansione della rete ecclesiastica verso nord, in direzione delle Alpi. Tale strategia venne introdotta dal vescovo Ambrogio di Milano (374–ca. 397) e le sue tracce si ritrovano in tutta l'area settentrionale della penisola italiana. Ciò dimostra che per considerare la diffusione del cristianesimo nell'Italia padana un'analisi complessiva di questa vasta area è indispensabile. Inoltre, i dati indicano che gli sforzi ufficiali e organizzati per fare proseliti erano percepibili nel territorio dove vennero messi in atto, ma erano ancora troppo limitati per poter parlare di una «cristianizzazione» dell'area.

RÉSUMÉ

L'article s'interroge sur l'existence d'une stratégie institutionnelle cohérente de diffusion de la foi chrétienne dans la région des Alpes méridionales. En utilisant à la fois des sources textuelles et matérielles (c'est-à-dire archéologiques), il identifie un modèle récurrent, qui prévoyait la création d'églises baptismales au nord des sièges épiscopaux dans des lieux clé situés le long des voies qui menaient au versant nord des Alpes. Puisque le droit de baptiser était l'apanage des évêques et de ceux auxquels ces derniers avaient conféré un mandat spécifique, la présence des baptistères témoigne d'une initiative précise de la part des évêques. L'emplacement des baptistères dans la région comprise entre Turin et Trente révèle la manière dont les évêques organisaient l'expansion du réseau ecclésiastique vers le nord, en direction des Alpes. Les traces de cette stratégie, introduite par l'évêque Ambroise de Milan (374–vers 397), se retrouvent dans tout le Nord de la péninsule italienne. Cela prouve la nécessité d'analyser de manière globale ce vaste territoire dès lors que l'on considère la diffusion du christianisme dans la plaine padane. Par ailleurs, les données indiquent que si les efforts de prosélytisme officiels et organisés étaient perceptibles dans ce territoire, leur portée était encore trop limitée pour que l'on puisse parler d'une « christianisation » de la région.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieser Artikel untersucht, ob es eine kohärente, institutionelle Strategie zur Verbreitung des christlichen Glaubens in der Region südlich der Alpen gab. Durch die gleichzeitige Verwendung von textlichen und materiellen (d. h. archäologischen) Quellen wird ein wiederkehrendes Muster identifiziert, das die Errichtung von Taufkirchen – d. h. Kirchen, die über ein Taufbecken verfügten – an Schlüsselstellen nördlich des bischöflichen Zentrums zeigt. Das Vorhandensein eines Taufbeckens zeugt von bischöflicher Initiative, war ihnen doch das Recht gegeben, Taufen zu vollziehen. Baptisterien im Gebiet von Turin bis Trient deuten darauf hin, dass die Bischöfe in diesem Gebiet die Ausdehnung des kirchlichen Netzes nach Norden in Richtung der Alpen organisierten. Diese Strategie wurde nachweislich durch Bischof Ambrosius von Mailand (ca. 374–ca. 397) begünstigt und deckt entsprechend seinen Einflussbereich, den nördlichen Teil der italienischen Halbinsel ab. Dies zeigt, dass man dieses grosse Gebiet als Ganzes betrachten muss, wenn man die Verbreitung des christlichen Glaubens betrachtet. Darüber hinaus zeigen die Quellen, dass in dem Gebiet zwar offizielle, organisierte Missionierungsbemühungen zu erkennen sind, diese aber zu begrenzt blieben, als dass man von einer «Christianisierung» des Gebiets sprechen könnte.

SUMMARY

This article considers whether there was a coherent, institutional strategy to spread the Christian faith in the region just south of the Alps. Through the combined use of textual and material (i. e., archaeological) sources, the paper identifies a recurrent pattern, which saw to the establishing of baptismal churches – i.e., churches that had a baptistery – north of the episcopal centre, in key locations on the routes leading north of the Alps. Since the right to baptise belonged to bishops and to those to whom they specifically mandated it, the presence of a baptistery attests to an episcopal initiative. The location of baptisteries in the area from Turin to Trent points to the bishops in the area organising the expansion of the ecclesiastical network northward, towards the Alps. The strategy is shown to have been introduced by bishop Ambrose of Milan *(sed.* 374–ca. 397) and is identified across his area of influence, that is, across the northern part of the Italian peninsula. This proves the need to consider this large area as a whole when considering the spread of the faith. In addition, the data indicates that while official, organised efforts to proselytise are discernible in the territory, they are too limited to allow us to speak of a "Christianisation" of the area.