

Cultural boundaries, epigraphic boundaries

by Flavia De Rubeis

The concept of borders, examined from the point of view of the epigraphs, reveals how the use of inscriptions was a well-established strategic device among the elites: in particular, the knowledge of the value and efficacy of the writing displayed (as the cases of Venice and Croatia demonstrate), especially when considered within horizontal and vertical borders, indicates great attention to the epigraphic forms and formalisms employed. Such knowledge of epigraphic practice thus contributes to the construction of a lasting and widespread *epigraphic landscape*.

High Middle Ages; epigraph; epigraphic landscape; Latin palaeography; Venice; Croatia.

1. *Cultural boundaries, epigraphic boundaries*

In order to be able to speak of boundaries in the field of graphic culture – and more specifically with reference to the writing of epigraphs High Middle Ages – it is necessary to resort to the concept of graphic area. A graphic area identifies those territories where one graphic system prevails over other coexisting ones. Such a writing system is characterized by morphologically stable elements. From this point of view, it seems correct to place epigraphic production within a graphic area, considering the frequent relations that scripts may establish with the system (or systems) to which the book and documentary scripts refer.

Thus, in places where different graphic areas come into contact, hybrid scripts may emerge. As a result, different types of writing, which are not consistent among themselves, participate in the creation and stylization of these

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hybrid writings. These are, in other words, contaminations that generate extremely fluid systems, frequently not stylized and subject to morphological variations (in terms of the appearance of the letters).

Based on the palaeographical study that defines the graphic forms and from which the concept of graphic area derives, we have the notion of linguistic landscape, of which writing is one of the main instruments of multilingualism and multiculturalism, i.e. «the study of the linguistic landscape (LL) focuses on the representations of language(s) in public space. Its object of research can be any visible display of written language (a “sign”) as well as people’s interactions with these signs»¹.

But even in these terms it would be reductive to circumscribe the message it transmits to the materiality of the text alone. And here too, still resorting to the interpretative tools of the notion of linguistic landscape, it is necessary to extend to the content of the epigraphic text Bakhtin’s observation that «language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker’s intentions; it is populated – overpopulated – with the intentions of others»².

In the field of epigraphy, the linguistic landscape finds further specification in the epigraphic landscape, narrowing to some extent the very productive field of the linguistic landscape. When considering the epigraphic landscape, an inscription is not just a document or a text produced according to certain types of writing, but rather the outcome of a process in which several elements come into play that are distinct and at the same time strongly dependent on each other.

In examining some case studies in the Scottish area according to what is the interpretative model linked to the concept of epigraphic landscape, Kelsey J. Williams has proposed «a model for understanding epigraphic objects by reading along two axes: visual-symbolic-textual and stone-space-landscape, each of which influence the other and each of which are productive of new and entangled meanings»³.

An epigraph is not just a text destined to last, but a true vehicle of intent. The messages are numerous and layered, expressing the intentions of a single individual or a group of individuals; they indicate a common feeling or a specific intention. All these elements are entrusted to the writing (understood here as graphic expression, signs), the medium, its location and visibility. In other words, it is a strategy of visibility that draws heavily, more or less consciously, on graphic, formal and physical repertoires to best convey text and paratext.

Within the graphic areas, therefore, the use of more or less coherent writing systems (whatever their field of use: book, document, epigraph) can also

¹ Van Mensel – Vandenbroucke – Blackwood, *Linguistic Landscapes*, p. 423.

² Bakhtin, *Discourse in the Novel*, p. 294.

³ Kelsey Jackson, *Towards a Theoretical Model of the Epigraphic Landscape*.

be seen as a conscious instrument of cultural and social expression of the groups, or of the individual, who determined their creation, according to one of the aspects of the epigraphic landscape, with the meaning seen here.

From this point of view, one can also speak of graphic particularism, according to Giorgio Cencetti's expression in reference to early medieval book writings, covering both a territorial space (different writings according to different territories) and the type of society that produced the writing, i.e. writings linked to categories of writers⁴.

2. Graphic areas and epigraphic boundaries

It therefore seems obvious to imagine boundary zones between the so-called graphic areas where hybrid systems exist, consisting of a mixture of forms derived from several scripts in use along the boundary lines themselves. Within these systems, there are also differences dictated by different patrons with different requirements.

In contrast to graphic particularism, the concept of boundaries does not examine an area within which one script is active (or at least dominant), but rather the areas of use split between several systems and social components that use the script.

If we now focus our attention not on a graphic area, but on a single place within it (such as an urban or rural space, an abbey, a monastery or a church), it is not uncommon to find writing borders that could be defined as both horizontal and vertical, real boundaries that sometimes cannot be crossed between several graphic systems used in the same context (such as the epigraphic one, for example). By horizontal boundaries, I am referring in particular to the use, within the same timeframe, of several graphic systems in the same social context. These horizontal boundaries are characterized by the use of scripts that do not communicate with each other, or are unable to evolve into a single writing system. Vertical boundaries are, within the same writing system, the graphic forms that are morphologically differentiated and adapted to the needs of different patrons (such as the epigraphic capital E and the uncial E). Looking at a single place, or scriptural context, a fragmented context that, when considered by individual scriptural witness – be it epigraph, manuscript or document – may sometimes appear incoherent. Conversely, if we consider the different manifestations of writing as a whole through the filter of horizontal and vertical boundaries, the resulting picture may appear more cohesive. The concept of horizontal and vertical boundaries can provide useful and important indicators of the value that is assigned to the writing form and its use, in the direction indicated by the interpretative model of the linguistic landscape and thus by its extension into the epigraphic landscape.

⁴ Cencetti, *Dall'unità al particolarismo grafico*, pp. 236 ff.

3. *Epigraphic landscape*

From this point of view, I have used the case of Venice and the surrounding area, due to its position in an area of confluence between different graphic systems and extending the investigation to contemporary Croatian production.

The questions are: given the different epigraphic writings documented in the Venetian territory during the 7th-11th centuries with the focus on the 9th-11th centuries, how able are these writings of interfering with each other? What are the elements that make it possible to circumscribe the cultural areas, i.e. the social groups to which the epigraphic productions refer, and thus to define an epigraphic landscape?

The chronology involving this group of inscriptions starts from the mid-7th century and reaches the end of the 10th century, and concerns artefacts that are referable to the Venetian lagoon and the city itself. However, before proceeding to a detailed analysis of the inscriptions mentioned, I would like to focus on a particular aspect of production in the lagoon area and on the mainland limited to the territories affected by the Venetian presence.

From a reconnaissance carried out in view of the publication of the volume of *Inscriptiones Medii Aevi Italiae* dedicated to Venice and its province⁵ the first fact that clearly emerges is the marked difference between the production of the 6th-10th centuries and that of the following 11th-12th centuries: of the total 446 inscriptions surveyed (between direct and indirect sources), the distribution of inscriptions in Latin script is as follows: 30 inscriptions for the 6th-10th centuries; 224 in the 11th-12th centuries. Of the epigraphs in Greek script, 16 belong to the 6th-9th centuries, 130 to the 10th-12th centuries.

Now examining the materials from the point of view of their provenance, for the 6th-10th centuries an initial distribution throughout the Venetic territory is followed for the 8th-10th centuries by an initial convergence on the islands of Torcello and Murano. Starting from the end of 9th century the provenance shifts towards Venice, to reach an almost complete concentration on the city from the end of the 12th century.

This numerical variation, which also corresponds to a tendency towards territorial concentration, makes the data as a whole significant, highlighting and confirming a trend that finds a similar response in the remaining Italian and transalpine territories from the 11th century onwards⁶.

With the 12th century (notwithstanding the forward thrust linked to the epigraphs in the mosaics of San Marco's basilica which for the 12th century alone count 112 Latin and 19 Greek inscriptions, to which are added 38 Latin and 100 Greek inscriptions in the Pala d'Oro)⁷, the trend confirms the growth

⁵ The volume, by the author of this essay covers the city of Venice, the islands, and the entire province of Venice from the 6th century to the 12th century.

⁶ De Rubeis, *Scritture nazionali*, pp. 549-580.

⁷ Data from *La Pala d'oro*, and Andaloro *et al.*

already highlighted since the 10th century and indicates a surge along the 11th and 12th centuries with 112 Latin inscriptions (I recall for a better understanding of these differences the small number of 30 inscriptions alone between the 6th and 10th centuries) and 30 Greek inscriptions (compared to a total of 16 inscriptions between the 6th and 10th centuries)⁸.

In terms of the writing and the types of characters used, and taking into account the long chronology examined here, the area is characterized by the presence of numerous systems. In particular, there are 255 inscriptions in Latin characters, 146 in Greek, 4 in Kufic, 4 in Hebrew and 1 Runic.

In terms of content (again, notwithstanding the fact that many epigraphs have survived in a fragmentary state for which the identification of type and function is not possible), inscriptions with captions stand out due to their high number. These are followed by funerary inscriptions, many of which are on reused material (slabs, sarcophagi); dedicatory inscriptions (mosaic, slabs and ecclesiastical furniture); and temporal indications (dates on ecclesiastical floors). Graffiti for the chronology examined is poorly represented, although it is present in Torcello as well as in Venice for the 12th century.

Turning now to the Latin texts, there is a preponderance of inscriptions with captions or exegetical texts, and with a funerary function. The most represented Greek texts are captions or exegetical, with a preference for *nomina sacra*.

Latin is predominant in dedication inscriptions, with a large concentration for the 9th-11th centuries (with the exception of the Torcello inscription of the Basilica of Santa Maria Assunta, which is dated to the year 639)⁹. The funerary inscriptions come from various areas of the lagoon, but here too it is worth emphasizing the concentration of materials related to Torcello and Murano (for the first production, sarcophagi, reused, and slabs)¹⁰. Among these, for the 9th century, I would like to point out the nucleus composed of materials from the Benedictine monastery of Santi Ilario e Benedetto on the western edge of the lagoon, currently housed in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale in Venice, to which we will return in a moment. Among the materials from the lagoon, I would like to emphasize the frequent use of sarcophagi¹¹ frequently accompanied by funerary inscriptions, such as the sarcophagus fragments conserved at the Museo Provinciale in Torcello and originating from the mon-

⁸ Of course, the framework is partial, taking into account how much has been lost at present, but it nevertheless indicates a trend.

⁹ De Rubeis, *L'iscrizione del 639 di Santa Maria Assunta di Torcello*.

¹⁰ For example, the sarcophagus fragment from the monastery of Sant'Ilario of Ammiana, preserved at the Museo Provinciale in Torcello; for Murano, reference is made to the inscriptions preserved at Santi Maria e Donato and at the Museo del Vetro: a survey is in Agazzi, *Sarcofagi altomedievali*.

¹¹ Sauro – Moine – Ferri, *Venezia e la laguna tra IX e X secolo*.

astery of Santi Felice e Fortunato in Ammiana (Venice), such as the sarcophagus of Giovanni Villari from the late 9th century (Fig. 1)¹².

This is the general overview for the Venice area and the mainland. Looking now at writing for Venice and the lagoon, it is necessary to point out that epigraphic production started from a point of notable lack of experience in terms of writing continuity from the late antique tradition, as opposed to what was the case in the inland areas of Veneto, and more generally in the upper Adriatic.

Nearby Altino, with its artefacts from the Roman period, although late, does not in fact seem to constitute a precise point of reference for the development of writing in the area. Nor can Padua and Rovigo be brought into the equation for their writing production, for which the census of the *Inscriptiones Medii Aevi Italiae*¹³ indicates a significantly reduced number of inscriptions for the 6th-9th centuries, with an irregular rise up to the 12th century. Specifically, the distribution table indicates a total of 49 inscriptions. Of these, 5 for the 6th century; 3 for the 7th century; 7 for the 8th century; 5 for the 9th century; 2 for the 10th century; 4 for the 11th century; 23 for the 12th century.

The comparison with Vicenza, Treviso and Belluno, which are not particularly rich in written testimonies for the centuries prior to the 9th century (with the exception of the 30 graffiti in the basilica of Santi Felice e Fortunato in Vicenza, whose dating covers a chronological span from the 7th to the 9th century), shows the following trend, starting from the catalogue of the volume of the *Inscriptiones Medii Aevi Italiae* dedicated to the three provinces¹⁴. An initial substantial production (12 inscriptions for the entire area for the 6th to 7th centuries) is followed by a progressive decline during the 8th century (6 epigraphs, excluding the graffiti of the basilica of Santi Felice e Fortunato). A further decrease occurs in the following centuries (5 inscriptions for the 9th century, 4 for the 10th century, 5 for the 11th century) and it is only from the 12th century onwards that the trend is definitely reversed with 15 epigraphs in the catalogue. In the 12th century, the increase in epigraphic production is maintained and can be set in relation to two different events: the revival of epigraphic production that affected not only the area but the whole of Europe and, for the specific territory of north-eastern Italy, the earthquake of 1117.

¹² Preserved in fragments in the Torcello Museums, Provincial Museum, Murano, Galleria Franchetti, Venezia Ca' D'Oro, n. inv. 330: «[--- in n](o)m(ine) D(omi)ni n(ost)ri Ie(s)u Chr(isti) [---] Am(en). In huc tumuli claustra requie[scun]t Ioh(ann)i Vyllari me[m(bra)---]. Om(ne)s qui legitis orate D(ominu)m pro eo. Am(en)». See Agazzi, *Sarcophagi altomedievali*, p. 570.

¹³ The data is taken from the volume currently being printed of the *Inscriptiones Medii Aevi Italiae (VI–XII centuries)*, dedicated to the cities of Padua and Rovigo and their respective province. I would like to thank Nicoletta Giovè, editor of the volume, for having allowed me to see the data before publication.

¹⁴ For the catalogue of inscriptions, see *IMAI*, 3. That the increase of 15 inscriptions must be put down to reconstruction activities following the 1117 earthquake does not seem to be entirely excluded, as the dating of all the artefacts after the mid-12th century seems to indicate: see the chronology in *IMAI*, 3.

In particular, the inscriptions that belong to the 12th century are essentially found in the second half of the century, many linked to the reconstruction of churches, monasteries and basilicas, such as the basilica of Santi Felice e Fortunato in Vicenza, where the inscriptions (now partly removed and preserved in the current Museo Diocesano overlooking the basilica itself) unequivocally testify to the work carried out on the portal, crypt and gates¹⁵.

In terms of writing, for these areas and in general for the entire production in the provinces of Padua, Vicenza, Treviso, Belluno and Rovigo¹⁶, the trend would seem to be quite similar to what we can observe for Venice. In this area, in fact, after an initial phase that was predominantly non-specific in terms of the morphological aspect of the letters (with the exception of the artefacts in Santa Giustina in Padua, commissioned by the praetorian prefect Rufus Venantius Opilio ante 524, whose writing appears extremely close to the coeval models of Ravenna, and today located in the atrium of the *sacellum* of San Prodocimo)¹⁷, production does not seem to be defined in a stable manner by graphic characterization, at least until the 9th century. This trend actually places the entire hinterland quite close to what was happening in the Venetian area.

The scriptural framework, and in general the epigraphic landscape of the entire area, are substantially coherent in their graphic and textual expressions and in the distribution of production over the centuries covered.

4. Venice and its epigraphic landscape

From this all in all regular and even fairly homogeneous trend in the extended territory examined so far, starting from the end of the 8th century, and especially during the course of the 9th, Venice moves on in a different direction with respect to the area mentioned, modulating and characterizing the inscriptions at different levels of production.

In this, in my opinion, two elements come into play: a first one, linked to the emerging groups that made writing an element of self-representation (I am thinking of the *pergulae* or, more generally, of the ecclesiastical furnishings of the Torcello and Murano area, where the lay component played a significant role); a second one, directly linked to the first, to the possible existence of lapidary workshops to which these groups referred.

The quality of artefacts linked to patrons belonging to the family groups of the emerging elites, produced in the lagoon area first and then later more closely linked to the city of Venice, indicates a close and growing relationship

¹⁵ Cfr. *IMAI*, 3, nos. 58-62.

¹⁶ For the areas of Belluno, Treviso and Vicenza, see De Rubeis, *Introduzione paleografica*, pp. 7-10.

¹⁷ See De Rubeis, *Note epigrafiche*, no. 39, p. 149, tav. XVIII; no. 52, pp. 162-163, tav. XXI; no. 53, pp. 167-168, tav. XXI.

between writing quality and the elites themselves. On the basis of this relationship, starting from the end of the 8th century and with the first half of the 9th century, production was articulated according to stylizations that differed in the morphology of the letters, and by the patrons.

Apart from graphic products of a very poor level of writing, such as the 8th century dedicatory inscription to San Lorenzo found in Venice¹⁸, the writing used is, on the whole, characterized by a series of stable elements from the 8th century onwards. These elements are: the working technique with a well-defined triangular groove; the absolute respect for the bilinear system; the module of the letters tending towards the square; the horizontal strokes of the letters extended; the morphology of the letter D in delta, of the letter G in double Cs opposite each other. These are indicators that refer to the Lombard capital script in use in northern Italy and, more specifically, to that typology that Nicolette Gray calls «popular school»¹⁹.

An example of this is the dedicatory inscription of Santi Maria e Donato in Murano, made on reused material, and currently walled into the church façade. The text of the epigraph, which is in a serious state of deterioration, bears the dedication of the presbyter «Iohannacius: [de] donis D(e)i eg(o) || Iohannaci p(res)b(ite)r(o) || fier[i] pre[cepi]»²⁰ (Fig. 2). The same presbyter is probably also responsible for the inscription preserved today in the Murano Glass Museum, bearing a dedication on a *ciborium*, also from Santi Maria e Donato in Murano, and attributed to the 9th century: «[in]dignus Iohannaci p(res)b(ite)r(o) [---]»²¹. This epigraph – in a very poor state of preservation – is very close to the reused pillar dedication inscription mentioned here, and to the artefacts in the same church²². The closest comparison is the inscription of *Domenicus tribunus* and his wife *Constancia*, with their son, dedicatees of the artefact: «[---]t s(an)c(t)e Marie D(e)i genetricis et beati Estefani martiri ego indignus et peccatur Domenicus t[ribunus---][--- Cos]t[anc]ia et filius meus timporibu[s---]»²³.

¹⁸ Torcello, Museo Provinciale, inv. 660; *Museo di Torcello*, no. 14. The handwriting of the artefact shows considerable irregularity in the form of the letters, with strongly unequal sizes, misalignment on the staff, as well as processing technique.

¹⁹ Gray, *The Palaeography of Latin Inscriptions*, pp. 38-167.

²⁰ «De donis D(e)i ego// Iohannaci pr(es)b(ite)r(ite)r// fieri pre[cepi?]: for Calvelli, *Reimpiegghi epigrafici*, p. 126, the patron would probably be of Byzantine origin.

²¹ I do not accept the edition of the text in Vecchi, *Sculture*, no. 153, p. 104: «DIGNUS IOHANNA CIPR D».

²² For the dating of the decorative motifs of the inscription in the Torcello Glass Museum relating to *Iohannacius*, I refer to Agazzi – Valenti, *Corpus della scultura alto medievale. La diocesi di Altino-Torcello*, no. 15-09 (provisional numbering), currently in press. I would like to thank Michela Agazzi for allowing me to see the results of the research and publication in advance.

²³ Gray, *The Palaeography of Latin Inscriptions*, p. 113, no. 95, which integrates the bricked-in fragment with «torcellanus episcopus»; the reading of Agazzi, *Un ciborio altomedievale*, no. 12: “Domenicus tribunus” is accepted here. The inscription is preserved today in two fragments, the first walled outside the apse of Santi Maria e Donato, first register, north wing: «[---] t s(an)c(t)e Marie D(e)i genetricis et beati Estefani martiri ego indignus et peccatur Domenicus t[ribunus---]»; on the fragment see Agazzi-Valenti, no. 13-49 (provisional numbering). The sec-

(Fig. 3). The entire group of inscriptions is characterized by the module tending to the square, the peculiar shape of the letter D with a “delta” angled on the staff, the G consisting of two opposing Cs, the extension of the letter strokes, the shape of the nasals M and N with the crossbars high and not grafted to the vertices of the staffs and finally the O of reduced module. The affinities with the two inscriptions of *Iohannacius*, and also consistent with the sculptural apparatus, lead to a dating within the first half of the 9th century, excluding the dating to the 7th century for the dedication on the reused pillar in Santi Maria e Donato mentioned above.

5. *The Carolingian script in northern Italy*

The first changes in this script, a “Lombard capital type”, can already be seen in the first half of the 9th century. These changes correspond to what was also happening in other areas of northern Italy. An example of this is well represented by the epitaph of Abbot Magnus²⁴, where elements in Lombard capital are flanked by letters already in Carolingian capital epigraphy. Among the most relevant elements are the square form of the M, the rediscovered extension of the strokes, the O again tending to a round shape and no longer oval.

The changes in the field of epigraphy are matched by the transformations we find in both book and document scripts. Without going back over the stages of the arrival of the Carolingian minuscule and the transformations it produced, through the book, on the book and epigraphic scripts present in central-northern Italy, we can however observe how in these territories, at different times, but in any case by the end of the second half of the 9th century, the contributions of Carolingian culture brought about a radical substitution of the existing types of writing in all contexts of use, i.e. books, documents and epigraphs.

With the first half of the 9th century, we were on the threshold of a phase of repositioning of epigraphic writings, during which production was characterized – as in other parts of Italy and Carolingian Europe – by the presence of graphic elements recovered through the manuscript book from the early Carolingian period, with particular reference to distinctive scripts²⁵. This is

ond fragment, integral with the previous fragment of dedication, is kept in the Museo del Vetro in Murano and bears the mention of *Constancia*: «---][--- Cos][t[a]ncia et filius meus timpori- bu[s---]»; for the dating of the sculpture, see Agazzi – Valenti, no. 15-07.

²⁴ Brescia, Musei Civici di Arte e Storia, funerary inscription, mid-9th century; to be identified with an abbot of the Benedictine monastery of Leno (BS). See Sgarzi, *Iscrizioni bresciane*, no. 36, pp. 88-89.

²⁵ On the distinctive scripts in manuscripts of the Carolingian area see the context of the overall production in Kessler, *Die Auszeichnungsschriften in den Freisinger Codices*; examples of Carolingian epigraphic capital writing are offered by *Die Inschriften des Landkreises Bergstrasse*, nos. 1-8. On the restoration of the epigraphic capital between the 8th and 9th centuries

the use of distinctive scripts that, echoing the idea of the graphic hierarchy of late antiquity, placed within an ideal order the epigraphic capital as the main script, followed (in order) by the rustic capital, then the uncial, the semi-uncial and finally the text script. This order, extremely rigid in the fixed hierarchical position of the scripts, could not be reversed and, consequently, the first script in importance was the epigraphic capital – the first to be seen and imitated.

Among the earliest evidence of this renewed interest in distinctive writings in epigraphic capital is the Evangelary of Godescalc assigned to the years 781-783²⁶. The manuscript is written with high quality apparatus scripts characterized, among other letters, by the presence of the C in the square form, as in the captions of the evangelists Mark, Matthew and Luke on cc. 1r and 1v and 2r²⁷. The distinctive script of the Evangelary still appears to be in a stabilization phase (cf. the use of the square C destined to be abandoned in the course of the 9th century in the book context), especially when compared with the later production in Carolingian script. The point of comparison for the evolution of the distinctive script is with the manuscript preserved in Bern, cod. 250²⁸, from the first half of the 9th century. In this manuscript, an epigraphic capital alphabet appears on c. 1v, that seems to imitate models of imperial epigraphy. The full restoration of the square form, the contrast between thick and thin strokes, the very slight apex on shafts and strokes, as well as, of course, the morphology of the letters (which excludes the square C) refer to this script. When compared to the alphabet of the Bern Codex, the capital used for the distinctive script of the Godescalc Evangelary presents the form of the letters still slightly compressed laterally and the apexes on strokes and staffs are executed in the double form of a triangle and a curvilinear apex.

The presence of the square C in this early production, most likely linked to the scriptoria of Tours for the first attestations, was destined to find an important following in epigraphic scripts, where it would remain attested even after its increasing rarity in the book context at the end of the 9th century.

This process of transferring writing models from the manuscript book to the graphic systems in use for epigraphs appears fairly early. The few writing experiments of the Merovingian period were quickly abandoned in favour of the reintroduction of the epigraphic capital proposed by the Carolingian book, and the Carolingians themselves, as Cécile Treffort demonstrates, quickly grasped its significance not only from a graphic point of view, but also and above all from a social point of view²⁹.

in northern Italy, and the influence of Carolingian epigraphic culture, see De Rubeis, *Modelli impaginati*.

²⁶ Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, NAL 1203. CLA V 681 (< <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6000718s> >).

²⁷ < <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6000718s/f1.item> >.

²⁸ Bern, Burgerbibliothek, Cod. 250. The manuscript is dated 823 for cc. 1-13v (< <https://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/it/list/one/bbb/0250> >).

²⁹ Treffort, *Mémoires carolingiennes*.

The process of diffusion, or imitation, of the Carolingian book and its distinctive script was thus soon destined to affect all areas of the kingdom, even where previous epigraphic experiences continued to be used without any particular changes, at least by the first half of the 9th century.

Among the earliest evidence of this newfound interest in distinctive scripts in epigraphic capital is the Evangeliary of Godescalc³⁰.

From these writings, the transition to epigraphic production was very rapid, and imitations of these forms also appeared in Italy from the first half of the 9th century onwards. An important case in point is the group of inscriptions coming partly from the monastery of San Salvatore in Brescia and partly from the monastery of San Benedetto in Leno, today preserved in Brescia at the Civici Musei di Arte e Storia. These include the group of epitaphs of nuns and abbesses of the women's monastery of San Salvatore³¹. The entire group is characterized by the use of a script that is clearly derived from Carolingian models: the C in the square form, the extended strokes, the traverses of the M placed on the base line, the square module of the letters. Among the materials from the monastery of San Benedetto of Leno, I would like to mention the epitaph of Abbot Magnus, the inscription in elegiac couplets of the priest Tafo from 897³² (one of the earliest testimonies of dating to the year in Italy and among the earliest in Europe) and the epitaph of Abbot Alberic³³. The three artefacts testify to the transition not only in terms of graphics, but also in terms of the renewed textual repertoire, from the Lombard to the Carolingian tradition. Abandoning the rhythmic structure of the text, typical of Lombard inscriptions, the use of the elegiac couplet returns in this group; references to Alcuin, beloved of Carolingian epigraphic production, appear.

Thus, with the textual and writing change in northern and central Italy, even the more eccentric areas with respect to *scriptoria* where Carolingian writing was already fully deployed on all levels (documents, books, epigraphs, as is the case in Verona) indicate the progressive entry of this script.

³⁰ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAL 1203. CLA V 681 (< <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6000718s> >).

³¹ Sgarzi, *Iscrizioni bresciane*, nos. 31-33, pp. 75-81.

³² *Ibidem*, no. 38, pp. 93-99. De Rubeis, *La tradizione epigrafica*. Robert Favreau (Favreau, *Epigraphie*, pp. 296-297) expresses a substantially negative opinion, considering Tafo's inscription to be a kind of agglomeration of quotations that is not particularly successful. It is a product in elegiac couplets arranged over 10 lines (originally), with internal quotations that denote textual knowledge of numerous authors, through mnemonic textual composition, and this, in my opinion, leads to a reassessment of its cultural significance, thus leading me to disagree with Favreau's judgement.

³³ Sgarzi, *Iscrizioni bresciane*, no. 34, pp. 82-84.

6. Venice and its graphic landscape

This is the case of Venice and the arrival of the epigraphic capital. We do not know much about the existence and circulation of manuscripts related to the new Carolingian script in the Venetian sphere during the 9th or early 10th century. Help in this direction is offered by the presence of the Benedictine monasteries that, from the first half of the 9th century, found hospitality in and around the nascent city of Venice. These included the monastery of Santi Ilario e Benedetto on the edge of the lagoon, founded in 819 by the Particiaci Doges, and the female monasteries of San Zaccaria and San Lorenzo³⁴.

The Benedictine monasteries were to be endowed with manuscripts not only for the liturgy, but also for daily reading practices as required by the Rule. In fact, we know clearly from the Rule itself how reading is an integral part of monastic life, with the defining of reading times and references to texts for community readings³⁵.

It would, therefore, seem logical to imagine for the nascent monasteries in the lagoon and the city itself an initial endowment of manuscripts. We must imagine a library about which we cannot speculate in terms of the overall consistency for general textual types. We can, however, be certain of the presence of manuscripts related to the liturgy and the functions that the Rule itself indicates for reading, manuscripts containing the Old and New Testament at the very least³⁶. An example of a monastic library is offered by the catalogue of the monastery of Montecassino preserved on c. 69r of the Cavense Cod.2, dated to the end of the 8th century³⁷:

Brebe facimus de ipsi codici: in primis Regum I, Salomon, storiale, Prophetarum, Homelie Bede, Homelie de dibersis doctores, colectariu de dibersis doctores, Scintillu, Danihel, Eptaticu codex betere I, collectaru minores I, Cronica I, Psalteriu I, Etthiomolgiaru I, Istoria longobardoru I, lectionaru I. Insimul totidem sunt cotdici XVII³⁸.

As at the monastery of Montecassino, and in general in the early medieval monasteries, the monasteries in the lagoon had to be provided with specific texts from the Old and New Testament. And thus the monastery of Santi Ilario e Benedetto also had to be endowed from its foundation with a library dedicated to liturgy and education.

³⁴ Rapetti, *Il doge e i suoi monaci*.

³⁵ On writing and reading in the monastic sphere, see most recently Bassetti, *Cultura e scuola*. References to the Rule in *La Regola*.

³⁶ *La Regola* 9: «Codices autem legantur in Vigiliis divinae auctoritatis tam Veteris Testamenti quam Novi, sed et expositiones earum, quae a nominatis et orthodoxis catholicis Patribus factae sunt».

³⁷ The catalogue is transmitted from manuscript 2 of the Monumento nazionale della Abbazia Benedettina della Ss. Trinità di Cava De' Tirreni, Cod. 2, containing Isidore's *Etymologiae*; it was made in the Montecassino *scriptorium* between the third quarter and the end of the 8th century: De Rubeis *Un diacono, un codice, una storia*.

³⁸ The inventory is published in Traube, *Textgeschichte*, p. 107; Inguanez, *Catalogi*, p. 3, no. 2. On the dating to the 8th century: De Rubeis, *Un diacono, un codice, una storia*, pp. 121-126.

Where these manuscripts might have come from to the monastery of Santi Ilario e Benedetto is a question to which we cannot give a certain answer, even taking into consideration its foundation links to the community of San Servolo³⁹. In fact, we know that the first monks moved to establish the monastery of Santi Ilario e Benedetto the year 819 precisely by moving from San Servolo. However, we do not know the content of the library itself, on account of the vicissitudes of the monastery of Santi Ilario e Benedetto whose decline began as early as the 11th century, and whose existence ended in 1214 when the monks moved to San Gregorio, their dependency in Venice since 989.

Despite the difficulty in finding possible manuscripts in the monastery of Santi Ilario e Benedetto from its origin, we have indirect information that suggests a possible provenance. An indirect clue is offered by the funerary inscriptions from this monastery. The inscriptions, in fact, show the use of scripts that do not seem fully in line with the production of the first half of the 9th century documented at Santi Maria e Donato in Murano, to give an example, or in the lagoon area in general.

The variation in writing, with respect to the artefacts, that prove to be closer to the forms of the Lombard capital found in the area, is already documented in the funerary inscription of *Lantfridus* datable to the 9th century, preserved today in the Scamozzi Courtyard, Museo Archeologico Nazionale in Venice, and coming from the monastery of Santi Ilario e Benedetto⁴⁰ (Fig. 4). Here the writing, while on the one hand partially referring back to the Lombard capital system, at the same time already presents those elements that indicate the entry into the area of the epigraphic capital of Carolingian recovery. The morphology of the letters E and M with the form tending to the square, the C in the angled form, the development of the strokes and the support of the M's crosses on the base line refer to the script in use in Carolingian manuscripts. The inscription is also characterized by the use of different forms for the same letters, such as the letters C (now angled, now lunate), N (now Lombard capital type, now epigraphic capital), and R (with an oblique stroke, now concave, now convex, depending on the morphological reference to the Lombard capital or the epigraphic capital). The use of letters with a double form is not, however, an exception in the broader northern Italian panorama of the first decades of the 9th century. I recall, for example, the case of Brescia and Leno (cited above) where the arrival of the epigraphic capital re-proposed by the Carolingian writing tradition disrupted pre-existing traditions. With the arrival of this new script, we observe the formation of medium to long graphic oscillations destined to last until the second half of the 9th century. The second half of this century marks the start of the stabilization of the use

³⁹ Ss. *Ilario e Benedetto*, no. 1 (819). On the overall dynamics between Venice and the monastery, see Rapetti, *Il doge e i suoi monaci*.

⁴⁰ «V k(alendae) sept(embris) | obiit Lantfrid|us in pace. Qui legit unc / versiculum oret pro me / ad Dominum Deum nostrum»: Venezia, Museo Civico Correr, inv. M. Correr, cl. XXV-160, M. Arch. 854.

of the epigraphic capital at the expense of the Lombard capital, which will only be maintained in Lombard southern Italy⁴¹.

Going back to the inscription of *Lantfridus*, I should point out the presence of letters that can be related to contemporary book scripts and, more specifically, to the distinctive lettering found in manuscripts. The punctual reference to book writings is represented by the large A of *Lantfridus* on the second line, with the oblique crossbar that cuts the left-hand shaft, executed with doubled hatching along the entire body of the letter; by the letter C in angled form, alternating with the lunate form; by the letter M with thin, divaricated shafts completed at the ends by ornamental apices in the form of a stroke and with the crossbars grafted below the vertexes of the shafts. The set of letters finds exact correspondences in manuscripts from the late 8th century and the first half of the 9th century, such as the manuscript Clm 6279, assigned to the late 8th century⁴².

Also from the monastery of Santi Ilario e Benedetto is the funerary inscription of the *ancilla Constancia*⁴³ (Fig. 5), made on a sarcophagus and also preserved in the Scamozzi Courtyard, Museo Archeologico Nazionale in Venice. The sarcophagus fragments present the text distributed on a bipartite mirror, correctly aligned on the very evident line. In this inscription, as with the text of *Lantfridus*, I note the oscillations between forms of epigraphic tradition and those derived from book writings, although, it should be pointed out, such borrowings are much more marked. The letters A and E (also present in epigraphic capital) are punctual takes from the uncial script, as is the M, in both uncial and capital forms. Unlike the *Lantfridus* inscription, the references appear more decisive and, in my opinion, closer still to the Carolingian book. I refer, in addition to the above-mentioned uncial script, in particular to the form of the letter M, with the traverses presenting a marked extension at the intersection of the strokes down to the base line, an element that appears with great frequency in Carolingian manuscripts from the end of the 8th century onwards⁴⁴.

Also common to the epitaph of *Constancia* and the inscription of *Lantfridus* are the C in the square form (alternating with the lunate form), the module tending towards the square of the letters, as well as the carving of the script which, in both inscriptions, appears rather neat, with a deep groove and triangular section. Both artefacts are characterized, as already noted, by intrusions of letters from book scripts, by references to Lombard and epigraphic capitals, as well as by the accentuated tendency to use double forms for the same letter.

A third sarcophagus from the same monastery, again assignable to the mid-9th century, also preserved in the Scamozzi Courtyard, Museo Archeo-

⁴¹ De Rubeis, *La produzione epigrafica*.

⁴² München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 6279, sec. VIII ex.: Kessler, *Die Auszeichnungsschriften*, no. 10.

⁴³ Venezia, Museo Civico Correr, inv. M. Correr, cl. XXV-606, M. Arch. 851.

⁴⁴ Kessler, *Die Auszeichnungsschriften*.

logico Nazionale in Venice, presents Donato's funerary inscription⁴⁵. The very poor state of preservation does not allow for a precise analysis of the individual letters, but from what can be discerned, the text is in capital letters of the epigraphic type, with the form tending towards the square. Among the few letters that are still visible today, the morphology M with the square form and the R with a descending stroke down to the base line should be emphasized.

However, these are exceptions, as already mentioned, with respect to the contemporary production in the area, but exceptions that are linked by the context of origin, i.e. the monastery of Santi Ilario e Benedetto, a foundation associated, as previously mentioned, to the emerging Venetian elites.

Within the framework, therefore, of the epigraphic landscape, the artefacts examined here consistently fall within a specific conscious strategy of using well-selected materials on which to have inscriptions engraved (Roman reused materials, *pergulae*, dedicatory slabs, sarcophagi). In this way, the patrons ensured, on the one hand, visibility and lasting enjoyment of the written text, and on the other hand, precisely through the selection of valuable materials and forms, underlined the importance of their social position.

7. The scriptural strategy

In this perspective of visibility, a recent important discovery expands the epigraphic and scriptural strategy to include the linguistic landscape. I refer in particular to the discovery in 2020 of early medieval frescoes in the basilica of Santa Maria Assunta in Torcello, dating to the 9th century⁴⁶.

During restoration and consolidation work on the structures of the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament, or the Diaconicon (Fig. 6), the upper spaces of the counter-vault were emptied to allow the consolidation of the medieval masonry (Fig. 7). Once the wall had been removed from the rubble that prevented it from being visible, several fragments of a fresco, hitherto completely unknown, surfaced.

This is a cycle obliterated during the reconstruction of the chapel and directly intersected by the 11th-century vaulted ceiling of the chapel itself. The covering of the frescoes thus finds a *terminus ante quem*, prior to the 11th

⁴⁵ «Donatus et G[---]esrg[---]se[---]muscaveso[---]arc[---]r[---]n[---]». The text in its current state of preservation is severely damaged and no easier to read than in Polacco, *Marmi*, p. 27, no. 12 (with reproduction). Museo Nazionale Archeologico di Venezia, inv. n. 384.

⁴⁶ The study of the inscriptions, in anticipation of their edition, is being carried out by the writer for the corpus of *Inscriptiones Medii Aevi Italiae*. I would like to thank Diego Calaon, to whom we owe the archaeological survey that brought the frescoes to light, for the information and the images. The discovery took place during the archaeological survey and restoration supported by Save Venice Foundation, directed by Paolo Tocchi, in coordination with the Patriarchate of Venice and under the supervision of the Soprintendenza, and with the scientific archaeological collaboration of Università Ca' Foscari, Venezia. Reference to < https://www.unive.it/pag/14024/?tx_news_pi1%5Bnews%5D=9235&cHash=5083a549eb7d3be36da411d-offb18dd3 >.

century. The cycle, severely damaged by the earthquake of 1117, as well as by the previous construction of the chapel, is currently partial, with the loss of considerable portions of plaster.

The frescoes consist of scenes framed by festoons, at least in the parts that survive, composed of cornucopias, pomegranates and fantastic animals. The scenes in the panels depict an enthroned Virgin, perhaps an annunciation, and a portrait that unequivocally depicts St. Martin, as the *picta* captioned inscription near the portrait states (Fig. 8): *sanctus Martinus*.

Apart from the clear reference to the saint, the other scenes must have been accompanied by captioned texts, as confirmed by the presence of fragments of inscriptions now reduced to a few letters.

The documented writing is an epigraphic capital linked entirely to the Carolingian tradition, devoid of references to earlier epigraphic traditions in the area, as already reported for the inscriptions previously discussed. Unlike these, in fact, which, as we have seen, are the result of a mediation between Lombard and Carolingian scripts, the frescoed inscriptions are devoid of references to the Lombard script and indicate the epigraphic capital of Carolingian revival as the pole of attraction for the morphology of the letters. It has been suggested, for the cycle of frescoes and the elevation on which they are located, a possible connection with the renovation works commissioned by Bishop Deusdedit II (864), a fact that fully corresponds with the frescoed inscriptions.

In particular, the caption inscription of the saint presents the letters in a square module (e.g. M, S, C), the strokes are extended again, chiaroscuro appears on the letters, and there are apices at the endings of shafts and strokes. With regard to the morphology of the letters, the C is round and not vertically developed and laterally compressed, as in the Lombard capital; the M and the N bear the traverses grafted to the ends of the rods (unlike the Lombard script characterized by the attachment of the traverses in the body of the rods); the R has a wide and rounded loop that is not compressed on the rod; the S has a wide central portion that is horizontally extended. In a second fragment of the fresco, three letters appear, one of which is a P (only the *occhiello* is present, but along the portion of the rod that is still preserved no *occhiello* or trait can be seen to indicate B or R, respectively), with a wide, rounded *occhiello*. In both inscriptions, the letters have apexes made by grafting a curvilinear apex on the shafts and tracts, an element that appears in book script and is far removed from the apexes on letters of the Lombard period, which consist of straight tracts.

We are therefore in the presence of a script that has completely eliminated possible reminiscences of the Lombard capital or elements derived from local stylizations of this script. The graphic system used fully corresponds to Carolingian type epigraphic writing, with the exclusion (as far as it is possible to verify from the fragments visible today) of the C in the square form that appears in the inscriptions from the monastery of Santi Ilario e Benedetto, particularly in the epitaph for *Lantfridus*.

The writing documented in the Torcello frescoes, as well as the inscriptions from the monastery of Santi Ilario e Benedetto, all of which can be dated to the mid-9th century, are of ecclesiastical commission, but not only. They are the product of a high cultural sphere, receptive to the new book scripts and epigraphs that were expanding in northern Italy; they are the fruit of commissions linked to the city's ecclesiastical aristocracies, a fact that is by no means negligible, as will be seen below.

Unlike these, the inscriptions associated with the nascent secular aristocracies seem to be indifferent to the new suggestions coming from Carolingian graphic culture. The scripts in use by the Venetian elites, such as the already mentioned case of the *pergula* of Donato and his consort *Constancia* in Santi Maria e Donato in Murano, from the first half of the 9th century, seem to be rather more firmly established in writing forms circumscribed within a local tradition, than to a welcoming approach to the new incoming script.

With the end of the 9th century and in the 10th, writing was destined to change, with the definitive abandonment of all reminiscences of the Lombard tradition. It is therefore a sort of internal boundary in which the spaces of the ecclesiastics and the spaces of the laity seem to be distinct from each other, also in terms of epigraphy. While the former welcome the new script, the latter keep the one already in use as their own without excessive changes at least until the second half of the 9th century.

The placing on parallel tracks of two productions differentiated by the will – as I believe – of the patrons, highlights a conscious use of well-defined graphic forms, according to a well-documented practice in the rest of Italy (from the Lombards to the writings of papal Rome), recognizing a significance to certain scripts well beyond the mere vehicle of text. The inscriptions, which are assigned an apparently unique value as exposed writings and, as such, vehicles of written messages, at a closer look thus indicate precise formal strategies from which the commissioning figures seem unlikely to be able and willing to evade.

In order to verify the incidence of writing strategies – meaning graphic sign, support and their visibility – on the epigraphic production, and the existence of these strategic boundaries, a comparison with the neighbouring Croatian area will be useful, since within the same chronology, it is characterized by a significant production of inscriptions, both in numerical and qualitative terms. There are 22 inscriptions found from the Croatian area assigned to the 9th century. This is a considerable number, especially when set in relation to the territorial extent of this production and distribution framework. From the point of view of patronage, an examination of the catalogue data of Vedrana Delonga⁴⁷ allows us to identify who the protagonists of this production were, so rapid in its growth: in fact, it should not be forgotten that the appearance of

⁴⁷ Delonga, *The Latin Epigraphic Monuments*.

early medieval epigraphic writing in Croatia is dated to the second half of the 8th century and increased decisively during the 9th century.

As has already been discussed for the Venetian area, the presence of lay patronage in ecclesiastical furnishings is active, especially in the act of dedication and donation, if not in the foundation of ecclesiastical or monastic structures. In the Upper Adriatic area, and Dalmatia in particular, this presence acquires proportions worthy of mention. Between the 9th and 10th centuries, the laity turn out to be commissioning numerous elements of liturgical furnishings, as can be deduced from dedicatory inscriptions, which account for almost 70% of the total production⁴⁸. A closer look at their chronological distribution over the above-mentioned centuries, i.e. the 9th and 10th, reveals that 17 out of 22 inscriptions were due to the intervention of laymen in ecclesiastical structures, and executed within materials intended for liturgical furnishings⁴⁹. Texts where individuals belonging to the family group, such as spouses and children, are also mentioned can be traced back to the lay elites.

From a chronological point of view, the most significant numerical concentration can be traced back to the second half of the 9th century, i.e. to the period after 879, a date of particular importance due to the recognition of Duke Branimir by John VIII. The datum is not negligible, as has been observed by Vedrana Delonga, according to whom such growth and concentration between the 9th and 10th centuries could be the result of a strategy of visibility on the part of the newly recognised Croatian ruler and his elites⁵⁰.

In the inscriptions of the Upper Adriatic area in the 9th and 10th centuries, the scripts in use present numerous and surprising affinities with the epigraphic tradition of the northern Italian Lombard area of the 8th century, and in particular with the inscriptions seen for the eastern Veneto area. I refer in particular to letters such as the almond-shaped O, the A with broken crosses – which Nicolette Gray had suggested was used for Italian productions as a distinctive element of the so-called popular school – here play the role of a characterizing element of the writing.

The inscription from the church of Santa Marta di Sgombrate⁵¹, attributed to the first half of the 9th century, bears a surprising number of elements similar to what we have seen in northern Italy. These are the letters A with the oblique descending transversal, the M and N with high transversals, the almond-shaped O. Beyond these strictly graphic data, I would like to underline the frequent use of di-graphism (e.g. for the E), the misalignment of the letters and the use of discontinuous forms.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 285-286 and 307-309.

⁴⁹ Delonga, *The Latin Epigraphic Monuments*.

⁵⁰ Delonga, *The Latin Epigraphic Monuments*, pp. 341-342. On Croatia, see Borri, *Francia e Croazia*; Borri, *Captains and Pirates*.

⁵¹ Delonga, *The Latin Epigraphic Monuments*, pp. 50-51, cat. n. 1; Archaeological Museum of Split, inv. 1136.

These phenomena do not change in the following century, as we saw for the eastern Veneto area. On the contrary, the graphic forms tend to consolidate and stabilize exactly as in the previous century, and with the same characteristics (di-graphism, accentuated misalignment and irregular modulus, plus the morphology of letters such as E, D, Q, as well as M and N that refer to the first production in eastern Veneto). There is no change in the module (which remains vertical), nor in the execution technique of the letters (which tend, where possible, to accentuate the thickening of the hatching through the depth of the furrow), nor in the morphology (such as the M, whose crossbars remain high as in the Lombard type, whereas in nearby Venice, on the contrary, they return to being resting on the base staff, as in the epigraphic capital seen, for example, in Santa Maria Assunta in Torcello or in the inscriptions of the monastery of Santi Ilario e Benedetto. This system, together with increasingly developed apices and the thickness of the hatching becoming completely devoid of contrast between thick and thin elements, remained constant at least until the 10th century. In the inscription of Prince Svetoslav dated between 969 and 986 or 997, from the royal monastery of St. Bartholomew⁵², in addition to the usual layout that is not perfectly framed within the mirror, one observes the further development of the apexes, as well as the hatching made with a deep furrow and lacking chiaroscuro contrast. We are almost at the end of the 10th century and the same variations which are documented in northern Italy are – on the contrary – not present. I refer in particular to the adaptation to the forms of the Carolingian script, which already in the course of the 9th century had led to the gradual abandonment of the previous epigraphic script now more or less characterized as Lombard.

The real first changes can only be perceived with the first half of the 11th century, although it will be the second half of that century that will clearly indicate the changes in writing that affected the whole area. An example of these early changes can be found, for instance, in the dedicatory inscription of Abbot Moses from the first half of the 11th century from the Church of Saints Peter and Moses in Solin⁵³. Here, the script used, while overall retaining the morphology of the letters, is nevertheless executed with greater respect in the alignment of the letters on the line and greater control of the letter form, which here tends towards the square.

The dedicatory inscription of Lubimiro Tepçi of the Church of St. Nicholas in Podmorje or St. Peter in Koblucac from 1089⁵⁴ is executed with the letters correctly aligned to the major side within the mirror. The epigraph shows the text executed with a shallow groove and reduced thickness; the letters are slightly apical and compressed laterally with accentuated vertical development. In this inscription, we can observe an important change, namely the

⁵² *Ibidem*, pp. 118-119, cat. n. 73; Archaeological Museum of Split, inv. 1076.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 146, cat. n. 99; Archaeological Museum of Split, inv. 2552.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 102, cat. n. 60; Archaeological Museum of Split, inv. 2559.

introduction of letters that correspond to the distinctive script of manuscripts in the Beneventan minuscule script, i.e. the book script and epigraphic script in use in southern Italy since the 8th century. In Lubimiro Tepçi's inscription, the stroked forms of the O and G correspond perfectly with the initial letters of manuscripts in the Benevento script, as for example in the ms. Casin.148 dated 1010, where on c. 236 a large illuminated G appears with a broken central curvature⁵⁵.

This is the first true innovation in epigraphic script brought about through direct borrowing from the manuscript book. The phenomenon has been linked to the arrival of southern Italian Benedictine monasticism and the spread of writing practices related to this, especially in the epigraphic sphere, for the Dalmatian area⁵⁶. One of the earliest attestations of the Benedictine presence in the area is offered by a passage from *De praedestinatione* by Godescalc de Orbais⁵⁷, dated 852, in relation to an episode concerning the Croatian king Tripmir. In this passage – which is, however, not very clear – reference is made to the construction of the monastery of Rizinice near Klis, directly requested by the sovereign, for the Benedictine community. The construction of the monastery is also remembered by a dedicatory inscription that still exists today, in which the Croatian sovereign is mentioned⁵⁸.

This testimony, in addition to referring to the presence of the Benedictine community in the area, provides a useful indication of the relations that were immediately established between the Croatian sovereigns and Benedictine monasticism. These relations, while having their ups and downs, were stable. It is probably due precisely to these political ties that not only monasticism, but also the writing imported by these Benedictine monks from southern Italy, where the custom of transferring graphic forms from the distinctive scripts of manuscripts to epigraphs was an established practice, was spread. Thus, because of these political and also cultural relations, in the space of a few years, we see the introduction into epigraphic practices of elements deriving from manuscripts of the Cassinese type of Beneventan script, as in the above-mentioned ms. Casin.148, produced at Montecassino in the early 11th century.

The persistence in the period prior to the 11th century of a script that remained always the same, and one not very receptive to suggestions from other and different systems (as in the specific case of the Carolingian and the restored epigraphic capital), seems to be, as it was for Venice and its area, a precise and conscious choice. Indeed, I believe that this choice was directed towards maintaining a well-defined script status at least until the 11th century. This choice kept alive a practice and its external forms (the writing) derived

⁵⁵ On the decorated initials of the ms. Casin. 148 see Orofino, *I codici decorati*, pp. 21-24, tav. VII d.

⁵⁶ De Rubeis, *Tra Dalmazia e Italia*, pp. 247-253.

⁵⁷ Godescalc de Orbais, *De praedestinatione* IX, 6; Lambot, *Oeuvres théologiques*.

⁵⁸ Delonga, *The Latin Epigraphic Monuments*, p. 138; Archaeological Museum of Split, inv. S 54.

from the needs of visibility to be consolidated, especially in the light of Vedrana Delonga's observations, who sees precisely in the recognition of Branimir by John VIII in 879 one of the possible strong motivations for the numerical increase of epigraphic production in the area. Hence the need not to vary the writing, fixing a model and keeping it as an index of a well-defined social status.

8. *Conclusions*

In conclusion, the concept of boundaries, examined from the point of view of epigraphs, indicates a long and articulated pathway, with outcomes that are not entirely similar to each other; the concept of boundaries, likewise, indicates common general trends and similar attitudes found over vast areas, even across different chronologies; the concept of boundaries indicates the emergence of lay elites that deployed every strategy to gain visibility, but with different dynamics here too.

For Venice and its area, starting from a production of poor quality, both the development of texts and the consolidation of writings, as well as the progressive increase, in numerical terms, of epigraphs, indicates the growing recourse to the "main" instrument for visibility by local elites, differentiated by cultural and social groups. While the secular elites maintained the scripts that had marked their epigraphic production from the very beginning, the ecclesiastics moved towards a script much closer to manuscript writing, transmitting these cultural contacts to the inscriptions. For the Croatian area, the political establishment of the elites is manifested not only through the surge in the secular epigraphic production, but also through the maintenance of a script that becomes an element of status recognition.

The epigraphic instrument thus proves to be an effective device, to which the elites frequently resorted, even in the absence of a consolidated writing system. This latter element indicates full awareness of the value and efficacy of the writing displayed, as the cases of Venice and Croatia demonstrate, and especially when considered within horizontal and vertical boundaries, they indicate great attention to the epigraphic forms and formalisms employed, contributing to the construction of a long-lasting and widespread epigraphic landscape.



Figure 1. Torcello, Museo Provinciale, inscription of Giovanni Villari (photo: Flavia De Rubeis): su concessione di Città Metropolitana di Venezia - Museo di Torcello.



Figure 2. Murano, Chiesa dei Santi Maria e Donato, inscription of *Iohannace* (photo: Flavia De Rubeis): su concessione di Curia Patriarcale di Venezia, Ufficio Beni Culturali.



Figure 3. Murano, Chiesa dei Santi Maria e Donato, inscription of *Domenicus* tribuno (photo: Flavia De Rubeis) : su concessione di Curia Patriarcale di Venezia, Ufficio Beni Culturali.



Figure 4. Inscription of *Lantfridus*: Venezia, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Direzione regionale Musei Veneto, su concessione del Ministero della Cultura; su concessione di Fondazione Musei Civici Venezia.



Figure 5. Inscription of *Constancia*: Venezia, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Direzione regionale Musei Veneto, su concessione del Ministero della Cultura; su concessione di Fondazione Musei Civici Venezia.



Figure 6. Torcello, Basilica of Santa Maria Assunta, chapel of the Diaconicon (3D: Diego Calaron): Save Venice.



Figure 7. Torcello, Basilica of Santa Maria Assunta, chapel of the Diaconicon (3D: Diego Calaron) : Save Venice.



Figure 8. Torcello, Basilica of Santa Maria Assunta, inscription of St. Martinus (3D: Diego Calao) Save Venice.

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