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## **Almatourism**

Journal of Tourism, Culture and Territorial Development

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### **From the Roman and then Longobard Via Cassiola to the Piccola Cassia for a Tourist Project**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

A coordinated set of initiatives of cultural value also useful for the acquaintance and tourism development of the territory must have as solid basis the study of the ancient testimonies of the path of travelers and pilgrims. Cassiola road was a Roman road, continuing north of Cassia road, disused during the occupation of the Longobards of West Emilia, and reopened by the longobard king Astolfo in the middle of the eighth century. Today the different stretches of Cassiola or Piccola Cassia road are still accessible on foot, on horseback, by bicycle, and touch places of high historical, architectural, artistic and cultural value.

The study of many other medieval roads deriving from Roman ones has verified the persistence of the use of the road name itself (such as Fiamenga da Flaminia or Cassiola da Cassia) or the use in medieval documents of the term strata, which always indicates a road of importance not only local but at least regional or trans-regional. Via Cassiola can be found in medieval documents from this name, in the vulgar Latin transformed into Cassola, or in the historical cartography of Modern age with the name of Cassola or Cassoletta.

Its path to the plain between Modena and Bologna covered important Benedictine abbeys rich in relics, such as S. Silvestro di Nonantola and S. Maria in Strada, and medieval hospitals for pilgrims, such as S. Bartholomew of Spilamberto. On the hills, the road touched the abbey of St. Lucia of Roffeno and wandered the Apennine to the passage of the Arcane Cross, where a great cross was driving the passengers. On the way to the pass, pilgrims could stay at the church of S. Colombano in Fanano, while in the valley of the Ospitale torrent one could find refuge in the hospice of S. Giacomo di Val di Lamola, both still existing. In Tuscany, the road allowed to arrive in Pistoia, the end of the Roman Cassia road, where pilgrims could adore the relics of saint James in the cathedral, or reach the Garfagnana and Lucca, where the Holy Face attracts the devotion of thousands of faithful men and women from all over Europe.

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**Keywords:** *Strata*; Cassia; Devotions; Nonantola; Apennines

Un insieme coordinato di iniziative di valore culturale ma utili per la conoscenza e lo sviluppo turistico del territorio deve avere come solida base lo studio delle testimonianze antiche del percorso delle strade di viaggiatori e pellegrini. La via Cassiola fu una strada romana, proseguimento verso nord della via Cassia, andata in disuso durante l'occupazione dei Longobardi dell'Emilia occidentale, e riaperta dal longobardo Astolfo a metà dell'VIII secolo. Oggi i diversi tratti della via Cassiola o Piccola Cassia sono ancora percorribili a piedi, a cavallo, in bicicletta, e toccano luoghi di alto valore storico, architettonico, artistico e culturale.

Lo studio di numerose altre strade medievali derivanti da arterie romane ha verificato la costanza dell'uso del nome proprio della strada (come Fiamenga da Flaminia o Cassiola da Cassia) o l'uso del termine *strata*, che indica sempre una strada di importanza non solo locale, ma almeno regionale o trans-regionale. La via Cassiola può essere individuata nei documenti medievali da questo nome, nel latino volgare trasformato in Cassola, oppure nella cartografia storica di età Moderna con il nome di Cassola o Cassoletta.

Il suo percorso nella pianura fra Modena e Bologna toccava importanti abbazie benedettine ricche di reliquie, come S. Silvestro di Nonantola e S. Maria in Strada, e ospitali medievali per pellegrini, come S. Bartolomeo di Spilamberto; sulle colline la strada toccava l'abbazia di S. Lucia di Roffeno e valicava l'Appennino al passo della Croce Arcana, presso il quale sorgeva una grande croce che guidava i viandanti. Sulla strada verso il passo, a Fanano i pellegrini potevano sostare presso la chiesa di S. Colombano, mentre nella valle del torrente Ospitale si poteva trovare rifugio presso l'ospitale di S. Giacomo di Val di Lamola, entrambe chiese ancora esistenti. In Toscana la strada permetteva di giungere a Pistoia, capolinea della via Cassia romana, dove i pellegrini potevano venerare le reliquie di S. Giacomo Maggiore conservate nella cattedrale, o raggiungere la Garfagnana e Lucca, dove il Volto Santo attirava la devozione di migliaia di fedeli provenienti da tutta Europa.

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**Keywords:** *Strata*; Cassia; Devozioni; Nonantola; Appennino

## Introduction

A coordinated set of initiatives of cultural value, useful for the knowledge and tourism development of the territory must have as solid basis the study of the ancient testimonies of the route of travelers and pilgrims, otherwise it is likely to propose fake itineraries that have never really existed and therefore misleading. In the case of the boundary between the present provinces of Modena and Bologna, both in the plain and in the mountains and hill regions, thanks to studies of the decades old, one can say surely path from the late antique and high Middle Ages from a road which marked on

one side the boundary between two Roman municipal territories and the other from the Po to Central Tuscany (Pistoia). We can assert that what medieval documents present us with the name of Via Cassiola was a Roman road, continuing north of Via Cassia. Indeed, the three branches of the road that we delineate seem to belong to two distinct Roman streets, the way to Verona and the way towards Aquileia. Many finds of known Roman materials (Calzolari, 1988) or have recently happened to carry out public works in the Crespellano area and have not yet been published. The presence of a *Quinta* landmark in the Middle Ages (1014 and then 1315) in the area of San Giovanni in Persiceto (Foschi, 1998, p. 82, note 12) suggests that the traces of the signaling of the distance along the eastern road axis had fossilized in a landmark when the militaries had disappeared and was now buried the road itself.

The road was disused during the occupation of the Longobards of West Emilia and was reopened by King Longobard Astolfo in the middle of the eighth century. However, it remained a boundary road for centuries, following the eastern ridge of the stream Samoggia, which was controversial between Bolognesi and Modenesi.

Today, the various stretches of *Cassiola* way, renamed Piccola Cassia, are still accessible on foot, by horse, by bicycle, and by touching places of high environmental, natural, historical, architectural, artistic and cultural value. Many of these places still show traces of the Roman presence and then Lombard, and remained the fulcrum of occupation and exploitation of land for several centuries.

This road in the Middle Ages could rather be defined as a "road area", according to the fortunate definition of Giuseppe Sergi: in fact, the documentary evidence of the road in the plain and in the hills defines parallel paths rather than a unique and defined route.

The study of many medieval streets deriving from Roman arteries has verified the persistence of the use of the proper name of the road, such as Fiamenga da *Flaminia* (Foschi, 1998 and 2003) or *Cassiola* da Cassia, or the use of the term *strata*, which always indicates a road of importance not only local, but at least regional or trans-regional. Also for the course we are interested in, there are many examples in the unpublished documentation of Santa Lucia of Roffeno: an act of March 1124 presents *Aldevrandus olim filius Bandi de Rofeno* donate for his soul and to obtain the forgiveness of sins at the church of Santa Lucia virgin located *in loco qui dicitur Strada 4 sestarii of terra laboratoria in Vezano*, bordering on the common way. The act was signed under the portico of the monastery of Santa Lucia<sup>1</sup>. Even today there is the township Strada at the church of Santa Lucia.

## 1. The Emilian route

Another notion is to keep in mind about this way: since it is a reversal of a previous road, it is possible that King Astolfo has modified it according to a concept that can be called "without cities": as is known, the Longobards, of their arrival in Italy, neglected the lost Roman cities and preferred to use rural power centers such as large courts. In rethinking the road between the Po and Tuscany, it is possible that the King has preferred to shorten the route and avoid touching Modena and Bologna to the north and Pistoia to the south of the Apennine chain to reach Lucca. In fact, it is possible from Nonantola to reach via Emilia and then to walk the road to the valley of the

Samoggia without touching large centers, as well as from Lizzano Pistoiese to reach Lima Valley and to reach Lucca without touching Pistoia.

If we take the Po as one of the terminals of our road, we will find that those who came from Verona could cross the Modena territory and touch Nonantola; who came from Padua had the choice of touching Cento and San Giovanni in Persiceto or stay more east and go to meet the via Bazzanese (the medieval via Predosa) at Pragatto. The two main branches of *Via Cassiola*, which in the local tradition becomes Cassola, the Nonantola one and the Persiceto one, touch the Via Emilia in two different points, the one most used by Modenesi to the bridge of Sant'Ambrogio, the other more convenient for the Bolognesi to the east, to the Samoggia bridge, but then their route began to converge on Via Predosa (current Bazzanese or Vignolese) and Bazzano to reach the ridge between Samoggia and Panaro. Beyond Bazzano the road continued to touch the castle of Monteveglio, which could be accessed through a connecting link.

Another branch of the street passed for Castello di Serravalle. The two trails remained near and parallel along the river, but they were both important and frequent: in fact, both at Castello di Serravalle and at Monteveglio were allowed to market once a month, as specified in the Bologna statutes of 1288. On the most west was the church of San Giorgio, at the castle of Samoggia, which can be identified with one of the castles that the Byzantines built in Italy towards the end of the sixth century to stop the longobard invasion.

More upstream, present Savigno, the two trails joined to face the most mountainous part of the route: from San Prospero the road touched the very ancient church of the Holy Trinity, a very popular cult among the Franks, placed in the *Prato Barati* place, Germanic name (and precisely ancient French) that could mean Meadow of the Battle (by *baratta*). Further south, at Strada there was at least half of the XI century Santa Lucia of Roffeno, an important Benedictine monastery, which belonged in 1110 to the abbey of Nonantola, where travelers were welcomed into a guest house. The whole complex was surrounded by rugged walls that protected it from assaults of bandits and villains, while the bell tower also served as a watchtower and refuge in war time.

The route then entered the territory of Castel d'Aiano, a long contended between the Municipalities of Modena and Bologna. From this point on, the road abandoned the ridge of the Samoggia, which did not directly lead to the Apennine watershed, and its route touched Semelano, Pietracolora and Bombiana. In this harsh and disadvantaged stretch of mountain travelers could find shelter at two hospitals located near the passage called the Bocca dei Ràvari, one called Vedétola and another called "of the priest Passuto". From here travelers reached Gaggio Montano, Rocca Corneta and Fanano, entering definitively in Modena territory. In the last uphill to Tuscany, the trail continued along the valley of Lámola (today valley of the Ospitale) and remained on the left side of the creek, touching the village of Ospitale, where today there is the church of San Giacomo, where a hospital for pilgrims was established in the Middle Ages (Zagnoni, 2017), then to go down through the passage of the Arcana Cross to Cutigliano and Lizzano Pistoiese (Mucci,Trota, 1983).

## 2. The stages in archaeological remains and medieval documents

Each one of these routes shows significant roman or medievale traces: first of all the Nonantola area. Nonantola, in fact, has a Roman origin as evidenced by the numerous archaeological finds and its name, which appears to derive from the size of the centurial territory included in an incomplete *centuria* due to the course of a river or other natural obstacle (Calzolari, 1993). After the Old Age were disused the Roman structures to keep the fields dry, such as the drainage channels, then in the Middle Ages the Nonantola plain experienced a period of severe crisis of population and the cultivated territory became wild. Only with the foundation of the Benedictine monastery of St. Silvestro by the work of King Longobard Astolfo and his brother-in-law Anselmo rebuilds a nucleus of population, following the reclamation and the agrarian accommodation favored by the monks. San Silvestro was founded in 752 not only to reclaim the land and to restore the crops and the inhabitants, but also to control and promote the communications between the plain and the Modena mountains: for this purpose it acquired during the early Middle Ages along the Via Cassiola the monastery of Santa Lucia di Roffeno (1110) and the hospital San Giacomo of Val di Lamola (from the XI century) and the other hospital of St. Michael the Archangel of Bombiana (since the end of the 11th century).

The important monastery on the Tuscan slope owned the Batoni castle (Rauty, 1972) and an hospital in Lizzano Pistoiese, in addition to the monastery of San Salvatore in Fanano, founded in 749, but soon disappeared. The abbey of San Silvestro di Nonantola controlled therefore with its possessions or foundations or dependencies the whole path from the Po of Primaro to Pistoia. A crucial position on the road is Fanano: in fact King Astolfo, through his brother-in-law, who became a monk, Anselmo, first founded, in 749, a monastery dedicated to San Salvatore in Fanano together with a hospital, in order to make active, safe and always accessible this important common way which linked the Modena and Western Bolognese plains to Pistoia, then in 752, established another basis on the plain, in Nonantola. The mountain foundation soon declined, while the monastery of Nonantola became a center of population and culture in the Po Valley of the Middle Ages. However, it can not be said that the hospitality function carried out by the center of Fanano has completely disappeared with the disappearance of the Longobard monastery of San Salvatore, in fact, remained an hospital in the center of the village dedicated to San Giacomo and also the hospital for pilgrims in Val di Lamola, in the village of Ospitale, which still indicates the path followed by the road to climb the Croce Arcana passage, and a hospital also dedicated to St. James in Lizzano Pistoiese. It is also important to note that the hospital of Val di Lamola in the 14th century owned the hospital dedicated to St. Bartholomew at Spilamberto, of which I will speak, and they both depended on San Silvestro di Nonantola.

### 3. New documentary attestations

It is necessary to recapitulate the already known attestations found in documents of the early Middle Ages that allow us to outline the paths of this road: as *strata*, that is cobbled or anyway important is remembered a stretch near Ponzano (middle valley of the Samoggia) and a little further south, at Savigno, while Crespellano is called both

Cassola and *strata*, as well as in the surroundings of Monteveglio, Oliveto and Castello di Serravalle. A *fossa Cassiola* flowed in 1036 near Montirone of Sant'Agata Bolognese, at the *capella Sancti Dalmacii* (today Sant'Almaso, at Calcara)<sup>2</sup>, confirming that the name had spread to the plain between Modena and Bologna as elements of Roman agrarian limitation, a rural ditch.

The inhabitants of Monteveglio's castle, an important stronghold of Matilde of Canossa, in 1157 swore to representatives of the Municipality of Bologna to *tenere stratam* for the benefit of the people of Bologna, that is, to keep it and keep it running and practicable. In 1222 the Cassola route between San Cesario (Mo) and Bazzano (Bo) constituted the border between the territories of the municipalities of Modena and Bologna in the reconnaissance made by the bishops of the two cities to solve the secular question of the bishopric border (Foschi, 1998). Even in the privilege of Emperor Frederick II granted to the Modenesi his faithfuls in 1226 to give way to the former definition of the boundary given in 1204 by the podestà of Bologna Uberto Visconti, for long stretches the *strata* or *Cassola* is marked by terms, previous confines, and it touches the village Cassolano. This is the mountainous part of the route from Fontana Lombardese (south of Castel d'Aiano) to the hospital of "prete Passuto" to the church of Santa Lucia di Roffeno, whose main altar marked the border. Descending to the altitude and proceeding further north the boundaries "descendunt per stratam iusum usque ad crucem de Torileto et per ipsam stratam ad crucem Pipini", where the road crosses evidently marked both the path and possible crossroads of paths with the road. The border line continued northwards, following the road and crossing places that today can not be recognized (except perhaps *Gaudiano*, which has become Golzano), marked by other border checkpoints<sup>3</sup>. It is therefore a ridge road, which is supported by a strong morphological sign, the watershed between the two valleys of Samoggia and Panaro.

The pursuit of the research on the medieval known documents and on what has been published since the early twentieth century today provides new attestations of the road in various areas of the plain between Modena and Bologna and in the Apennines at the border of the territories of the two cities.

Today we can say that the area where the parish church of Santa Maria in Strada still rises, the heir to the Benedictine abbey of the same name, was particularly dense with the ancient attestations of the passage of the road: the documents concerning the 11th century monastery reported different attestations of via in the plain between Modena and Bologna near the important crossroads between the road and Via Emilia. The place named *Caxola* bordered on the church of Santa Maria, where there was a land donated on June 9, 1077 by Ildebrando del fu Lamberto to Abbot Rolando<sup>4</sup>. In the vicinity of Calcara was the place named *Cassiola* where lived Pietro del fu Martino *de Cassiola* on February 28 or March 1, 1026, who made a donation of land to the abbey<sup>5</sup>. Via *Cassiola currit* near other land in the same area donated to the Abbey in 1057, July 1<sup>6</sup> by other inhabitants of Calcara. Bordered on an abandoned branch of the Samoggia river, said *Samodia vecla*, the *Cassiola de Carpenito*, which was the road boundary with a land given to the abbey in April 1085<sup>7</sup>. The *Cassiola* still bordered a land donated to Abbot Gandolfo July 9, 1092, probably near Sant'Almaso (Calcara)<sup>8</sup>. In the area between Zola Predosa and Calcara, at the edge of the plain to the first hills, the *Cassiola* was to be

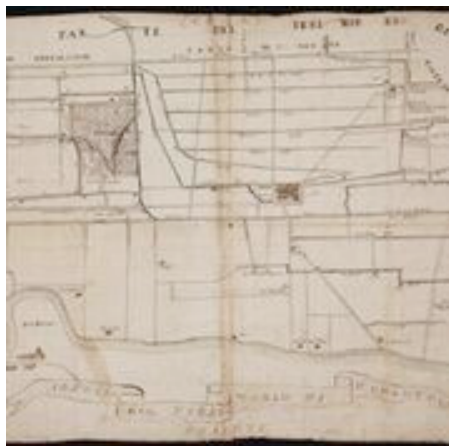
found on the boundary of two land donated to Abbot Gandolfo on November 20, 1094<sup>9</sup>.

A little further south on the hills of Montebudello (*Corneliano*), there must be the place *Casiola* where there was a piece of land given in emphyteusis by the abbot to a worker<sup>10</sup>. In the hilly area of Castello di Serravalle, that is, at Stagnano, today Sant'Apollinare di Vallata, intervened in an act of February 25, 1076, Azo di Pietro *de Cassiola*<sup>11</sup>.

The western route, through which it was possible to reach Modena, had to run at the castle of Savignano sul Panaro. In fact, the Benedictine monastery of St. Peter of Modena had possessions in the high plain on the border between the territories of Modena and Bologna, where the place called Cassola was to be found, where some fields were donated to the monastery in 1079<sup>12</sup>. Spouses from Savignano in 1158 rented fields by the abbot Placido, adjacent to the Via *Caxola*<sup>13</sup>.

### 3. Historical maps

The *Cassiola* route can also be found in the historical cartography of the modern age with the name Cassola or Cassoletta or via Maggiore (**Figure 1**).



**Figure 1:** An image of the «via Maggiore» in the seventeenth century south of Nonantola

Source: Archivio di Stato di Modena, Mappario Estense, Serie generale, n. 99

Modern cartography is chronologically far from the time when the road was reopened by the Lombard sovereign, but it is well known that long-term territorial structures such as roads hardly disappear altogether or radically change paths or names. In addition to some of the already published reports about maps in the State Archives of Bologna (Foschi, 1998, p.100), the Modena state conservation institute also maintains some plants and maps of great utility for this research: in this plant the stretch of plain from Nonantola to via Emilia is called "via Maggiore": our way as oblique straight leads to Emilia street and to Panaro's passage (Mucci, Trota, 1983). The design is in ink and watercolor and dates back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries<sup>14</sup>.

In addition to showing the plain around the castle, characterized by the vast medieval woods, this «Pianta dimostrante il territorio di Nonantola» (**Figure 2**), is crossed by various roads paths, well accessible, and reduced to high-density agricultural land. The

design depicts settlements and cultivations of the territory up to Bolognese and in its technical perfection and aesthetic pleasure shows that it was traced in the eighteenth century. The technique is in ink and watercolors. Thanks to this depiction, we see that for Nonantola passes the "Via Mavora", the Via Maggiore of the territory between Bologna and Modena, still recognizable in the eighteenth century, before the great nineteenth-century transformations of viability, methods of cultivation, subdivisions<sup>15</sup>.

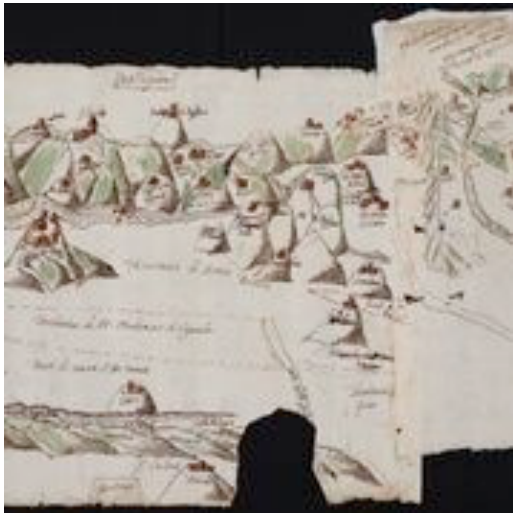


**Figure 2:** The Modenese plain around the castle and the abbey of Nonantola, with its large forest of the early Middle Ages and the Via Mavora (*Maior*) leading to the Via Emilia: eighteenth-century drawing

Source: Archivio di Stato di Modena, Mappario Estense, Serie generale, n. 50

The route of the way between Modenese and Pistoiese on the ridge dividing the valley of the Samoggia torrent from that of Panaro is well illustrated by this bird's eye view of the Roffeno area, in the Apennines. It is a non-signed 17th-century pen and watercolor drawing, probably linked to the border controversy that opposed the community of Monte Tortore and Roffeno (now Roffeno Musiolo) community (**Figure 3**) in the first half of the century: in 1613 a phase of the dispute, with the affixing of boundary terms in the points indicated by experts Vincenzo Sassi for Bologna and





**Figure 3:** Via Cassiola in the Samoggia valley near S. Lucia di Roffeno  
Source: Archivio di Stato di Modena, Mappario Estense, Serie generale, n. 350

Antonio Ambrosi for Modena, but contests throughout the mountain border continued mostly south, between Fanano and Rocca Corneta, until the end of the 18th-century (Foschi, 2001). In particular, in this beautiful representation of the mountainous area on the border between the Modena and Bologna areas, the road is present but is ideally depicted as a straight sign above the many hills that it actually runs. Although in its unusual representation technique, the paper is actually rich in information, because it shows us the territory with the castles (also vanished today, like Rocca di Roffeno) and the roads that reach them, churches, water and mountains in their precise shape, more or less steep. Are evident the plates created artificially on top of the mountains to build towers and fortified dwellings, are drawn the confluences of the streams; however, in the most complicated points, to respect the orography, the designer has to draw the mountains and the country upside down<sup>16</sup>.

The precise area of the passage of the Croce Arcana is instead shown by this amazing late-fifteenth-century view of the mountain area between Fanano and Ospitale: it was recently studied and interpreted by Federica Badiali (Baraldi, Badiali, 2012; Badiali, 2012), which noted the particular method of representation and the vivacity of technique (Figure 4).



**Figure 4:** Image of the valley of the Ospitale creek and of the Arcana Cross pass drawn on parchment in about 1480

Source: Archivio di Stato di Modena, Mappario Estense, Serie generale, n. 104

The perspective with which is depicted the basin of the mountains of the high val Dardagna is a unique and original elaboration that does not correspond to any shared convention: this is an elaboration of the end of the fifteenth century (circa 1480) which aims to present the local roadside inserted in the relations between the localities and the surrounding mountain environment. Sestola, Lotta, Trignano, Rocca Pelago and Fanano, the Ospitale valley and the surrounding mountains are recognized: from the Corno alle Scale to the Cimone (Monte Lunata), from Spigolino (Fulgorino) to Monte Cervarola to Monte Lancino. It is an ink pattern, color and tempera on parchment, which depicts every significant element in the most favorable way for its understanding, although this representation overrides its position and size relative to other elements of the landscape. The landscape is shown in a particular representation called "fish eye", which is not found in other Italian maps but was used briefly among German engravers by the second quarter of the fifteenth century.

In detail, it is very interesting for our purpose of recognizing the road to Tuscany indicating the two steps possible to cross the Apennine ridge, on the one hand the passage of the Tre Termini (in the ancient passage of the Calanca) another, markedly highlighted, the passage of the Croce Arcana, at the top of which is a large red cross. Another element that makes the paper unique and precious is the representation of five landslides, represented by brown "ribbons", originating from the saddles between the mountains or the slopes of the mountains themselves. The deep study of Federica Badiali also points out that the style of representation approaches this view to the coeval miniature of the precincts of Ferrara governed by Este family, both in the manner of depicting the castles, the rocky shores and the arboreal species.

This kind of representation in the global sense suggests that this beautiful and even luxurious map was commissioned for a passage from Emilia to Tuscany particularly important, as was that of Ercole I d'Este, who after a few years from the ascent to the duchost, changed the traditional alliance of his father Niccolò with Venice and turned to Milan and Florence. In 1478 he accepted a military conduct in the war that opposed Florence and his allies to Pope Sisto IV and to King Ferrante of Naples (1478-80) and moved towards Florence to meet Lorenzo il Magnifico<sup>17</sup>. The bending traces that the paper has might have been caused by a practical use of travel, in the terminal mountain area of Emilia and at the ridge separating it from Tuscany. Choosing to use the steps leading from Modena to Pistoia, though less direct, to go to Florence was certainly due to the need of the Duke to stay as far as possible in Modena territory. Hercules's venture adventure ended at the end of the three-year course, which was not renewed, while the revolutions of the covenants he promoted led to a progressive worsening of the relationship between Ferrara and Venice in the years 1480-1481, which resulted in the war of Ferrara (1482-1484), whose outcome was truly disastrous for Ercole<sup>18</sup>.

#### **4. Ways and destinations: relics for a conclusion**

The path of *Via Cassiola* in the plain between Modena and Bologna touched important Benedictine abbeys, which attracted travelers for devotion, rich in relics, like San Silvestro di Nonantola. Even today the Benedictine and Diocesan Museum contains objects of worship and devotion distributed between the 10th century and the Baroque age, like the precious Latin stauroteque in whose front face is a large portion of the Holy Cross and at the ends of the minor relic arms. The relic is contained in a blanket of silver and golden silver, in turn covered with a gold plated theca of 1679. Another Greek cross statuary, dating back to the 13th and 1331, contains fragments of St. Peter's Cross. The reliquary of the saints Senesio and Teopompo is a remarkable piece of Venetian gold art dating from the late twelfth to the beginning of the 13th century. Remember that the relics of these Eastern saints passed from the place of martyrdom, Nicomedia, to Jerusalem and to Treviso, from which they were repaired to Nonantola in 911, due to fear of the invasion of the Hungarians. The San Silvestro arm reliquary was executed by Giuliano da Bologna in 1372 by Tommaso Marzapesci of Bologna, a doctor of decree and abbot of Nonantola. Another valuable piece of the museum is the ivory reliquary cassette of the end of the XI or the beginning of the XII century, which has refined decorations both inlay and tapestry and contains fragments of the garments of the Protomartire Saint Stefano (Caselgrandi, 1998). The centuries-old veneration at the abbey of Nonantola for the relics of Pope San Silvestro I made for them a precious baroque reliquary still preserved in the Abbey Museum (Baldini, Borghi, 1991).

In addition to the abbeys, we witness the presence along its path of medieval hospitals for pilgrims and travelers, such as San Bartholomew of Spilamberto and San Colombano of Piumazzo (Foschi, 2009).

The first one, thanks to scientific excavations, returned the form and consistency of the guest hospitality and the bodies of pilgrims buried there, including a man who wore a seashell from Santiago di Compostella on his clothes (Labate, Librenti, 2013). In the same area several burials of Longobard families have returned extraordinary kits in weapons, dresses and ornaments (Breda ed., 2011).

The Church of San Colombano of Piumazzo instead leads us on the traces of that formidable evangeliser, the Irish Colombano, who in Europe between the 6th and 7th centuries led to the German people, and in Italy specifically to the Longobards, the word of Christ purified of the many heresies. But his life and his preaching were also an example of austere community life and devoted to the colonization of wild lands, but also to the revival of literary and cultural life with the foundation of famous scriptorias. The church of San Colombano in Piumazzo in 1014 belonged to the colombanian and then Benedictine abbey of Saint Peter, Lorenzo and Colombano of Brugnato, which stood between Liguria and Lunigiana along an important way of communication that united the Ligurian Levante to Pontremoli. This church of San Colombano in Piumazzo remained active for many centuries: in the modern age it was a oratory of giuspatronata of the Boccadiferro family, which rebuilt it in 1559; at the beginning of the nineteenth century it was desecrated, privatized and transformed into a stable and mill; it exists, well-recognizable, still today, intact outside, but transformed into a warehouse inside, where frescos of some value are also visible (Foschi, 1992, 2013).

Parish Church of St. James of Piumazzo maintains an eighteenth-century reliquary that for a long time had been lost, containing a fragment of San Colombano's bones. It has the form of an ostensory with silver oval teak, covered with red silk and embroidered in gold, embedded in an artwork made of silver metal, worked in relief and supported by a painted wooden top. Until 1823 it was listed in the inventory of the sacred objects of the church of San Colombano. When this was desecrated, the relic and the art container were brought to the nearby parish church of San Giacomo and preserved there. The sacred relic, authenticated on parchment in 1731 by Pietro Geronimo Arrighi, notary and auditor of the Curia of the Archbishop of Bologna, is therefore a rare testimony to that Irish monk lived between the end of the sixth and the first years of the seventh century that crossed Europe spreading Christianity among the pagans and founding monasteries.

It is then known that a church dedicated to Saint Colombano still exists today, although rarely officiated, even to Fanano; it was mentioned in the 10th century; it belonged to Fanano's church in 1233 but in 1583 was partially destroyed and stand there only a wooden cross. At that date we also have an interesting representation, in the same record as the pastoral visit of the vicar of the abbot of Nonantola, Enea Padovano, which shows us a simple tower southwest of the center of Fanano, distinguished by the name "S. Colombano" (Silvestri, 2005, p.145). Rebuilt in 1588, it did not last long with winds and weather and had to be rebuilt in 1602 by Ottonello Ottonelli as a private church. His son, Count Don Giovanni Battista, enriched the interior with paintings and furnishings; damaged in time and passed in the nineteenth century to other families in the area, was restored in the post-war period and today it is waiting for new restorations.

In Tuscany the road allowed to reach Pistoia, the Roman Via Cassia terminal, where pilgrims could venerate relics of St. James the greater in the cathedral (Rauty, 2000), or to reach Garfagnana and Lucca, where the Holy Face attracts the devotion of thousands of faithful men and women from all over Europe (Sabbatini, 2016a and 2016b).

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