The Lands of Ambrose: Monks and Society in Early Medieval Milan. By **Ross Balzaretti**. Studies in the Early Middle Ages 44. Turnhout: Brepols, 2019. xvii + 640 pp. €130.00 hardcover.

Extracting narratives from non-narratival sources is at the heart of the historian's métier. Ross Balzaretti's study of the charters associated with Sant' Ambrogio, the basilica and mausoleum of St. Ambrose of Milan that evolved into a monastery during the Carolingian period, offers not only narratives but also gushers of information for narratives yet to be written. Balzaretti's larger story concerns the expansion of this urban monastery's landholdings and consequent influence in the rural hinterland of northern Italy in the early Middle Ages. Nested within that narrative are many other stories: how seventeenth- and eighteenth-century scholarship continues to influence ideas about early medieval Lombardy (39–49, 292–294); how the cult of St. Ambrose developed from the fourth to the eighth century and persists to the present (89–104, 113–130, and passim); how Sant' Ambrogio was transformed from a basilica to a monastery under Carolingian patronage (158, 167–175, 180–186, and passim); and how the fortunes of the monastery correlated to the vicissitudes of Carolingian politics and the rise of the Ottonians (187–228, 231–235). In between are expositions of the number, type, authentication, and distribution of surviving Italian charters (49–69, 318–322, and passim), the state of archaeological excavation of Milan (82–87, 157–159, 162–166, 247–249, and passim), the demographic profile of early medieval Milan (240–246, 249–253, 256–271, and passim), the use of late antique funeral stones in the region (76–82, 153–155), and late antique Milanese book culture (69–76). The bibliography is eighty-six pages long. This book aspires to serve many audiences, from novices whose primary language is English to experts, whether one thinks of it as a portmanteau or a magical mystery tour.

To accommodate so much activity and such a range of subject matter, the book is divided into two substantial portions. The first half uses the larger canvases of historiography and methodology to assemble the topics noted above. The second portion comprises four case studies of villages in the Milanese hinterlands dominated by the lordship of Sant' Ambrogio, displaying Balzaretti's passion for the microcosmic, signaled in enthusiastic advocacy for the practice of microhistory; an entire section is devoted to "The Importance of Microanalysis" (481–487). The value of these case studies is enhanced by Balzaretti's interest in environmental history: the four sets of villages, described as "micro-regions," almost represent micro-climates, to which villagers responded with micro-agriculture. Dubino produced walnut oil rather than the olive oil of Campione and Limonta; Balzaretti helpfully connects the production of both oils to the lighting in the churches and monasteries in these spaces (304–305, 401–402, 425). The case studies illuminate other economic activity, such as the presence of mints and use of coinage (325–326; see also the numerous entries in the index for moneyers and money).

Balancing Balzaretti's interest in the material, agricultural, and environmental is profound interest in the human experiences revealed in the charter record, in particular by looking through the lens of gender. The effort to bring gender to the surface is largely successful, although, understandably, somewhat intermittent. Opening the book with Anstruda's charter of 721, in which Anstruda sells her guardianship (*mundium*) for three gold *solidi*, Balzaretti discusses violence toward women, women's legal status

https://doi.org/10.1017/S000964072100161X Published online by Cambridge University Press

and capacities, post-Roman constraints on women, and women's strategies for securing protection and economic security (30–39, 43–47). In the study of Campione, Balzaretti places Anstruda's charter in the context of local, family power. Property transfers upon marriage and women's entry into religious life, as well as donations to religious establishments, show the formal complexities, even among local gentry, of interwoven ownership—of both property and persons—and changes in status wrought over the course of human lives (309–317).

Enriching the analysis of Anstruda's situation is Balzaretti's attention to the intersection of Lombard law with provisions in charters. The illegality of Anstruda's transaction arises from a law issued by King Liutprand shortly before composition of the charter, penalizing the marriage of free women to slaves, reiterating a section in the mid-seventh-century Edict of Rothar (33–35, 44–46). Another law of Liutprand from the same year affected the status of a manumitted worker in Campione (311). Balzaretti notes that the borders of Campione coincided with the spatial extent of Lombard law (38–39). Awareness of Lombard law is traceable, perhaps, to the prominence of lay notaries in Italian documentary production; notaries were sometimes involved, as Balzaretti notes, in legal adjudication and were accustomed to preparing other types of documents used in secular courts (58–59). The types of charters issued in Campione conform to the categories described in Lombard law: *cartula de accepto mundio*, *cartula donationis*, *cartula venditionis*, *noticia* (320–323). In a case heard in 876 about minor children in dire need selling a house, the judge, a viscount of Milan, consulted a Lombard lawbook to use a law issued in 735 (380). A will prepared in the 870s by a bishop from Inzago describes himself as "son of Iso . . . who lived according to the laws of the Lombards" (*filius . . . Isonis, qui vixit legibus langobardorum*) (460, 465). Throughout the pages of this large book, there is constant confirmation of what François Bougard set forth so clearly some twenty-five years ago (*La justice dans le royaume d'Italie de la fin du siècle au début de XIe siècle* [Ecole française de Rome, 1995]): the prevalence of judges, advocates, *defensores*, notaries, and other paralegals as actors in documentary and legal processes; to them, Balzaretti adds monks.

The energy and effort that went into writing this study are evident at every turn, and for the excavation and lucid explication of the material readers should be very grateful. Brepols has, as usual, published an impeccable text (two typographical errors in 600 pages, I believe), with lovely, clear maps that are essential to grasping the geography of Sant' Ambrogio's holdings, and tables documenting the dates, types, and primary actors in the charters. The index is well constructed and accurate. As the chapter titles are broad (e.g., "Evidence," "Interpretation"), and the table of contents does not list the subheadings mercifully present in each chapter, there is an opportunity for readers to create their own tools for navigating the wealth of information. Readers will surely pillage this generous contribution to scholarship for a wide range of purposes, so it is heartening that it represents the best in careful preparation, transparent presentation, lively interpretation, and broad scope. *The Lands of Saint Ambrose* takes us to the very grounds, literally, of life in early medieval Milan and its surrounds.

Abigail Firey
University of Kentucky
doi:10.1017/S000964072100161X