

NOURISHMENT AND ASCETICISM: THE MEASURE OF FOOD

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Abstract

In the history of monasticism the attention given to food and discipline in diet is central to eremitical and coenobitical experience in both the East and West. The types of food and the quantities and timing of repasts are abundantly evident in precepts, rules and customs. While no dish or beverage is absolutely prohibited – not even wine or meat – nutritional choices had to be justified on biblical and religious grounds and above all medical and dietetic ones. The present article will show that consideration of these themes – with reference in particular to the medieval period and the Rule of St. Benedict (Regula Benedicti) – sheds light on our understanding of the norms of observance which for centuries have characterised the Christian ascetical tradition.

Key words: *Monasticism, Asceticism, Food, Meat, Wine, Abbot, Rule of St. Benedict*

In the *Vita Antonii*, it is recounted that the father of Egyptian asceticism «ate once a day after sunset, sometimes every two days and occasionally every four days. Bread and salt were his only sustenance and water his only drink. It is superfluous to speak of wine and meat since not even others inferior to him in virtue took these things»¹. Of Father Arsenio we learn that he ate «a basket of bread

¹ *Vita di Antonio*, Introduzione di Christine Mohrmann, Testo critico e commento di Gerardus Johannes Marinus Bartelink, Traduzione di Pietro Citati, Salvatore Lilla, Mondadori, Milano, 1974 (Vite dei santi, 1), cap. 1, 6-7, p. 23; on the uses of bread, Gabriele Archetti, “Noli pane satiari”. *Il pane sulla mensa dei monaci*, in *La civiltà del pane. Storia, tecniche e simboli dal Mediterraneo all’Atlantico*, Atti del Convegno internazionale di studio (Brescia, 1-6 dicembre 2014), a cura di

a year» and when fruit was ripe he said: «*Bring me some. So he tasted just once a little of each food, giving thanks to God*»². As in the case of sleep and work, there are no precise rules regarding food related to the discipline of the Eastern anchorites; much depended on personal inclination, time and place: «[it is] better to drink wine with discernment than drink water recklessly», observes Palladius in the prologue to the *Lausiaca History*³.

Nourishment was of fundamental importance in ascetic practice. One day Abbot Silvan, while disputing with a group of Euchites, received a monk who, on seeing the brothers at work, said: *Labour not for the meat which perisheth* (John 6, 27). *Mary hath chosen that good part* (Luke 10, 42). The Father did not reply, «but called over one of his disciples and said to him: “Zaccaria, give the brother a book and put him in a cell without anything”. When it was time for the midday repast the monk waited to be called to table but since he did not see anyone come he asked Silvan: “But Father, aren’t the brothers eating today?”. When Silvan replied in the affirmative, the brother asked why he had not been called and the Father replied: “Because you are a spiritual man and do not need such food. But we as men of the flesh must eat and therefore work whereas you have chosen the good part. You read all day and do not want to take material nourishment”. On hearing these words the monk prostrated himself and begged for forgiveness»⁴.

Gabriele Archetti, Fondazione Cisam, Spoleto, 2015 (Centro studi longobardi. Ricerche, 1), p. 1663-1704; Idem, “*Panis libra una*”. *La misura del pane dei monaci*, in *Banchetti e vivande nel Rinascimento a Roma*, a cura di Ivana Ait, Fondazione Besso, Roma, 2017 (Roma nel Rinascimento. Inedita, saggi 72), p. 135-155.

² *Vita e detti dei Padri del deserto*, a cura di Luciana Mortari, Città Nuova, Roma, 1996, n. 17 and 19, p. 98.

³ Palladio, *La Storia Lausiaca*, Introduzione di Christine Mohrmann, testo critico e commento di Gerardus Johannes Marinus Bartelink, traduzione di Marino Barchiesi, Mondadori, Milano, 1974 (Scrittori greci e latini. Vite dei santi dal III al VI secolo, 2), Prologo 9, p. 11.

⁴ *Vita e detti dei Padri*, n. 5, p. 463-464. On this subject, Gabriele Archetti, “*Mensura victus constituere*”. *Il cibo dei monaci tra Oriente ed Occidente*, in *L'alimentazione nell'alto medioevo: pratiche, simboli, ideologie*, Sessantatreesima settimana di studio (Spoleto, 9-14 aprile 2015), Fondazione Cisam, Spoleto, 2016, p. 757-795; Idem, *I monaci a tavola: norme e consuetudini alimentari*, in *Gli spazi della vita comunitaria*, Atti del Convegno internazionale (Roma-Subiaco, 8-10 giugno 2015), a cura di Letizia Pani Ermini, Fondazione Cisam, Spoleto, 2016 (De re monastica, 5), p. 305-327; further, *Living and dying in the cloister. Monastic life from the 5th to the 11th century*, edited by Gabriele Archetti, Miljenko Jurković, Repels, Zagreb, 2017 (Hortus artium medievalium, 23/1-2).

Biographies of truly good monks always describe how and what to eat, thus illustrating the ranking of penitential practices and the heroism of the aims they reached in mortification. However, a certain opposition between the diet of the coenobites and the austerity of the anchorites may be observed⁵. The contrast becomes more marked during revival of the eremitical movement, which numbered Peter Damian, Bernard of Clairvaux, Abelard and Peter the Venerable among its prominent theoreticians and polemicists.

In presenting the rule of life at Fonte Avellana, Peter Damian does not prescribe a daily timetable to be adhered to in the hermitage but begins with the dietary regime, or rather, the discipline of fasting respected by all those who were at Santa Croce – monks and lay brothers alike. He observes: «Gluttony is used to hurl its enticements as weapons against novices»⁶; therefore, in order not to defile the rest of the body with the belly's vices they avoided filling the belly with food.

In the *Vita Romualdi* we learn that on the advice of the Reforming Saint Venerius «retreated to a crag [...] where he lived in solitude for four years, bereft of any human comfort, and eating no bread except for the three loaves which he had brought with him from the monastery; he drank no wine, ate nothing that was cooked and lived only on fruits of the trees and roots and herbs. On the same crag there was also a hollow where in the winter the saint collected water which he made use of during the summer»⁷; while Boniface «on becoming a monk subjected himself to so stringent a diet that

⁵ *Historia monachorum seu liber de vitis Patrum*, in *Patrologia latina*, 21, ed. Jacques Paul Migne, Parisiis, 1849, cap. I: *De sancto Joanne*, col. 395; cap. II: *De Hor*, col. 405-406; cap. VI: *De Tueone*, col. 410; cap. VI: *De Apollonio*, col. 410-411; Palladio, *La Storia Lausiaca*, cap. 11.4, p. 53; 18.2, p. 79; 38.10.12-13, p. 199, 201, 203; 45.2, p. 219, further, Adalbert de Vogüé, *La regola di san Benedetto. Commento dottrinale e spirituale*, Abbazia di Praglia, Bressio di Teolo (Pd), 1998² (Scritti monastici, 5), p. 328.

⁶ The reference is to *Regula Benedicti* (= RB) 78, 8, cfr. Pier Damiani, *Lettere (41-67)*, a cura di Guido Innocenzo Gargano, Nicolangelo D'Acunto, traduzione di Adelmo Dindelli, Lorenzo Saraceno, Costanzo Somigli, revisione generale di Lorenzo Saraceno, Città Nuova, Roma, 2002 (Opere di Pier Damiani, 1/3), letter 50, cap. 52, 53, 13, p. 179, 181, 153. On the dietary regime at the hermitage of Santa Croce: Gabriele Archetti, «*Solum in pane et aqua abstinere*». *L'alimentazione a Fonte Avellana al tempo di Pier Damiani*, in *Fonte Avellana nel secolo di Pier Damiani*, Atti del XXIX Convegno del Centro Studi Avellaniti (Fonte Avellana, 29-31 agosto 2007), a cura di Nicolangelo D'Acunto, Il segno dei Gabrielli, San Pietro in Cariano (Vr), 2008, p. 179-211.

⁷ Pier Damiani, *Vita beati Romualdi*, a cura di Giovanni Tabacco, Istituto storico italiano per il Medioevo, Roma, 1957 (Fonti per la storia d'Italia, 94), cap. 24, 2, p. 50.

often in the space of a week he limited himself to eating only on Sundays and Thursdays». However, having gone to Rome to receive episcopal ordination and prepare himself for preaching, «he would eat every day because of the exhaustion occasioned by his journey, keeping up his strength with half a loaf and on feast days adding a little fruit and roots and herbs, while excluding soups of every kind from his daily sustenance»⁸.

FROM THE EAST: UNIFORMITY IN DIVERSITY

According to St. Benedict (RB 78, 5), the standard reference point for monastic regulations on nourishment is Bishop Basil of Caesarea and his comments on coenobitism, as set down in the *Rules*. These represent the foundations of Christian monasticism. It was this bishop who devised the theory that it was impossible for everyone to follow the same diet; his observations included also the welfare of the sick, the rule of sobriety, the dangers of greed and its subsequent pleasures, and the preference for simple inexpensive food within easy reach. In answer to the question: «What is the measure of temperance», he did not hesitate to reply: «that the needs of each person differ according to age, work and physical constitution and the restraint and the manner in which it (*temperance*) is exercised. From this it follows that it is not possible to include in one rule all those who want to live a Christian life; therefore, once the measure has been established for ascetics in good health we allow those who are entrusted with the governing of the community to implement changes to that measure and adapt it to individual needs»⁹.

Whoever is in charge of the community must provide «suitable nourishment for the sick, those who are exhausted with toil, or those who prepare themselves to confront a long journey or undertake a similarly burdensome task, while always taking into account the needs of each monk. As to mealtimes, the manner in which food is taken and the restraint exercised it is not possible to establish the same rule for everyone; the single common endeavour shall be the satisfaction of needs. Overloading the stomach with food deserves malediction because the Lord said: *Woe unto you that are full!* (Luke

⁸ Pier Damiani, *Vita beati Romualdi*, cap. 27, 1, p. 57.

⁹ Basilio di Cesarea, *Le regole. Regulae fusius tractatae - Regulae brevius tractatae*, Introduzione, traduzione e note a cura di Lisa Cremaschi, Qiqajon, Magnano (Vc), 1993, *Regole diffuse* (= Rd) cap. 19, 1, p. 138.

6, 25)»¹⁰. In governing the community and providing spiritual guidance the criterion is respect for variety within uniformity. Whereas compulsory ascetic heroism was by no means called for, openness towards personal impulses was required, as were sincerity, purity and consistency with inner expectations.

The Pachomian Rule shows clearly the preoccupation with avoiding inequality in the amount of food served while emphasising that someone may demand special treatment¹¹; care of the sick or weaker brothers is also underscored¹². «If a brother is weakened by the oppressive heat», prescribe the *Rules* of Orsiesi, «those responsible shall have care for him, and the brother should advise them if he is not in a condition to eat his bread at the table with the brothers». Provided that the requirements were genuine and not an excuse for favouring personal weaknesses or desires it was permitted to give what was needed by exercising good sense, though within means of the monastery¹³. As one of Augustine's maxims affirms, «it is better to have fewer needs than to possess several things»¹⁴.

For this reason suitable food for monks had to be simple and easily gathered or grown, even when –following the Lord's example – guests were welcomed, since He assuaged the hunger of the crowd in the desert with frugal fare: «barley loaves, and two small fishes» (John 6, 9); whereas one should resort to foods from outside «only if these are absolutely necessary to live, such as oil or similar products» or if such foods help a patient, provided this can be achieved without difficulty¹⁵. Harmful foodstuffs should be avoided, even if they look appetising; during the common mealtime the brothers ate what had been prepared with moderation in the kitch-

¹⁰ Basilio di Cesarea, *Le regole*, Rd cap. 19, 1, p. 139-140.

¹¹ *Pacomio e i suoi discepoli: regole e scritti*, Introduzione, traduzione e note a cura di Lisa Cremaschi, Qiqajon, Magnano (Vc), 1988, (= *Pacomio, Precetti*) n. 38, 41, 51, 74, p. 71-73, 77; *ibid.*, *Regolamenti* n. 41, 50, p. 162-163, 166.

¹² *Pacomio, Precetti* n. 40, 42, 105, p. 72, 80-81; *Regolamenti* n. 24, 42, p. 158, 162-163.

¹³ *Pacomio, Regolamenti* n. 49, p. 165-166.

¹⁴ *Regola di Agostino*, in *Regole monastiche d'Occidente*, a cura di Enzo Bianchi, traduzione e note di Cecilia Falchini, Einaudi, Torino, 2001, cap. 3, 5, p. 18, *La misura del cibo; Regola di Agostino alle vergini*, in *Regole monastiche femminili*, a cura di Lisa Cremaschi, introduzione di Enzo Bianchi, Einaudi, Torino, 2003, cap. 3, 4, p. 17, *La disciplina ascetica*.

¹⁵ Basilio, *Le regole*, Rd cap. 19, 2, p. 141; cap. 20, 2, p. 142-144; for overview, Gabriele Archetti, *L'olio sulla barba di Aronne. Suggestioni dal mondo monastico*, in *Ars olearia, I. Dall'oliveto al mercato nel medioevo - Ars olearia, I. From olive grove to market in the Medieval Ages*, a cura di Irma Naso, CeSa, Guarene (Cn) 2018 (Centro studi CeSa. Saggi e ricerche, 2), p. 205-228.

en since: «it is absurd to take food for sustenance and then wage war on the body with these foods, preventing it from observing the commandments»¹⁶. One is predisposed to be grateful towards the Creator because even while eating one does not escape his merciful gaze¹⁷.

As for drinking, Basil continues: «mention is not even made since water, which is available to everyone, flows naturally from the earth and is sufficient for our needs – unless such a drink should prove to be harmful to someone owing to an infirmity and therefore best avoided, as Paul advises Timothy (1 Timothy 5, 23)»¹⁸. The question is one of balance and restraint and, once these are attained, there remain no prohibitions or restrictions against the consumption of particular foods or beverages. What is important is to avoid pleasure, excess and satiety, without mistaking the love for God with that for his creatures¹⁹. Therefore it is suitable «to have a well-prepared and respectable table, never to exceed the rule of restraint» and to obtain «the wherewithal to live through the effort of our hands», namely *using the things of this world without abusing them* (1 Corinthians 7, 31), as the sacred writings prescribe²⁰.

Such general themes find expression in various ways in the rules for monks and nuns from Pachomius to Augustine, from Cassian to Caesarius, from the Master to Benedict, to Aurelianus, Columbanus and Fructuosus. When connected with fasting they are strengthened. It is a method of asceticism practised by the saints should not to be left to the individual will. Apart from being a corrective measure to be exercised with discretion and not out of vainglory, when united combined with prayer, fasting leads to purity in those who practise it with a suitable attitude of mind²¹. At all events, the monastic diet – as in the case of an athlete who as part of his training places his trust in correct nutrition – is tied to the medicine of the ancients²². Thus knowledge of the qualities of food was fundamental if these were to be adapted to the needs of indi-

¹⁶ Basilio, *Le regole*, Rd cap. 19, 2, p. 141; for the *Regole brevi* [= Rb], *ibid.*, cap. 126, 133, 134, 196, 252, p. 311, 314, 347, 375-376.

¹⁷ Basilio, *Le regole*, Rb cap. 196, p. 347.

¹⁸ Basilio, *Le regole*, Rd cap. 19, 2, p. 140.

¹⁹ Basilio, *Le regole*, Rd cap. 18-21, p. 136-146.

²⁰ Basilio, *Le Regole*, Rd cap. 20, 3, p. 145.

²¹ Basilio, *Le regole*, Rd cap. 12, 16, 51, p. 121, 130-133, 203-204; Rb cap. 44, 128, 129, 130, 136, 137, 138, 139, 277, p. 266, 312-313, 315-317, 396-397.

²² Archetti, “*Mensura victus constituere*”, p. 757-795.

vidual monks. It enabled the selection of the nutriments necessary to individual requirements for a suitable diet.

As a result, choices in diet represent a well-regulated instrument for each specific lifestyle, a carefully calculated ways of retaining or recovering health in accordance with existential choices. This is because according to medieval physiology physical and psychic health consisted of a natural balance between the “humours” and the elements of the four primary qualities: hot, cold, dry and wet, and the set of the four elements: earth, water, air and fire²³. Without these medical and dietary presuppositions monastic regulations on diet appear incomprehensible and their popularity and the vocabulary used appears likewise inexplicable. In the Christian tradition foods are neither pure nor impure (Matthew 15, 1-20; Mark 7, 1-23); by restricting them the goal is not to defend man from external defilement, but rather to heal the heart, mortify desire and liberate the spirit. The austerity exercised in taking food does not represent a conquest of the self or one’s inner nature, as in the pagan world, but rather constitutes a profoundly evangelical experience whose spiritual meaning lies in the relationship established through the Lord’s passion on the cross²⁴. Thus it is a question of a spiritual vision.

The avoidance of gluttony is therefore the first stage in any serious ascetic journey while, as St. John Cassian stated²⁵, dietary self-restraint plays a key role in keeping the carnal passions in check. Therefore, in the rule of the Master (*Regula Magistri*) and that of Benedict²⁶ the absence of food, namely fasting, is closely connected to chastity: it is undertaken as periodic abstinence, whereas

²³ For these concepts, Marilyn Nicoud, *Les régimes de santé au Moyen Âge. Naissance et diffusion d'une écriture médicale*, Publications de l'École française de Rome, Rome, 2007 (Bibliothèques des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, 333); Eadem, *La dietetica antica e medievale*, in *La civiltà del pane*, p. 1115-1129; and for a new interpretation by Francesca Stroppa through artistic representations, *Le immagini e gli usi del pane nel medioevo*, ibid., p. 1230-1275.

²⁴ Pacomio, *Catechesi sui sei giorni di Pasqua*, in *Pacomio e i suoi discepoli*, p. 232.

²⁵ Jean Cassien, *Conférences I-VII*, Introduction, texte latin, traduction et notes par Eugène Pichery, Les éditions du cerf, Paris, 1955 (Sources chrétiennes, 42), conlat. 5, 4-6.10.25-26, p. 190-195, 197-199, 215-216.

²⁶ On the *Regula Magistri* (= RM) cfr. *La Règle du Maître*, éd. Adalbert de Vogüé, I-II, Les éditions du cerf, Paris, 1964 (Sources chrétiennes, 105-106); *Regola del Maestro*, I: *Introduzione*, traduzione e commento a cura di Marcellina Bozzi, II: *Introduzione*, testo e note a cura di Marcellina Bozzi, Alberto Grilli, Paideia, Brescia, 1965; on the *Regula Benedicti* cfr. San Benedetto, *La Regola con testo latino a fronte*, a cura di Giorgio Picasso, traduzione e note di Dorino Tuniz, Edizioni San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo (Mi), 1996 (Storia della Chiesa. Fonti, 7).

the renunciation of chastity is permanent. However, the description of these two conditions – and only these – is couched in the same exhortative terms, for both practices are to be “loved” (*ieiunium amare, castitatem amare*) inasmuch they are interdependent and it is easier to curb sexual appetite by training the body to restrain desire through fasting²⁷. Like prayer, fasting has a universal function, which is transformed into an instrument in the fight against evil: «Demons of this sort cannot be expelled *nisi in oratione et ieiunio*» (Mark 9, 29; Matthew 6, 5-15 and 16-18). Moderation in eating therefore takes on material and spiritual relevance: by restraining the desire to eat, the other appetites are curbed thus transforming restraint into a spiritual discipline since «every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things» (1 Corinthians 9, 25)²⁸.

A tenth-century text from the Iberian Peninsula, the *Libellus a Regula Sancti Benedicti subtractus*, mentions the extent to which greed, by overburdening the stomach with tasty dishes, divests it of spiritual strength, fortifies the body and depletes the soul giving rise to neglect in the Divine Office (*Opus Dei*). «Thus, burdened with food, a dulled nun is not keen on vigils and makes no attempt to sing psalms at the appointed hour; she does not lift up her mind to Heaven, neither does she accede to the grace of compunction. She is slow to go to her prayers, grows impatient in reading, is obstinate in understanding the word of the Lord, remiss in obeying her superiors, and lukewarm about performing all good works»²⁹.

RITUAL AND MEALTIMES

Until the fifth century sources of information on food consumption, mealtimes and nutrition is for the most part somewhat general. Owing to the existence of the *Regula Magistri* and the *Regula*

²⁷ RM 3; 13; 70; RB 4; 13; 64; de Vogüé, *La Regola di san Benedetto*, p. 318-321.

²⁸ 1 Cor 9, 25, with reference to food in particular, taken up by Basilio, *Le Regole*, Rd cap. 16, 1, p. 131; 18, p. 136-137; in a narrower sense, Basilii Caesareae Cappadociae archiepiscopi *De ieiunio homelia II*, in *Patrologia cursus completus. Series graeca*, 31, ed. Jacques Paul Migne, Parisiis 1857, cap. 2, 3, col. 190.

²⁹ *Libellus a regula sancti Benedicti subtractus*, in *Regole monastiche femminili*, cap. 33, 1-8, p. 241; on the monastic timetable, Gabriele Archetti, “*Nihil operi Dei praeponatur*”. *Il tempo dei monaci nel medioevo*, in “*Tempus mundi umbra aevi*”. *Tempo e cultura del tempo tra Medioevo e età moderna*, Atti dell’incontro nazionale di studio (Brescia, 29-30 marzo 2007), a cura di Gabriele Archetti, Angelo Baronio, Fondazione civiltà bresciana, Brescia, 2008 (Storia, cultura e società, 1), p. 51-80.

Benedicti we have an early codex on measure in eating (RM 26; RB 39), the quantities to drink (RM 27; RB 40) and mealtimes (RM 28; RB 41); however, in these three closely related chapters the Benedictine rules are characterised by greater austerity³⁰. In particular, the time of the noon meal (RB 41), which comprised the main repast, varied with the seasons: from Easter onward the meal was taken after midday at the end of Mass, while supper (*cena*) was taken on completion of the office of Vespers before sunset³¹. On the shortest days of winter, at Advent and during Lent, the brothers ate just one meal in the mid afternoon³² (at about 3 p.m.), even though they were allowed to receive a *caritas* – a snack of bread and wine³³ – before the Compline (the last office of the day) and at other moments during the day.

There was a ritual to these meals. After washing their hands, the brothers entered the refectory where they were seated in strict order of seniority in accordance with their entry into the monastery. Ingress into the refectory took the form of a procession and the monks remained standing until the arrival of the abbot, who gave the blessing. The food was distributed and eaten in silence³⁴, while the lector caused his voice resound from the height of the pulpit as

³⁰ For a detailed comparison, see *La Règle de saint Benoît*, Introduction, traduction et notes par Adalbert de Vogüé, texte établi et présenté par Jean Neufville, VI, Paris, 1972 (Sources chrétiennes, 186), p. 1125-1240; Archetti, “*Noli pane satiari*”, p. 1678 ss.

³¹ The timetable of meals was calculated according to the length of daylight – both on spiritual grounds and for reasons of heating costs (RB 41, 9), cfr. *La Règle de saint Benoît*, p. 1172; and observations by Gabriele Archetti, “*Infundit vinum et oleum*”. *Olio e vino nella tradizione monastica*, in *Olio e vino nell’alto medioevo*, Spoleto, 20-26 aprile 2006, Fondazione Cisam, Spoleto, 2007 (Settimane di studio della Fondazione Cisam, LIV), p. 1108-1109.

³² For the commentary on RB 41, *At what hours meals should be taken*, see the notes of the monk Hildemar of Corbie, in Rupert Mittermüller, *Expositio Regulae ab Hildemaro tradita et nunc primum typis tradita*, in *Vita et Regula ss. p. Benedicti una cum expositione Regulae a Hildemaro tradita*, F. Pustet, Ratisbonae, Neo-Eboraci, Cincinnatii, 1880 (= Hildemaro), p. 448-452.

³³ On this aspect, Gabriele Archetti, “*Mensura potus*”. *Il vino dei monaci nel medioevo*, in *La civiltà del vino. Fonti, temi e produzioni vitivinicole dal Medioevo al Novecento*, Atti della VII Biennale di Franciacorta (Monticelli Brusati - Antica Fratta, 5-6 ottobre 2001), a cura di Gabriele Archetti, Centro culturale artistico di Franciacorta e del Sebino, Brescia, 2003, p. 251-259; Idem, “*Infundit vinum et oleum*”, p. 1174-1175 ss.

³⁴ Archetti, “*De mensura potus*”, p. 242-251; Idem, “*Nihil operi Dei praeponatur*”, p. 71-79. Throughout the day there were moments during which conversation in cloisters was permitted. After the chapter in the morning and supper in the late afternoon; in the church, refectory and dormitory silence was observed and broken only by psalms and readings (RB 6; 7, 56-57; 38, 5; 42, 8-9; 52, 2).

he read the sacred Scriptures. «From the time you sit down to eat», Augustine instructed, «until you rise from the table, listen without making a noise and without talking to what is read out loud, as is customary; not only shall the mouth take food, but the ears too are hungry for the word of God»³⁵. As to mealtimes and the consumption of food, concessions were made to those whose responsibility it was to serve the community, such as welcoming guests, helping those who were sick, or performing weekly duties in the kitchen or other tasks allocated by the abbot.

The refectory was generally shared, but the onerous tasks of hospitality, especially during the Carolingian period, sometimes resulted in the monks' kitchen and refectory being distinguished from those of the abbot. In accordance with the Rule the abbot was seated at the table with the guests (RB 56, 1) and, if necessary, to avoid shaming them through ostentatious abstention, he broke his fast in compliance with such duties pertaining to receiving and entertaining guests. If the guests were not too numerous he could invite members of the confraternity to his table, provided that one or two elders remained with the others to maintain discipline³⁶. In the mid-ninth century Hildemar of Corbie remarks that the superior ate with the confraters, but in the larger communities – such as at Saint Gall – the abbot was unable to see all the monks, nor to control their behaviour so the superior brothers kept a watchful eye on the younger ones. But most of the abbots in Hildemar's time thought that the superior's refectory should be kept apart from that of the monks³⁷, and when guests arrived «the title of abbey should be filled with deeds and real examples rather than words».

But for Hildemar, the abbot's table should not be separated from that of the brothers, who, on seeing the self-restraint exercised by the abbot and the silence he observed while eating with the

³⁵ *Regola di Agostino alle vergini*, cap. 3, 2, p. 16; and in epistle 207 *Contra Iulianum*, he observes: «At table not only do we reflect on important matters but we discuss them; while eating and drinking we are no less attentive to listening and speaking, and all that which we wish to know or remember is implanted in our minds more so than if it were read to us» [Agostino, *Contro Giuliano*, Introduzione e note di Nello Cipriani, traduzione di Ermanno Cristini, Italo Volpi, in Idem, *Polemica contro Giuliano*, I, Città Nuova, Roma, 1985 (Opere di sant'Agostino, XVIII, 1), cap. 71, p. 746].

³⁶ Ildemaro, p. 522; see Gabriele Archetti, *Pellegrini e ospitalità nel medioevo. Dalla storiografia locale all'ospedale di Santa Giulia di Brescia*, *Brixia sacra. Memorie storiche della diocesi di Brescia*, VI (2001), 3-4, p. 91-104; Idem, *Spazi e strutture claustrali nei commenti carolingi alla Regola benedettina*, *Hortus artium medievalium*, 20 (2014), 2, p. 451-455.

³⁷ Ildemaro, p. 523-524, 528-529; Archetti, «*Infundit vinum et oleum*», p. 1167-1172.

guests, were edified by his good example. Although he was entitled to partake of three or four dishes, which had been placed on the table out of respect for the guests, the abbot chose no more than three, showing the importance of restraint and appropriate measure³⁸. Sometimes the exact sequence of mealtimes varied owing to the hour of a visitor's arrival or the fasting period³⁹; but the place where the abbot partook of food with the guests was always the communal refectory. Both the abbot's kitchen and that of the monks had serving hatches through which food was passed into the refectory where it was served⁴⁰. There was a canon who cooked for the abbot, while a monk, who worked under the cellarer obtained the fish and various victuals when a guest arrived for lunch. Another brother, in the kitchen, took the food and distributed it through the serving hatch of the refectory; but if the cleric on duty in the abbey kitchen needed assistance in cooking the food the brother had to help him and his place was taken by the cellarer.

Benedict deals with the *mensura cibus* in RB 39, which corresponds to the Master's more detailed chapter 26, whether there were two daily meals or just one. We do not know what supper comprised except for the third part of the ration of bread set aside by the cellarer for the evening (RM 27, 28; RB 39, 5)⁴¹. The main repast, the

³⁸ Ildemaro, p. 523-524.

³⁹ Concerning the fact that the superior could break his fast in order to accompany the guest while the brothers continued to abstain, cfr. Ildemaro, p. 526; Archetti, *Spazi e strutture claustrali nei commenti*, p. 452-454.

⁴⁰ On this, Federico Marazzi, *Refettori e refezione nei monasteri altomedievali: uno sguardo attraverso l'archeologia e le fonti scritte*, in *Gli spazi della vita comunitaria*, p. 329-369; and Rosa Fiorillo, *La dieta dei monaci a San Severo di Classe*, *ibid.*, p. 371-383.

⁴¹ On these aspects Archetti, "Noli pane satiari", p. 1678-1690; Idem, "Vas optimo lacte plenum". *Latte e formaggio nel mondo monastico*, in *La civiltà del latte. Fonti, simboli e prodotti dal Tardoantico al Novecento*, Atti dell'incontro nazionale di studio (Brescia, 29-30 maggio 2008), a cura di Gabriele Archetti, Angelo Baronio, Fondazione civiltà bresciana, Brescia, 2011 (Storia, cultura e società, 3), p. 249-269; Idem, "Parvula poma sumebat". *Suggestioni dal mondo monastico*, in *Le parole della frutta. Storia, saperi, immagini tra medioevo ed età contemporanea*, a cura di Irma Naso, Zamorani, Torino, 2012, p. 67-89; Idem, "Mensura victus constituere", p. 757-795; Idem, "Dulcissimas ficus comedere". *Note sparse dalle fonti monastiche*, in *Fichi. Storia, economia, tradizioni. Figs, History, Economy, Traditions*, Atti del convegno internazionale di studio (Sanremo-Bordighera, 22-23 maggio 2015), a cura di Alessandro Carassale, Claudio Littardi, Irma Naso, Philobiblion, Ventimiglia (Im), 2016, p. 105-118. For the iconography see observations by Francesca Stroppa, "Lac et caseum" *nelle fonti artistiche tra età medievale e moderna*, in *La civiltà del latte*, p. 103-182; Eadem, *Vite, uva e vino nella tradizione iconografica medievale e moderna*, in "In terra vineata". *La vite e il vino in Liguria e nelle Alpi Marittime dal Medioevo ai nostri giorni*, Atti del con-

meal at midday, consisted of two dishes cooked in such a way as to allow the brothers to eat either one or the other according to their individual needs (RB 39, 1-2). A third course composed of fruit or fresh greenstuff, *poma aut nascentia leguminum*, might be added if the community's economic resources were sufficient and local conditions allowed this (RB 39, 3). It was within the scope of the abbot's power to add something if work in the fields was particularly hard (RB 39, 6); in other prescriptive texts, like those of the Master or Caesarius of Arles, this supplement was restricted to Sundays, feast days or special occasions, for instance the presence of a guest⁴². The criterion of moderation was applied in all circumstances in order to avoid overindulgence (RB 39, 7-8) and children's servings were apportioned in keeping with their age. This was to ensure that nothing was wasted and that greed was avoided (RB 39, 10).

The term *pulmentaria*, namely cooked dishes, had different meanings according to the ingredients used in its preparation: meat, fish, pulses (broad-beans, lentils, peas, beans kidney-beans, chick-peas, lupines) or «bread accompanied by cheese, leeks, eggs and similar things», writes Hildemar⁴³. In the Rule *pulmentum* implies a cooked dish of greenstuff, cheese, eggs and flour, the preparation of which varied according to the ingredients used. The term *poma* relates to the «fruit of trees, apples, pears, figs...»⁴⁴; we may note in Carolingian commentaries that the third course was composed of fresh seasonal fruit⁴⁵; fruit was permitted at the noon meal and supper but not outside mealtimes⁴⁶ because it was at odds with the

vegno di studi in memoria di Giovanni Rebora (Taggia, 6-8 maggio 2012), a cura di Alessandro Carassale, Luca Lo Basso, Philobiblion, Ventimiglia (Im), 2014, p. 306-356; Eadem, *Le immagini e gli usi del pane*, p. 1211-1338; Eadem, *Frutto proibito o albero della vita? Note intorno alla fortuna medievale di un tema iconografico*, in *Fichi. Storia, economia*, p. 185-212; Eadem, *Usi, simboli e raffigurazioni dell'olio e dell'olivo nelle fonti artistiche medievali*, in *Ars olearia*, p. 229-251.

⁴² The Master allowed supplements on Sundays, feast days and in the presence of guests (RM 26, 11-12); Cesario permitted four dishes a day during feast days, as well as desserts and greenstuff (*Regola per le vergini di Cesario*, in *Regole monastiche femminili*, cap. 71, p. 63-64).

⁴³ Ildemaro, p. 435; Archetti, "Vas optimo lacte pleno", p. 257-258; Idem, "Panis libra una", p. 135-155.

⁴⁴ RB 39,3 and Anselmo Lentini's comment in San Benedetto, *La regola*, Abbazia di Montecassino, 1994³, p. 355; especially Archetti, "Parvula poma sumebat", p. 67-89; Idem, "Dulcissimas ficus comedere", p. 110-111.

⁴⁵ Smaragdi abbatis *Expositio in Regulam s. Benedicti*, ed. Alfred Spannagel, Pius Engelbert, Schmitt, Siegburg, 1974 (Corpus consuetudinum monasticarum, 8), p. 255-257, cap. 39: *De mensura cibis*; Ildemaro, p. 436, 441.

⁴⁶ *Theodomari abbatis Casinensis epistula ad Karolum regem*, saec. IX in., recensuerunt Kassius Hallinger, Maria Wegener, in *Initia consuetudinis benedictinae*.

Rule stating that two meals a day must not be exceeded⁴⁷. Further, the expression *nascentia leguminum* refers to uncooked pulses left to soak and allowed to sprout, or rather the “sprouts” of pulses⁴⁸.

The daily quantity of bread allocated to each monk (RB 39, 4-5) – whether for just one *refectio* or both the *prandium* and *cena* – was established by means of a scale. According to Carolingian commentaries the expression *panis libra una propensa* indicates rather more than just “copious”, the standard translation for the word *propensa*; the meaning is closer to a “well weighed out” or “measured” quantity referring to the uncooked mixture or dough⁴⁹. A single measure of dough once baked in the oven formed into a loaf weighing about 800 grams based on the *pondus* or mould of this weight. The *pondus* of Monte Cassino is still kept in the Abbey Museum and according to an ancient coenobitical tradition goes back to St. Benedict⁵⁰. In fact it is later in date, being equivalent to the measure adopted by the ascetics in the Egyptian deserts described by Cassian.

THE MEAT DEBATE

The question of the prohibition against the consumption of meat is more complex. It should be seen within the context of biblical and patristic models: from Moses to Elijah, and John the Baptist to Jesus and the desert fathers. These models, which are connected with fasting in its religious sense together with tenets of medicine and diet, were intended to protect chastity and curb gluttony. There are no strong theological or moral reasons or scriptural writings which account for this prohibition aside from the continuity of penitential practice since the Old Testament. On account of the greater natural purity of birds (Genesis 1, 20-23) the consumption of their

Consuetudines saeculi octavi et noni, Schmitt, Siegburg, 1963 (Corpus consuetudinum monasticarum, 1), p. 165.

⁴⁷ Ildemaro, p. 436-437.

⁴⁸ The wording *nascentia leguminum*, to be understood as *germinantia*, is explained as follows: «mos est illius terrae et romanae et aliarum provinciarum mittere legumina in aqua et cum germinata fuerint, tunc manducant» (Ildemaro, p. 436, 441); this is confirmed in the custom at Monte Cassino: «Beatus pater noster instituit duo cocta pulmentaria in cotidiana refectioe fratribus praeparari et tertium de leguminibus crudis aqua infusis» (*Theodomari abbatis Casinensis epistula*, p. 163; Archetti, “*Mensura victus constituere*”, p. 772-777).

⁴⁹ Smaragdi abbatis *Expositio in Regulam s. Benedicti*, cap. 39, p. 255: «Quod autem dicit *Panis libra una propensa*, ante pensata vel librata intellegitur»; Ildemaro, p. 497; Archetti, “*Noli pane satiari*”, p. 1687.

⁵⁰ For these aspects Archetti, “*Noli pane satiari*”, p. 1687-1690.

flesh, or types of white meat, is considered a more efficacious remedy for bridling concupiscence.

As pointed out by Augustin Calmet, in a monastic environment the Benedictine passage asserting that «everyone shall abstain from the meat of quadrupeds, with the sole exception of those who are seriously ill» (RB 39, 11) – however clearly expressed and set apart from the regulations concerning the sick – is among those which «has been the most studied yet the least agreed on»⁵¹. In *Genesis* Adam was forbidden to eat a particular fruit, whereas the consumption of meat and wine begun only after the Flood, which is why abstinence (*continentia*) is akin to a return to a sort of primordial bliss⁵². Conversely, renouncing the taste of food is the price for attaining contemplation: just as fasting had prepared Moses and Elijah to see God, so dietary asceticism increases the taste for spiritual things, warding off the satisfaction of bodily pleasures.

The debate on meat unfurls within a vast number of pronouncements based on two fundamental principles: firstly the ancient cosmology of the four elements: fire, air, water and earth. Fire is the hot element, positioned uppermost in the hierarchy and nearest to the light of God, in opposition to the earth, characterised by darkness, which is the cold element and positioned lowermost. From their interpenetration is derived the nature of things in their mineral, vegetable and animal components; with her original methodology Hildegard of Bingen has shown their complex cosmo-anthropologic aspects which embrace Christian creation as the key signature.

⁵¹ «Let the weakest brothers eat meat so that they can recover; but once their health is restored, they should all abstain from flesh meat as usual» (RB 36, 9). For some commentators this means that St. Benedict prohibited only the meat of quadrupeds while allowing that of fowl; other commentators maintain that the prohibition of birds applied to all monks, whether healthy or sick, and that only invalids were permitted the meat of quadrupeds. The distinction drawn between the two types of meat was at the centre of a protracted discussion that may be summarised in the following two positions. The first was that since poultry is more digestible than other types of meat and as such inconsistent with the monastic diet it was excluded by Benedict because it was included in penitential practice; the second position was that since the flesh of birds was «less firm and less nutritious and considered to be meat of the same type as fish» it was not forbidden to monks, unlike the «meat of quadrupeds» (Augustin Calmet, *Commentario letterale, storico e morale sopra la Regola di S. Benedetto, con alcune osservazioni sopra gli Ordini Religiosi, che seguitano la stessa Regola*, II, M. Bellotti, Arezzo, 1751, p. 33-34 and p. 33 for text citation).

⁵² On this, de Vogüé, *La Regola di san Benedetto*, p. 326-328.

The second principle is linked to the Biblical account of the creation of the fish and birds from the waters⁵³. In the text these creatures are related in nature through their common origin and shared moral importance⁵⁴. However, birds – inasmuch as they live in the element of air and are nearer sometimes to water and earth and sometimes to the sky – rank higher on the scale of nobility compared to fish, which live in the water, and they rank yet higher than quadrupeds which live on the earth and occupy a lower position in the hierarchy of the four elements.

As a result, and with the exception of the seriously ill, the consumption of the flesh of quadrupeds, namely red meat, was forbidden, whereas fish and fowl were implicitly allowed⁵⁵. The Master permitted meat to be served from Christmas to Epiphany and Easter to Pentecost, according to a practice followed also at Monte Cassino⁵⁶. But he made those who did so sit aside, «in order that the distance separating those who are slaves of their own desires and those who are masters of their own bodies may be seen» (RM 53,

⁵³ Gen 1, 20-23 and Bede's comment on fish and birds «aquarum animantia», especially animals created from the waters «genus animantium de aquis» (Venerabilis Bedae Hexaameron sive libri quatuor in principium Genesis, in *Patrologia latina*, 91, ed. Jacques Paul Migne, Parisiis, 1862, col. 26-27; for its manifestation in an artistic context, Stroppa, *Le immagini e gli usi del pane*, p. 1263-1275).

⁵⁴ This was a tradition of the antique church, as pointed out by Epifanio di Salamina in the *Compendio della fede*, where there were those who abstained «from meats of all types – those of four-footed animals, birds, fish –, also eggs and cheese [...]. Some abstained from all these foodstuffs, others only from the meat of four-footed animals, while they consumed the meat of birds and all other foods. Others abstained from the meat of birds but ate eggs and fish; still others abstained also from fish but ate cheese; yet others did not even eat cheese. Finally there were those who even abstained from bread and a few did not consume fruit of the trees or cooked foodstuffs»; the prohibition on the meat of quadrupeds during periods fasting and abstinence applied to everyone [Epifanio di Salamina, *Panarion eresie 74-80. Compendio della fede*, Traduzione e note di Domenico Ciarlo, Città Nuova, Roma, 2015 (Collana di testi patristici, 238), cap. 23, 4-5, p. 266-267].

⁵⁵ On the prohibition of meat, Archetti, «*Mensura victus constituere*», p. 780-792; Idem, *Mangiare carne in monastero? Norme e consuetudini*, in «*Carnem manducare*». *La carne e i suoi divieti: storia, produzioni, commercio e salute*, Convegno internazionale di studio (Rovato, 25-29 marzo 2020), a cura di Gabriele Archetti, Fondazione Cisam, Spoleto (Centro studi longobardi. Ricerche, 7), (*forthcoming*); also, Stroppa, *Le immagini e gli usi del pane*, p. 1260-1275; Eadem, *Immagini bibliche, rappresentazioni artistiche e universo animale*, in «*Carnem manducare*», (*forthcoming*).

⁵⁶ *Epistulae variorum Carolo Magno regnante scriptae*, ed. Ernst Dümmler, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Epistularum*, IV, *Epistulae Karolini Aevi*, II, Weidmann, Berolini, 1895, cap. 13, p. 511.

31-33), while the sick who ate meat were required to purify themselves before returning to the community.

Caesarius of Arles distinguishes between *pullos* and *carnes*. In the Rule for Virgins (*Regula ad virgines*) only the sick may be nourished by birds and these should not be distributed in the community, whereas red meat is reserved for cases of serious illness⁵⁷. The Rule for Monks (*Regula monachorum*) prohibits those in good health from eating meat of any kind, though it was relaxed «to give the sick whatever was necessary to them»⁵⁸, including meat, when required for the restoration of health. Following Caesarius of Arles Aurelianus allows poultry only to the sick and he introduces fish; Fructuosus limits this concession to the sick and monks sent on a journey, while Isidore refers to fowl when he speaks of «levissimarum carniū alimenta» distributed on feast days but, as in the case, of wine one could abstain voluntarily⁵⁹.

In the rule of Leander of Seville in the Iberian Peninsula, the archbishop writes to Sister Florentina as follows: «On account of your weakness I dare neither to prohibit, nor to allow you to eat meat. Whoever has sufficient strength shall abstain from meat; it is hard to feed the enemy against which one fights while feeding one's own flesh to the degree of feeling it resist». He goes on to explain that meat is like a potent drug, so doctors prescribe «this medicine in such a way that, if taken gradually, it does not weigh down the patient, but restores him»⁶⁰. Hildemar describes the custom in Carolingian monasteries of administering meat only to those brothers who had been confined to their bed for at least a week and had made use of it during periods of convalescence. But once they had recuperated and taken their seats again in the refectory with the community, for two or three days the cellarer would give them courses composed of more nourishing food – fish, eggs, cheese and vegetables to facilitate and accelerate recovery⁶¹. Then they resumed a normal diet.

At the hermitage of Fonte Avellana, in the case of illness everything was tempered by compassion: the needs of individual monks

⁵⁷ *Regola per le vergini di Cesario*, cap. 71, 7-9, p. 64; *Regola orientale* [6th c.], in *Regole monastiche d'Occidente*, cap. 25, 8, p. 72-73.

⁵⁸ *Regola di Cesario ai monaci*, in *Regole monastiche d'Occidente*, cap. 241-242, p. 102.

⁵⁹ *Regola di Aureliano*, in *Regole monastiche d'Occidente*, cap. 51, p. 122; *Regola di Fruttuoso*, *ibid.*, cap. 3, p. 343-344; *Regola di Isidoro*, *ibid.*, cap. 9, 4-5, p. 319.

⁶⁰ *Regola di Leandro*, in *Regole monastiche femminili*, cap. 24, 1-22, p. 129-130.

⁶¹ Hildemaro, p. 412, 417; Archetti, "Mensura victus constituere", p. 790-791.

were met by charity and in more serious cases patients would be transferred to suitable structures, such as the monasteries of Camporeggiano or Accereta⁶². Brothers who were able to abstain from meat were allowed to stay in the hermitage and be cared for in appropriate fashion. The addition of meat as a source of protein was resorted to only in complex situations, while recuperation took place in the cell or rural outbuildings of the hermitage⁶³. Even Peter Damian mentions the serious state of his health when, in spring 1057, «given that there was no kind of fish available and since, on account of [his] weakened stomach, [he] was unable to consume food of any kind, the brothers persevered with many prayers for at least three days», urging him to take a few mouthfuls of meat and have respect for his body exhausted body⁶⁴. In response Peter just recounted the joke played by the count of Orvieto one of his guests, a monk⁶⁵.

While the meat controversy can be found in numerous examples and biblical references in the monastic literature, the debate is intensified through Bernard's of Clairvaux bitterly ironic image of cooks in quest yet more new spices with which to prepare the monks' dishes with skill. Whether Bernard's account reflects the truth and how useful this was in achieving his aim is not easy to assess. However, he observes, those dishes caused the brothers to lose their taste for frugal fare and, although they abstained «from the single dish of meat», the «courses of large fishes» were increased⁶⁶.

⁶² *Carte di Fonte Avellana*, 1. (975-1139), a cura di Celestino Pierucci, Alberto Polverari, Presentazione di Alessandro Pratesi, Edizioni di storia e letteratura, Roma, 1972 (Thesaurus Ecclesiarum Italiae, IX/1), doc. 11, 15, 17, p. 27, 37, 45; further, Ovidio Capitani, *San Pier Damiani e l'istituto eremitico*, in *L'eremitismo in Occidente nei secoli XI e XII*, Atti della seconda Settimana di studio (Mendola, 30 agosto - 6 settembre 1962), Vita e pensiero, Milano, 1965, p. 136-137; Archetti, "Solum in pane et aqua abstinere", p. 191-195.

⁶³ *Carte di Fonte Avellana*, doc. 31, p. 85.

⁶⁴ Pier Damiani, *Lettere (41-67)*, letter 55, *To the monks Rodolfo and Aripando*, cap. 9, p. 235.

⁶⁵ Count Orvieto Farolfo, pretending not to have any fish, initially offered his guest, a monk, succulent pork rind and, after the monk had accepted this in contempt of the rule, a large pike from the lake. «This fish has been kept especially for you – he told the monk – in case you were to abstain from meat. But since you have satisfied your appetite for meat by gorging yourself on flesh foods, this fish will not enter your mouth»; thus the count was shamed in front of his table companions [Pier Damiani, *Lettere (41-67)*, letter 55, cap. 12, p. 237].

⁶⁶ Bernardo di Chiaravalle, *Apologia all'abate Guglielmo*, in *Opera omnia di san Bernardo*, I. *I trattati*, a cura di Ferruccio Gastaldelli, Città Nuova, Roma-Milano, 1984, cap. 9, 20, p. 197.

Bernard's point of view is echoed one of the letters of Peter the Venerable to the Cluniac priors in which he deplores the custom of eating meat every day of the year excluding Fridays: «They are fed up with broad-beans, cheese, eggs and even fish. The tables of the virtuous monks bristle with roast or stewed pork, a succulent calf, rabbit or hare, a goose selected from a gaggle of geese, chickens almost all quadrupeds or domestic birds. But these kinds of meat are no longer much good. Long-standing habits become irksome. The overfed monks have taken to luxurious repasts and sophisticated delicacies, and they can now eat only goats, venison, wild boar or bear. Hunters are needed and it is necessary to search the woods. In order that God's servants are prevented from dying of hunger skilled fowlers are required to capture pheasants, partridges and turtle-doves. And we have to act promptly to fulfil all their desires because they would otherwise be unable to live»⁶⁷. This means that despite the restrictive norms it was standard practice to permit meat together with other foods.

It was Peter Abelard, who, in his letter 161 to Heloise, abbess of the Paraclete, settled the meat dispute which was entrenched in the cloisters. His intention was to regulate coenobitic life in that Benedictine monastery; this much debated document of rules was never followed by the nuns of Troyes. As for foodstuffs, it emphasises that excess should be avoided and that the necessary must suffice; preference should be given to what costs less, is readily available and does not cause scandal, since the sin lies not in feeding oneself, but in greed⁶⁸. «When the Lord sent forth the apostles he said, *Eat such things as are set before you*» (Luke 10, 8). This means that all food is allowed as long as one avoids causing scandal and troubling one's conscience: «The sin lies not in eating, but rather in desiring food when it gives rise to pleasure in what is illicit and causes greed for what is forbidden, sometimes inducing us to consume unrestrainedly, thus causing a great scandal»⁶⁹.

Thus «Satan – namely the devil – understood that it was not food but the desire for it which is the cause of damnation, and he subjugated the first man (*Adam*) not with meat, but with an apple (Genesis 3, 17), and tempts the second (*Christ*) not with meat, but

⁶⁷ Pietro il Venerabile, *Un monaco nel cuore del mondo. Lettere scelte*, a cura di Domenico Pezzini, Paoline, Milano, 2010, letter 161, p. 259-260.

⁶⁸ *Regola di Abelardo*, in *Regole monastiche femminili*, cap. 16, 1, 2-4, p. 332-333.

⁶⁹ *Regola di Abelardo*, cap. 16, 1.14-19, p. 334 and cap. 1, 41, p. 336 for text citation.

with bread (Matthew 4, 1-3)⁷⁰. While no foodstuffs are prohibited, overindulgence (*crapula*), excess and superfluity are. God's creatures are good and nothing should be rejected when one partakes with thanks, which is why weak human nature must be nourished with all foods, but without sustaining the vices. «Let them exercise greater moderation in taking those nutriment which, being superfluous, may be more harmful. It is better and more praiseworthy to eat with moderation than to abstain entirely»⁷¹. Therefore one should be satisfied with what one possesses without seeking quality in food, «because even the angels ate the meat prepared by Abraham (Genesis 18, 1-8) and Jesus fed the multitude in the desert with fish (Matthew 14, 15-21). From this we learn that we ought not to refuse either meat or fish, and above all we should eat that which does not bring sin and which is offered spontaneously, prepared simply and at lower cost»⁷².

So why is meat preferred to fish given that it costs less, is more readily available and easier to cook? Why refuse meat which gives less pleasure than fish and birds, which are also not forbidden by Benedict? All kinds of meat are not equal and one should not think that it is more acceptable to God to eat one rather than the other. «Moreover, fish is all the more costly for the poor and beyond their means owing to its being less abundant than meat and it has less power to reinvigorate weak human nature; thus in one case it may overburden, whereas in another it may be more useful»⁷³.

Therefore it would be better, observes Abelard, to establish a criterion for consuming it: «one should not take it more than once a day, the same person should not be offered several portions, nor should other dishes be added; it should not be permitted more than three times a week, namely Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday, even if feast days intervene. The more solemn the feast day, the more abstinence should be devoted to its celebration [...] not so much with copious food as with exultation of the spirit»⁷⁴. Whenever meat was not

⁷⁰ *Regola di Abelardo*, cap. 16, 3.18, p. 349-350, he continues: «That is why we often commit Adam's sin even when we partake of frugal common food. We should eat those foods nature requires and not those suggested to us by the pleasure of eating. In reality we experience less desire for those foods which appear to be less appreciated, and which are more abundant and less dear, like normal meat, which comforts our weak nature better than fish does, costs less and is easier to prepare» (ibid., 16, 3.19-21, p. 350).

⁷¹ *Regola di Abelardo*, cap. 16, 2.124, p. 347.

⁷² *Regola di Abelardo*, cap. 16, 3.7-9, p. 348-349.

⁷³ *Regola di Abelardo*, cap. 16, 3.34-37, p. 351.

⁷⁴ *Regola di Abelardo*, cap. 16, 3.40-41.44, p. 351-352.

taken they were allowed two portions of any dish to which fish could be added; the use of exotic spices to flavour food was not allowed; spices growing in the vicinity of the monastery had to suffice and fruit could be eaten only in the evening but «we do not forbid herbs, roots or particular fruits and similar things from being served at the table for medicinal use»⁷⁵. On the arrival of a guest charity could be demonstrated through additional courses; however, if someone wished to observe abstinence he was not prevented from doing so; further, he should avoid «being absent from the table or spending a day without taking food»⁷⁶.

What merit is there in abstaining from meat but «we eat copious amounts of superfluous food and spend lavishly on buying different types of fish and add pepper and spices, if afterwards we are drunk on pure wine and glasses of aromatic wine and herbal spirits? We justify all this by asserting that we cannot eat poor quality meat in public as though the quality of food were a greater offence than quantity, when the Lord forbids us excess and drunkenness, that is overindulgence in food and wine more than quality»⁷⁷. In this way dietary austerity finds its own logic; the obstacle to a monk's life of meditation and prayer lies not in the choice of dishes and their variety, but rather food and its measure – the keystone to bridling expectations, desires and bodily needs in view of spiritual pleasures.

WINE IN MODERATION

Finally the subject of drinking and the prohibition against drinking wine. Abelard follows the Christian ascetical tradition: wine is allowed, though monks must abstain and drink it only for reasons of health. According to St. Paul, wine is advised only in the case of frequent infirmities of the stomach (1 Timothy 5, 23), where the apostle «says not only *infirmities* but *often*»⁷⁸. Thus he

⁷⁵ *Regola di Abelardo*, cap. 16, 3.46-48, p. 352; further, Archetti, "Parvula poma sumebat", p. 68-88.

⁷⁶ *Regola di Abelardo*, cap. 16, 3.49-53, p. 352.

⁷⁷ *Regola di Abelardo*, cap. 16, 2.61-63, p. 342.

⁷⁸ *Regola di Abelardo*, cap. 16, 2.10, p. 337, bringing together in this the various intoxicating beverages «like those obtained from fermented barley or the juice of apples or that sweet outlandish drink obtained from the stewing of apples, or liqueur obtained from the squeezing of fruits of the palm, or syrupy water which is strained from cooked wheat» (ibid., cap. 16, 2.25, p. 338-339). On the use of wine in a monastic context, its prohibition and gradual acceptance, as well as the variety of wines at the monastic table, cfr. Gabriele Archetti, "De

criticises Jerome for the exhortation that nuns should refuse «wine like poison» since it is less harmful to women than to men owing to the characteristics of female nature. Citing Macrobius' *Saturnalia*, he relates how Aristotle claims that while the elders often get drunk women seldom do so; women have exceedingly moist bodies as revealed by «the softness and brightness of their skin and the frequent elimination of excess humours from their bodies. Thus when the wine consumed becomes such an abundance of humours, it loses its power and does not easily reach the seat of the brain since its strength has been sapped»⁷⁹. He adds: «women's bodies are purified by frequent elimination and they abound in holes which allow the converging humours to escape. The fumes of the wine disperse quickly through these outlets»⁸⁰.

He goes on to consider why that which is forbidden to monks is permitted to nuns given the notorious assiduousness with which monks fill their cellars with wine of various types. «In order to become drunk more easily they mix it with herbs, honey and spices and the more agreeable they find it to their palate the more incited they are to lustfulness the more ablaze they will be» for having drunk it⁸¹. But if wine, as Paul advised, can be consumed as a drug, it should be even more useful to women owing to their weakness, though they too out love for God must abstain from it or mix it with water «to assuage their thirst and to cause benefit to their health», without its proving to be harmful⁸². «We think that this may come about if at least the fourth part of this beverage is made up of water»,

mensura potus», p. 205-326; Idem, *Il vino nell'Europa medievale tra storia e storiografia*, in *Prosit. Excursus storico-archeologico su produzione e uso del vino in Aquileia e in Friuli Venezia Giulia tra Antichità e Medioevo*, a cura di Silvia Blason Scarel, Gruppo archeologico aquileiese, Manzano-Aquileia, 2005, p. 152-167; Idem, «*Infundit vinum et oleum*», p. 1136-1203; Idem, «*Solum in pane et aqua abstinere*», p. 195-202; Idem, «*Vineam noviter pastinare*». *Note storiche sulla vite e sul vino nella Liguria medievale*, in «*In terra vineata*», p. 13-35; Idem, «*Il vino non è per i monaci*». *Appunti sparsi sugli usi monastici antichi*, in *Dulcius nil est mihi veritate. Studi in onore di Pasquale Corsi*, a cura di Federica Monteleone, Luisa Lofoco, Edizioni del Rosone, Foggia, 2015, p. 65-87; Idem, «*Donum Dei tolerantia abstinentiae*». *Il vino nel mondo monastico*, in «*In vino civilitas*». *Vite e vino nella civiltà d'Europa dall'antichità all'evo moderno: letteratura, storia, arte, scienza*, Atti del convegno internazionale (Potenza, 11-13 ottobre 2016), a cura di Aldo Corcella, Rosa Maria Lucifora, Francesco Panarelli, Edizioni ETS, Pisa 2019 (Testi e studi di cultura classica, 73), p. 183-215.

⁷⁹ *Regola di Abelardo*, cap. 16, 2.34-35, p. 340.

⁸⁰ *Regola di Abelardo*, cap. 16, 2.36, p. 340.

⁸¹ *Regola di Abelardo*, cap. 16, 2.40-41, p. 340.

⁸² *Regola di Abelardo*, cap. 16, 2.131, p. 348.

though satiety and overindulgence are to be avoided; moreover, «the preparation of wine mixed with herbs and the use of pure wine as a medicine are not forbidden», though its use should be limited to the sick and the entire community⁸³.

Like meat, wine is connected with chastity: abstinence is a gift of God and not within the reach of everyone (RB 40, 1). The question centres on this fundamental principle and in this respect chapter 40 *De mensura potus* is abundantly clear, as is Abelard's comment. We know that «those to whom God *donat tolerantiam abstinentiae*, will receive *propriam mercedem*», or special recompense (RB 40, 4). But the quantity to drink is a chapter that may be considered a summary of the anthology of the rules and Benedictine spiritual knowledge.

ISHRANA I ASKETIZAM: MJERA U HRANI

Sažetak

U povijesti monaštva pažnja koja se pridavala hrani i prehrambenoj stezi je središnja za pustinjačko i cenobitsko iskustvo i na Istoku i na Zapadu. Vrste hrane, te količina kao i vrijeme obroka u velikom broju su vidljivi u propisima, pravilima i običajima. Iako nijedno jelo ili piće nije apsolutno zabranjeno – čak ni vino ili meso – izbor prehrane morao je biti opravdan biblijskim i vjerskim razlozima, a prije svega medicinskim i dijetetskim. Ovaj članak pokazuje da razmatranje ovih tema – posebno s osvrtom na srednjovjekovno razdoblje i Pravilo svetog Benedikta (*Regula Benedicti*) – baca svjetlo na naše razumijevanje normi koje se opslužuju, a koje su stoljećima obilježavale kršćansku asketsku tradiciju.

Ključne riječi: Redovništvo, askeza, hrana, meso, vino, opat, Pravilo sv. Benedikta

⁸³ *Regola di Abelardo*, cap. 16, 2.132-137, p. 348.