È sotto terra. La tradizione di Bano. Archeologia e storia di un monastero femminile. (Quaderni dell'Istituto di Storia della Cultura Materiale, 4). Edited by Enrico Giannichedda. 17 × 24 cm. 292 pp, 31 colour pls, 126 colour and 126 b&w pls and figs, 3 tables. Florence: All'Insegna del Giglio, 2012. ISBN 978-88-7814-559-7 (ISSN 2039-0688). Price: €18.00 pb.

First attested in 1203, the Cistercian monastery of Santa Maria di Bano in the Ligurian Apennines in NW Italy flourished in the 13th century. Its peak is reflected in two types of text: firstly, acts penned by the notary Giacomo di Santa Savina in 1288–89 at the time of the Abbess Astesana, and recording 40 nuns and perhaps six *conversi* or brothers, the names of the nuns signifying that many derived from noble families in wealthy Genoa to the south; the second sources are epigraphic, comprising one inscription dating to 1296 recovered in excavation, and commemorating construction of a *domus* and cloister, funded by brother Manfredo da Moasca; and another of 1298 (preserved at Castello di Tagliolo Monferrato) reporting Manfredo's latest project of a dormitory (Part I of the volume covers the history, texts, monastic presence in the region). The ceramic assemblage from the 2001–05 excavation seasons duly concentrates in the 13th and 14th centuries with emphases on products from coastal Liguria and imported Spanish glazed wares, reinforcing the image of a privileged Genoa-oriented community; noteworthy are vessels with religious imagery and graffiti on bowls signifying ownership (Finds and Excavation are detailed in Part II). Excavated remains comprised the refectory (featuring a fine brick pavement), courtyard (most finds derived from here) and part of the water system (drains, well, tank); in places walls stood to 2 m, while wall and roof collapses and evident robbing meant a mix of neatly sealed and disturbed contexts. The church and cloister complex, however, underlie or are part-incorporated in 'modern' structures set higher up from the excavation zone, to the north.

Interesting to read were the opening 'Punti di vista' — views from the landowner and his pleasure at the work and finds, but worries over re-burying, damage to walls from frost and weeds; from the director at finds likely to remain in storerooms; and from local Parco Naturale officials on the value of such projects even in times of economic crisis. The publication may not guarantee a museum, funds for new digging or flocks of tourists, but it does offer many insights into an upland medieval female monastic community, its personnel, their possessions and their outlooks.

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