

## Historical profile

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By Lorenzo Cera

In ancient times, the territory of Monasterolo di Savigliano was almost completely covered by woods, marshes and springs, making its settlement by man slow and difficult. The people of Celtic origin who crossed the Alps settled in the Canavese and Lombardy regions, while the Romans arrived in the Cuneo plateau in the 11th century B.C. To combat the hostility of the few and primitive inhabitants, they promoted the settlement of the Pollia population, which brought from Rome its pagan religion, laws and customs, as well as innovative farming techniques. No archaeological findings dating to this period have been offered up by the Monasterolo area, contrary to the neighbouring Villanova Solaro (tombstones) and Scarnafigi (coins). The Monasterolo countryside was crossed by only one "vicinalis" (local) road, called Revalanca, which linked a few "vici" (villages) of the Savigliano area to the larger road connecting Pedona (the present Borgo San Dalmazzo) with Pinerolo. A few interesting references to this road are to be found in the Staffarda Abbey library. The first historical information about Monasterolo dates back to a document of 907 A.D., published around the end of the 18th century by Girolamo Tiraboschi in his "History of the august St. Silvester of Nonantola Abbey": "capella fundata in onore sancti Silvestri iuris ipsius monasterii, qui est posita in loco e fundo Monesteriolo, seu cafis ...". In "Nonantola estates", the historian A.A. Settia puts forth the hypothesis that a large portion of the abbey's holdings, including the Monasterolo monastery, had been part of the "original estate of Nonantola" since the middle of the 9th century, i.e. since the time of Charlemagne. A small village grew up around this monastery, taking the name of Monesteriolo-Monastayrolium-Monastejrolium, from which the name Monasterolo is derived. After the Hungarian and Saracen invasions, the political situation of the Cuneo area stabilised under the dominion of Harduin the Glabrous, Earl of Auriate. His successors were the Sarmatorio, Manzano and Monfalcone families, all descendants of Robaldo I, Earl of Auriate, and knight of Charles II, called the Bald, who lived around 850 A.D. Feudal rights were exercised by the Turin and Asti bishops, whose local power subsequently passed to the Guercis, a noble family from Asti. At the beginning of the 12th century, Marquis Bonifacio Del Vasto took power; each of his seven sons founded one marquisate, two of which (Busca and Saluzzo) included our town at different times. The first defensive buildings, including the fortress, date back to Marquis Raymond and Marquis Otto of Busca, who founded the Busca of the Langhe and Rossana family. In 1241 and 1244, respectively, the two nobles transferred all their estates in Monasterolo, jointly with their feudal rights over the area, to Manfred III, Marquis of Saluzzo. In 1244, he was succeeded by his son Thomas I, who in turn assigned the fortress and its privileges to Marquis Otto of Nucetto.

A document of 1147 (regarding the attribution of feudal rights and prerogatives, including the collection of tithes) mentions the ancient parish church dedicated to St. Mary Received into Heaven. Additional information is found in a diploma of 1343, and in the catalogues of the "cattedrattico" of 1455, 1458, 1460, 1462 and 1464, as well as in accounts of the pastoral visits of 1546, 1585, 1593 and 1596. In 1659, this parish church was demolished, as it was in danger of collapsing, and replaced by the church of St. Annunciation of the Virgin Mary, owned by the Solaro family. In 1781, the bishop of Turin declared this second building impracticable, and authorised the transfer of all religious functions to the Disciplinati Brotherhood church, dedicated to St. Mary Received into Heaven. The current parish church, dedicated to the Saints Peter and Paul, was inaugurated in 1904. The wars that upset the Savoy state between 1347 and 1363 led to the destruction of all the fortifications built in Monasterolo at the beginning of the 13th century. The invasion by Luchino Visconti was followed by the wars between Earl Amadeus VI of Savoy, the Acaja princes, Marquis Thomas II and Marquis Frederic II of Saluzzo, and Queen Jane I of Anjou. Between 1350 and 1356, Monasterolo took advantage of the general turmoil and inability of the city of Savigliano to maintain order, by seceding and establishing a separate community. This is evidenced in the decree issued by the Savigliano city council on 27 June 1357, with the aim of "forming an expeditionary force to recover the territory of Savigliano". In 1360, Savigliano and the surrounding villages were sacked for a period of one month.

The castle, which remains the symbol of Monasterolo today, and the walls surrounding the town, still in existence in the 18th century, were built between 1363 and 1378 by the marquises of Saluzzo. The castle was remodelled several times between the 15th and 18th centuries, its structure adapted to the evolving needs of its inhabitants, and 1926 saw the demolition of the medieval tower "with bells and clock" that stood next to one of the ancient gates. Today, the castle belongs to the city of Monasterolo, which bought it on 3 January 1928 from Countess Maria Solaro of Monasterolo.

The Solaro of Asti family is mentioned several times during the first half of the 14th century, when Alessandro, Franceschino and Giovanni Maria bought "a portion" of the feudal rights to Monasterolo. This family achieved full

control on 28 May 1378, when Michelino bought the fief and the castle from Amadeus VI of Savoy with the payment of "13,000 gold florins of Florence". Michelino's daughter, Franceschina, then married Giovanni Filippo Solaro of Moretta, lord of Casalgrasso, thereby founding the Solaro of Monasterolo line. On 7 January 1604, Duke Charles Emmanuel I named two descendants of this line, Giovanni Francesco and Alessandro, Earls of Monasterolo. Towards the end of the 14th century, the above-mentioned Giovanni Filippo Solaro granted the "statutes" to the Monasterolo community, that is to say, a set of rules governing the town and its various activities. This document is inexplicably kept in the historical archive of the city of Scarnafigi.

A series of events caused great damage to the local community between the medieval and modern ages: Duke Amadeus VIII's decision in 1431 to impose an "extraordinary tribute" to finance the war against the marquis of Monferrato; the invasions by the Spanish (Charles V in 1515) and the French (Francis I in 1536); the plague, which drastically reduced the population between 1628 and 1632; the occupation by Cardinal Richelieu's army in 1630; the wars against France in 1690-1696, 1703-06 and 1743-47; and the deep economic crisis which struck Piedmont in the last decade of the 18th century.

In the past, the population was once subject to a number of rather unfair taxes (tithes, "fuocaggio", "celojra", "cotizi", "giogattico"), as well as to duties for grinding wheat, and for using water and ovens. The authorities carefully maintained property registers, including real estate inventories listing land owners and estimated tax values. The historical archive of the city of Monasterolo safeguards a few of these registers, dating between 1430 and 1760, which hold interesting data about the inhabitants and the landed property of each, and about churches, monasteries and, especially, the noble families which had both feudal and tax-collection rights (on behalf of the Savoy state). The last of such registers was compiled by Giovanni Francesco Clerico, a famous surveyor entrusted by the Savoy princes. Despite the difficulties linked to the War of Independence and World Wars I and II, the 19th and the first half of the 20th century saw the realisation of important public works and the implementation of new public services which gradually improved the standard of living. Particularly worth mentioning are: the digging of new canals, marsh reclamation, introduction of fertilisers and new agricultural tools, opening of a pharmacy and medical facilities, building of schools, establishment of a kindergarten, an aqueduct and sewer drain, improvement of the road network and introduction of passenger services linking Monasterolo with Savigliano, Saluzzo and Cavallermaggiore. In the 20 years between 1980 and 2000, Monasterolo saw aggressive building development followed by the expansion of artisan and industrial businesses. This led to a radical transformation of the local economy, which is now linked to several production sectors, on top of the traditional agricultural base. This transformation is due to the dynamism and work ethic of the people of Monasterolo and facilitated by the initiatives taken by the local government.