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ARCHITECTURES OF THE SOUL

Diachronic and Multidisciplinary Readings

Rolando Volzone
João Luís Fontes, eds.



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OF THE SOUL.
DIACHRONIC AND
MULTIDISCIPLINARY
READINGS

Editors

ROLANDO VOLZONE
JOÃO LUÍS FONTES

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The Benedictines in Rome and their influence on the design of Trastevere district

Maria Grazia Turco¹

Abstract

The paper recounts the historical courses of two main Roman churches, in Transtiberina area, dedicated to Saint Benedict, or entrusted to the Benedictine Order care, such as: St. Benedetto in Piscinula and St. Cecilia. Moreover, basing on archival sources, many Benedictines monastic complexes and churches, spread in the Roman vicinity, emerge. This heritage is nowadays highly fragmented, and surrounded by a deeply altered environment; nevertheless, some architectural peculiar features – constructions site process, building techniques, and foundation structures – can still be identified. The Benedictine friars had an important role regarding the urban structure, having deeply influenced the development of the areas where they settled, building their monasteries, as the two churches above mentioned demonstrate. Concluding, regarding the analyzed cases, clearly emerges that the urban Benedictine architectural complexes have always played an important role within the city pattern, not only regarding pastoral or evangelization obligations, but as *stabilitas* factor strengthener, embodying the choice to share the life with brothers, in a dedicated space. This cultural and architectural phenomenon established a ‘system’ between Benedictine complexes, one that influenced the development of the city, the territory and the landscape.

Keywords

Benedictine Order; Rome, urban settlements; landscape; St. Benedict in Piscinula.

¹ Sapienza University of Rome, Italia. Email: mariagrazia.turco@uniroma1.it. ORCID: 0000-0001-9336-5137.

Introduction

The study illustrates the events of two monastic complexes of the Benedictine Order, widespread in the Roman area; these are really urban ‘systems’ which, although today in an extremely fragmented and altered context, still make it possible to identify not only the dynamics of settlement but also the control mechanisms exercised both within the city and in the extra-urban area between the basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, the Tiber and Ostia.

Studies and archival sources² have highlighted the important role that Benedictine Order had in the organization of the areas surrounding their monasteries and in the construction of the surrounding settlement fabric, as territorial points of reference not only for Christian spirituality, and for cultural production, but also for urbanization and for the coordination of economic activities (fig. 1). This architectural system, albeit now in a very fragmented and altered context, still allows us to identify the unique features of the architecture, worksites and construction techniques used to build Benedictine monasteries³.

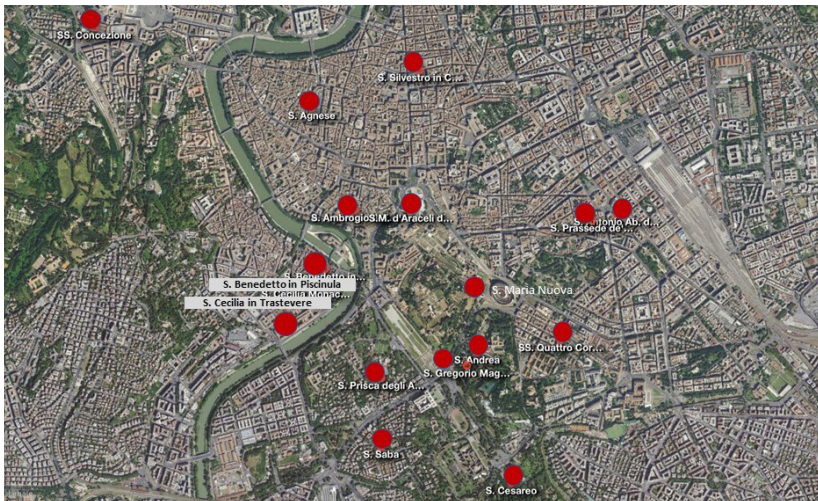


Fig. 1 – The complexes of the Benedictine Order in the city of Rome (elaborated by the author on satellite imagery Google Maps 2021, based on NOLLI, Giovanni Battista – *La Nuova Pianta di Roma*, 1748).

² LAZZARI, Franco – “Il Privilegio di Gregorio VII del 14 marzo 1081 ovvero il recupero delle proprietà ecclesiastiche in vario modo alienate”. *Annali del Lazio Meridionale* 2 (dicembre 2013), pp. 7-17; ROSATI, Paolo – “Celle e dipendenze del monastero dei S.S. Scolastica e Benedetto in area laziale”. In PANI ERMINI, Letizia (ed.) – *Teoria e pratica del lavoro nel monachesimo altomedievale*. Spoleto: Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 2015, pp. 191-212.

³ CHINAPPI, Eleonora – “Monasteri benedettini nel Lazio meridionale”. *Rivista di Terra di Lavoro-Bollettino on-line dell'Archivio di Stato di Caserta* VI, 1-2 (novembre 2011), pp. 1-17.

The study focuses on two churches in the Trastevere district⁴, a bustling, working class area of the city that according to nineteenth-century literature was “la prima [che] meritò di conoscere il lume della fede” as well as the “culla dell’Ordine Benedettino”⁵. In particular St. Benedict in Piscinula, that according to legend was built in 543 CE on the ruins of the *Domus Aniciorum*, and the Basilica of St. Cecilia in Trastevere⁶.

An in-depth review of the current church of St. Benedict in Piscinula provides important data regarding the settlements of the monastic order. In fact, the presence of a small room inside the church – the cell where Benedict withdrew to study and pray – provides evidence of the model used in monastic buildings during the period from the sixth to the eighth century⁷.

The Transtiberina area: St. Benedict in Piscinula and St. Cecilia

The church of St. Benedict in Piscinula is traditionally thought to stand on the ruins of a building owned by the aristocratic Anici family to which Saint Benedict is said to belong (fig. 2); Benedict is believed to have lived in this building while he was in Rome in the late fifth century (around 470). This hypothesis, often questioned by historians⁸, is based on the interpretation of an episode in the life of St. Benedict reported in Gregory the Great’s book *Dialogues*⁹.

⁴ AZZENA, Giovanni – “Trastevere in età romana”. In PANI ERMINI, Letizia; TRAVAGLINI, Carlo (dirs.) – *Trastevere un’analisi di lungo periodo. I*. Roma: Presso la Società alla Biblioteca Vallicelliana, 2010, pp. 1-33; GUERRINI, Paola – “Il Trastevere nella tarda antichità e nell’Alto Medioevo: continuità e trasformazioni dal IV all’VIII secolo”. In PANI ERMINI, Letizia; TRAVAGLINI, Carlo (dirs.) – *Trastevere un’analisi di lungo periodo*, pp. 35-96.

⁵ MASSIMO, Vittorio Emanuele Camillo – *Memorie storiche della chiesa di S. Benedetto in Piscinula nel rione Trastevere raccolte e pubblicate dal Principe D. Camillo Massimo*. Roma: Tipografia Salviucci, 1864, chap. II, p. 7.

⁶ ANGELI, Fabrizio Alessio; BERTI, Elisabetta – *Le chiese medioevali di Roma. I. Le chiese dentro le Mura*. Roma: Associazione Culturale Sesto Acuto, 2007, pp. 69-71, 76-78.

⁷ ARTICO, Vittoria – *San Benedetto in Piscinula e il suo oratorio mariano*. Roma: University of Roma Tre, 2018. Thesis dissertation.

⁸ CECHELLI, Carlo – “Di alcune memorie benedettine in Roma”. *Bullettino dell’Istituto Storico Italiano e archivio Muratoriano* XLVII (1932), pp. 83-158; CESANELLI, Lorenzo – “S. Benedetto in Piscinula”. *Capitolium* X (1934), pp. 299-308; BERTELLI, Gioia; GUIGLIA GUIDOBALDI, Alessandra – *San Benedetto in Piscinula*. Roma: Istituto di Studi romani, 1979.

⁹ CHIESA, Paolo (dir.) – *I «Dialogi» di Gregorio Magno. Tradizione del testo e antiche traduzioni*. Firenze: Sismel-Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2006.



Fig. 2 – Rome, via in Piscinula. Church of St. Benedict in Piscinula, the left corner with traces of pre-existing buildings. ©Maria Grazia Turco, 2018.

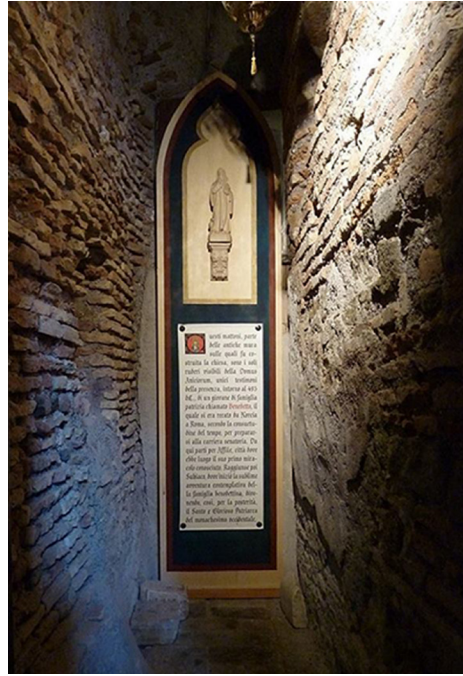


Fig. 3 – Rome, St. Benedict's cell or oratory, inside. Small room linked to the legend of the Saint's sojourn in Rome. ©Maria Grazia Turco, 2018.

The church was mentioned for the first time in *Liber Censuum Romanae Ecclesiae* by Cencio Camerario (1192) as *de Piscina* or *de Piscinula* (probably referring either to the rooms of baths, a fish market or a fountain)¹⁰; the term was found, albeit with several variants, in later documents, including the *Catalogo di Torino* (1320) where it is referred to as “*Ecclesia sancti Benedicti de Pisciola habet sacerdotem et clericum*”¹¹.

The first nucleus of the church can therefore be identified with ‘St. Benedict’s cell or oratory’, a small room linked to the legend of the Saint’s sojourn in Rome (fig. 3). This pre-existing construction testifies to a widespread custom, adopted in future Benedictine complexes, to recover pre-existing Roman buildings as well as reuse their materials¹².

¹⁰ FABRE, Paul; DUCHESNE, Louis (dir.) – *Le Liber Censuum de l’église romaine*. Paris: s.n.t., 1889, Vol. III, pp. 301-302, n. 91, n. 153.

¹¹ HÜLSEN, Christian – *Le chiese di Roma nel Medio Evo: cataloghi ed appunti*. Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 1927, p. 36, n. 231.

¹² STASOLLA, Francesca Romana – “L’organizzazione dei cantieri monastici”. In SOMMA, Maria Carla (dir.) – *Cantieri e maestranze nell’Italia medievale*. Spoleto: Fondazione Centro italiano di Studi sull’alto Medioevo, 2010, pp. 73-95; STASOLLA, Francesca Romana – “Celle e dipendenze per l’organizzazione del lavoro monastico

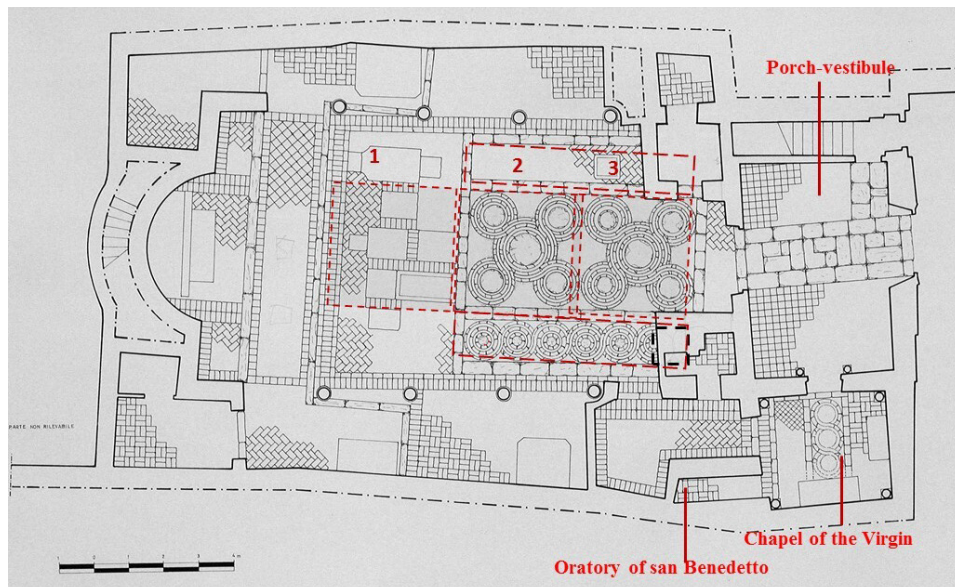


Fig. 4 – Rome, St. Benedict in Piscinula. Plant (elaborated by the author; Sapienza University of Rome, *Archive of Drawings and photo Collection*, Department of History, Representation and Restoration of Architecture, *S. Benedetto in Piscinula*, Atelier Architectural Restoration, prof. G. Carbonara).

In fact, during the sixth century numerous buildings from the Imperial Age and Late Antiquity – temples and *domus* – were scattered about the Roman countryside, so much so they became a key feature in choices involving monastic settlements. This custom was not only adopted by the new Benedictine Order, but was present in cenobitic experiences of earlier monasticism.

This small sacred room, albeit now rather tampered with and reorganised, does in fact appear to have influenced the layout of the church; evidence comes from its plan and the position of the walls of the central nave which tend to be parallel to the structures of the small cave (fig. 4).

A portico, now a vestibule after a staircase was inserted in the nineteenth century, leads into the church with its three naves divided by eight salvaged columns (one grooved, one in grey marble, four in grey granite, and two in red granite) with different kinds of capitals (datable to the first to the fifth century CE). The church has a semicircular apse.

in area laziale”. In PANI ERMINI, Letizia (dir.) – *Teoria e pratica del lavoro nel monachesimo altomedievale*. Spoleto: Fondazione Centro italiano di Studi sull’alto Medioevo, 2015, pp. 141-161.



Fig. 5 – Rome, St. Benedict in Piscinula. Cosmatesque pavements in the church with the quincunx type. (<https://it.wikipedia.org/>, July 5, 2007).

The twelfth century cosmatesque floor in the central nave is a seamless sequence of big *quincunxes* that once decorated the entire middle fascia of the nave; scholars attribute the floor to Lorenzo di Tebaldo's marble bottega¹³.

Today the floor is adorned with a row of two juxtaposed quincunxes, but the empty space between the *quincunxes* and the presbytery garden would suggest there was a third row (now lost) (fig. 5). To the left, next to the *quincunxes*, there is a row of six porphyry intertwined discs which are, however, absent on the right side of the nave; the final part of this mosaic portion is incomplete. In fact, the last disc where the pattern meets the wall of the bell tower is cut in half. This suggests that this sector may originally have had seven discs, ending in line with the first quincunx¹⁴.

According to Camillo Massimo (1803-1873), who wrote the history of the building in the nineteenth century, Cardinal Antonio Tosti (1776-1866) had the floor of the Chapel of the Virgin "riattato" around the year 1844: "il pavimento di

¹³ BERTELLI, Gioia; GUIGLIA GUIDOBALDI, Alessandra – *San Benedetto in Piscinula*, pp. 79-81.

¹⁴ GLASS, Dorothy F. – "Papal patronage in the early twelfth century, notes on the iconography of cosmatesque pavements". *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* XXXII (1969), pp. 386-390; GLASS, Dorothy F. – *Studies on cosmatesque pavements*. Oxford: B.A.R., 1980, pp. 79-80.

quella Cappella che è messo a tasselli di marmo diversi come nel resto della chiesa”¹⁵; and still to follow: “Il pavimento di S. Benedetto in Piscinula, a maggiormente comprovare la veneranda antichità di questa insigne chiesa, trovasi in varie parti lastricato di così detta opera Alessandrina, ossia di tessellato in pietra dura, di porfido, di serpentino, granito ed altri marmi, che probabilmente lo coprivano tutto intiero, ma essendo poi stati in gran parte devastati, il deperito mosaico fu posteriormente supplito con mattoni arrotati, e dai chiusini delle sepolture, che ancora oggi vi rimangono in numero di tre ... una gran parte peraltro di questo pavimento viene occupato dalle Lapidi sepolcrali”¹⁶.

The cosmatesque fragment in the Chapel of the Virgin could therefore have been recreated at that time by removing it from the floor of the nave where the long row of intertwined discs is missing on the right side of the two central *quincunxes*.

The two windows currently present in the walls on either side of the central nave were undoubtedly created during the nineteenth-century restoration. In fact, the earlier Romanesque single lancet windows were plugged (traces still remain on the east wall). The presence of these small windows is in line with other Benedictine complexes where monastic churches were rather modest in size, lit by small, simple, but sometimes very splayed openings.

A little later a bell tower was inserted in the central nave (eleventh century; bell dated 1069)¹⁷.

A small oratory was added to the left of the portico-vestibule no later than the thirteenth century; it has a slightly trapezoidal plan, a rib vault resting on four small columns (all different) placed on tall plinths, and reuse capitals. Known as the Chapel of the Virgin, it was decorated with mosaics that were already lost in the late seventeenth century; the chapel has a twelfth century cosmatesque floor. The altar embellished with cosmatesque porphyry slabs was consecrated in 1604¹⁸.

The Madonna and Child are worshipped in this chapel (fourteenth-century fresco on canvas repainted in the nineteenth century); this is a very devotional painting because it is said that Saint Benedict used to pray in front of this image.

The church became a parish in 1386 under the supervision of provost Catallo¹⁹. The changes made in 1412 by Giovanni Castellani are reported on an inscription that was still present in the seventeenth century (*Hoc opus factus est pro anima D. Joannis de Castellanis Anno Domini MCCCCXII*).

¹⁵ MASSIMO, Vittorio Emanuele Camillo – *Memorie storiche della chiesa*, p. 89.

¹⁶ MASSIMO, Vittorio Emanuele Camillo – *Memorie storiche della chiesa*, p. 19.

¹⁷ PRIESTER, Ann– “Bell Towers and Buildings Workshops in Medieval Rome”. *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* LII (1993), pp. 199-220.

¹⁸ MASSIMO, Vittorio Emanuele Camillo – *Memorie storiche della chiesa*, p. 70.

¹⁹ MASSIMO, Vittorio Emanuele Camillo – *Memorie storiche della chiesa*, p. 24.



Fig. 6 – Rome, St. Benedict in Piscinula. Main façade designed by the architect Pietro Camporese the Younger (1844). ©Maria Grazia Turco, 2018.

Important works were performed in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. However, the Papal Bull by Pope Leo XII (1760-1829) dated 1st November 1824, suppressed the parish; since the building was almost completely abandoned, it was closed to the public.

In 1844, the Massimo family sponsored the restoration of the church which involved building a new façade designed by the architect Pietro Camporese the Younger (1792-1873)²⁰ (fig. 6).

During the restoration two granite columns, probably belonging to the medieval portico-vestibule, were found on either side of the main entrance to the atrium. Today they too are lost.

In 1934 the architect from Ancona, Lorenzo Corrado Cesanelli²¹, drew up a project to restore its medieval configuration; however, nothing came of the project. In 1941 the building was entrusted to the nuns of the Institute of Our Lady of Mount Carmel who continue to look after it.

²⁰ MASSIMO, Vittorio Emanuele Camillo – *Memorie storiche della chiesa*, p. 63.

²¹ CESANELLI, Lorenzo – “S. Benedetto in Piscinula”, pp. 299-308.

A frescoed image of *Saint Benedict* is still visible to the left of the entrance door; it dates from the end of the thirteenth century and was replaced in 1916 after having been detached and restored. A *Madonna with Child* and *Saints Peter and Paul*, dating to roughly the mid-fourteenth century, are visible on the right wall.

The remains of the decoration on the inner wall of the façade and on the wall between the central and right nave can be seen on the right side of the vestibule, behind a door that is normally always shut, at the end of a flight of steps leading to the nuns' quarters. The paintings depicting the *Last Judgement* (on the façade wall), the *Sacrifice of Cain and Abel* and *Driven out of the earthly paradise* (right wall of the central nave) are in rather a precarious state of conservation; they date to the first half of the twelfth century and were hidden by the works performed in the first twenty years of the eighteenth century²².

The Old Testament cycle frescoed on the right side of the building was probably counterbalanced by a new testament cycle on the left nave; however, no traces of the latter remain. Other medieval artworks in the church include: a (mutilated) fresco of the *Virgin with Child and Saint Anne* dating to the first half of the fifteenth century (it is a so-called "*Metterza*", third in order of importance, with Saint Anne, Mary's mother, in a prominent protective position towards her daughter and Jesus); a *Madonna with Child* (fourteenth century) in a niche above the altar and stylistically linked to the Madonna in the vestibule; a fresco (now almost indecipherable) of *Saint Helena* (fourteenth century) in the apse; remains of frescoes with haloed figures (fourteenth century) perhaps depicting the *Baptism of Christ* located in the sacristy (which originally corresponded to the first part of the left side nave).

In September 1846, a wall of the church was demolished, revealing a fragment of a thirteenth-century fresco (*Madonna with Child*). It was removed and given to the Church of St. Ambrose della Massima where it is still venerated as *Regina Monachorum*.

Towards the end of the sixteenth century, during the Counter Reformation, several monasteries originally built as convents for men were quite often turned into female institutes. They include: St. Cecilia which since the ninth century had been occupied by canons regular, then by Humiliati monks and finally, since 1527, by the Benedictines²³; the convent of St. Cosimato; and the complex of Sts. Cosmas and Damian which from the tenth century was assigned to male orders, later occupied by the Benedictines and afterwards by the Poor Clares.

²² MAZZOCCHI, Eleonora – "«Pervenit itaque in paternam suam domum transtiberinam»: una proposta iconografica per gli affreschi della chiesa di San Benedetto in Piscinula". In LOMARTIRE, Saverio; PERONI, Adriano (dirs.) – *Il pane di segale: diciannove esercizi di storia dell'arte presentati ad Adriano Peroni*. Varzi: Guardamagna (PV), 2016, pp. 143-154.

²³ CAFFIERO, Marina – "Il sistema dei monasteri femminili nella Roma barocca. Insediamenti territoriali, distribuzione per ordini religiosi, vecchie e nuove fondazioni". *Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica* 2 (2008), pp. 69-95 (but 77-78).

In the decades between the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century numerous foundations – or refoundations or transformations – took place, especially of female monasteries. This occurred during the period of the Counter Reformation when the ‘system’ of monasteries began to be religiously as well as politically and socially important in family strategies; this information can be gleaned from in-depth studies of the some of the female founders of new institutions²⁴.

In fact, in the late sixteenth century six female Benedictine monasteries were founded: St. Cecilia in Trastevere, St. Mary in Campo Marzio, St. Ambrose della Massina, St. Anne, and the oblates of Tor de’ Specchi or of St. Francesca Romana²⁵.

The Medici Pope, Clement VII (1478-1534), made Maura Magalotti the abbess of the convent of St. Cecilia after transferring her from the Benedictine monastery of St. Mary in Campo Marzio. In fact, the monastery *Chronicle* reported that the abbess “fondò ed eresse questo luogo in monastero di monache del hordine delli Humiliati, sotto la regola di san Benedetto”²⁶.

The history of the building is undoubtedly very important (fig. 7). The basilica of St. Cecilia was founded on the ruins of a Roman *domus* built in the second century BCE and later enlarged to form an *insula*, probably the property of Valerian and his wife Cecilia²⁷. As far back as the fifth century a *titulus Caeciliae* was certified in the *Martirologio Geronimiano* (early fifth century) with the words: “*Romae transtibere, Ceciliii*”²⁸.

The sacred building, which in the early ninth century was probably extremely dilapidated, was founded by Pope Paschal I (817-824) who ordered the relics of Saints Cecilia, Valerian, Tiburtius and Maximus to be moved there.

The early Christian plan of the church is divided into a main hall with two side naves, a semicircular apse with an annular crypt, but no transept. The ciborium designed by Arnolfo di Cambio (1293) is located in the apse²⁹; its bases have remained partially incorporated into the sixteenth-century addition.

In 1100, Paschal II (1050-1118) rebuilt the monastery and cloister. The portico and bell tower were added between the twelfth and thirteenth century. In the late thirteenth century Pietro Cavallini (1240-1330) was entrusted with the decoration

²⁴ LIROSI, Alessia – *I monasteri femminili a Roma nell’età della Controriforma: insediamenti urbani e reti di potere* (secc. XVI-XVII). Roma: Sapienza Università di Roma, 2010. Tesi di Dottorato.

²⁵ MARINI, Alfonso – “Monasteri femminili a Roma nei secoli XIII-XV”. *Archivio della Società Romana di Storia Patria* 132 (2010), pp. 81-108; CAFFIERO, Marina – “Il sistema dei monasteri femminili”, pp. 69-95 (but 80).

²⁶ LIROSI, Alessia – *Le cronache di Santa Cecilia. Un monastero femminile a Roma in età moderna*. Roma: Viella 2009, p. 95.

²⁷ PARMEGIANI, Neda; PRONTI, Alberto – *S. Cecilia in Trastevere. Nuovi scavi e ricerche*. Città del Vaticano: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 2004.

²⁸ LIROSI, Alessia – “Scritture religiose a Roma nell’età della Controriforma: la *Cronica* del monastero di Santa Cecilia in Trastevere (1527-1710)”. *Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica* 2 (2008), pp. 119-147.

²⁹ ANDALORO, Maria; ROMANO, Serena – “L’immagine nell’abside”. In ANDALORO, Maria; ROMANO, Serena (eds.) – *Arte e iconografia a Roma. Da Costantino a Cola di Rienzo*. Milano: Jaca Book, 2000, pp. 73-102.



Fig. 7 – Rome, St. Cecilia in Trastevere. Main nave. ©Maria Grazia Turco, 2018.

of the church (several fragments were found during work in the twentieth century) while the *ciborium* was designed by Arnolfo di Cambio.

Further alterations to “embellish” the rather stark medieval plan were implemented by Paolo Emilio Sfondato (1591-1611)³⁰. After finding several relics of Saint Cecilia under the confessional he sponsored (1590-1591) the transformation of the presbytery area; this included adding a new altar with a confessional underneath it and the Chapel of the Bath, as we see it today. He also ‘restored’ Arnolfo’s *ciborium*, dismantled the pulpits, and installed new altars in the side naves which, together with the vestibule, were completely frescoed. Instead, the medieval frescoes in the central hall were simply restored and the missing parts completed. The frescoes are still in place.

More transformations and ‘embellishments’ added later gave the building its current appearance: twelve rectangular pilasters on each side divide the central and side naves; the sequence of arches and architraves create a series of semicircular and rectangular openings. Located above this alternate series of arches and passages, grated openings surrounded by ornate decorations let light into the galleries of the cloistered nuns located above the side naves. Rectangular windows with segmented arches are present above the grated openings. This architectural and decorative

³⁰ PEPPER, Stephen D. – “Baglione, Vanni and cardinal Sfondato”. *Paragone. Arte* 18, 211 (1967), pp. 69-74.

design required that the original columns be incorporated into the pilasters; the alteration was performed in 1823 during the restoration sponsored by Cardinal Giorgio Doria (1708-1759).

The large central hall has a wooden coffered ceiling embellished with a big painting by Sebastiano Conca (1680-1764) and the coat of arms of Cardinal Francesco Acquaviva (1665-1725) who sponsored its construction in 1724.

Both naves, left and right, have rib vault ceilings; the right nave has several chapels built at different moments in time: the first, dating to the sixteenth century, like the second chapel, was created inside the bell tower while the latter was built on the so-called bath of Saint Cecilia; the third chapel, i.e., the sacristy, is decorated with fifteenth century frescoes. The fourth chapel, the so-called Chapel of the Relics, dates to the same period, while the fifth and last chapel is modern and contains the tomb of Cardinal Mariano Rampolla del Tindaro (1843-1913).

In the early twentieth century alterations were made to the crypt by Giovanni Battista Giovenale (1849-1934) who redesigned the pre-existing corridor (1599) and medieval semicircular *ambulacrum*; he covered the walls in marble slabs from the catacombs and the ceiling with rather modest paintings.

The Benedictine ‘urban system’ between 16th and 17th centuries

It's evident, from these summary indications, that the Benedictines, through their location within the Trastevere district, have carried out not only a ‘silent’ religious activity but also, starting above all from the sixteenth century, an action of control of this urban sector; a ‘rooting’ that pushes the Benedictines to support the renewal of the entire district initially undertaken by Julius II (1503-1513) but later implemented, above all, with the creation of a direct connection between Borgo and Trastevere, the two areas located beyond the Tiber.

The Benedictines were always well rooted within the city, so they played an important role in influencing the development of the areas where their monasteries were located. The two complexes in Trastevere illustrated in this paper are excellent examples.

In the first decade of the seventeenth century the remodelling of the urban area next to the Tiber between the complex of St. Francis a Ripa and the Quattro Capi bridge appeared both necessary and important; the urban district was in fact redesigned by the Benedictine Abbot Costantino Caetani (1568-1650) who allocated a plot of land along the street close to the church of St. Benedict in Piscinula to be used to build a college for non-Roman Benedictine monks (Gregorian College)³¹.

³¹ ROCA DE AMICIS, Augusto (dir.) – *Roma nel Primo Seicento. Una città moderna nella veduta di Matthäus Greuter*. Roma: Editoriale Artemide, 2018.

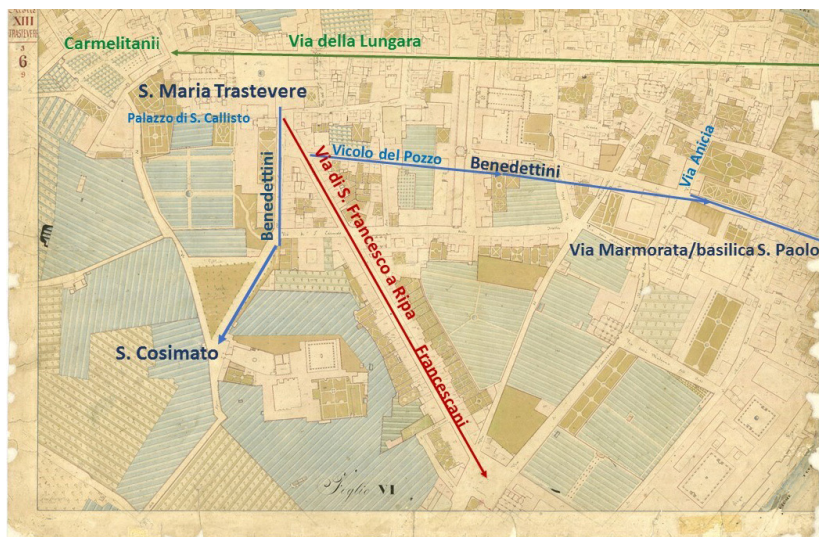


Fig. 8 – Rome, Trastevere. The religious orders and the reorganization of the urban area (elaborated by the author; Archivio dello Stato di Roma, *Presidenza Generale del Censo*, Catasto Gregoriano, Rione XIII Trastevere, foglio 6).

A building permit dated 29 August 1617 is evidence of the urban plan; an attachment illustrates the demolitions that were to take place to make way for the construction of the “strada da Ponte Quattro Capi a S. Francesco”³². The hostel sponsored by Costantino Caetani was officially founded on 18 May 1621 pursuant to a Bull by Pope Gregory XV (1554-1623) whose name was given to the street (now Via Anicia). The Gregorian College was short-lived: in 1641 it was gifted to the abbot of the Propaganda Fide Congregation; in 1658 it was entrusted to the English Benedictine Congregation that used it as a guest house for its monks until 1908. The building was demolished in the early years of the twentieth century and replaced by the current building now used by the St. Francesca³³.

In the early decades of the seventeenth century the urban district on the other side of the Tiber underwent massive reorganisation involving not only its road network, but also its buildings. The Pope had masterminded most of the plan, using religious orders to reorganise the urban area. This strategy established a sort of balance between the religious orders (fig. 8): the Carmelite settlements were located along the axis of Via della Lungara; the Franciscan settlements along Via di San

³² TABARRINI, Marisa – “Da ponte Sisto a ponte Rotto. La creazione di nuovi poli urbani e religiosi a Trastevere e la riorganizzazione dei rioni Regola e Sant’Angelo”. In ROCA DE AMICIS, Augusto (dir.). *Roma nel Primo Seicento. Una città moderna nella veduta di Matthäus Greuter*. Roma: Editoriale Artemide, 2018, pp. 275-290 (but 280).

³³ TABARRINI, Marisa – “Da ponte Sisto a ponte Rotto”, pp. 275-290 (but 280).

Francesco a Ripa and Via Transtiberina; and the Benedictine settlements along the road axis running from Palazzo di San Callisto to Via Anicia³⁴.

One of the most significant events was in fact the concession of the building of the titular cardinal of St. Maria in Trastevere to the Benedictine fathers of St. Paul after a papal brief (1608) had expropriated them from their summer convent near the church of St. Saturnino de Caballo on the Quirinale Hill. To offset the opening of Via di San Francesco a Ripa, two secondary axes were planned, perhaps suggested by the Benedictine Abbot Costantino Caetani. One road went from the square towards the church of St. Cosimato, the other – Via del Pozzo – towards a bridge that was to be built across the Tiber close to St. Maria in Cappella, thus shortening the distance towards Via Marmorata and St. Paul’s Basilica.

These two roads created a network between the Benedictine settlements: the first, now known as Via della Cisterna and Via dei Genovesi, ran towards the Basilica of St. Cecilia, and from there towards the Tiber where the new bridge was to be built; instead, the second led towards the church of St. Cosimato (fig. 9).



Fig. 9 – Rome. The Benedictine reorganization program of Trastevere in the 17th century (elaborated by the author on satellite imagery Google Maps 2021).

³⁴ TABARRINI, Marisa – “Da ponte Sisto a ponte Rotto”, p. 275.

Conclusion

The examples illustrated in this paper confirm the important role that urban Benedictine complexes have always played in the city, a role not linked to pastoral obligations or evangelisation, but rather to reinforce *stabilitas*, i.e., the choice to live in the same place with other brothers. In fact, every monastery is designed as a completely independent and self-sufficient urban entity, without hierarchical constraints, and completely isolated from the outside world, at least during the early days of the Order.

From the seventeenth century onwards entire buildings were altered, enlarged, or built *ex novo*; walls, loggias and porticoes were constructed to allow the monks to access the courtyards of the convents. This led to an increase in the size of the gardens within the perimeter of the cloister and included the incorporation of private courtyards and kitchen gardens so that the monks could walk freely around them and cultivate crops. Although a closed organism, it did however create a 'system' with the other interconnected Benedictine complexes; this exerted a strong influence over the development of the city thanks to the design of new road networks, the premise for a new, modern urbanisation.

This urban and territorial expansion policy is documented by the properties of the urban Benedictine complexes. In fact, the documents housed in the Alessandrino Cadastre show that many of the estates owned by monasteries in Rome are located along the Tiber, i.e., far away from the sites of big urban monasteries³⁵ (fig. 10).



Fig. 10 – Property of the Benedictine Order on the Tiber, near the Basilica of St. Paul f.l.m., detail, watercolor plant (Archivio dello Stato di Roma, *Presidenza delle Strade*, Catasto Alessandrino, 432/51, Tenuta di Grotta Perfetta, 10 ottobre 1654).

³⁵ MARAZZI, Federico – “Dalle valli ai litorali. Riflessioni sui rapporti fra coste ed entroterra in Italia centrale dall’VIII al IX secolo”. In MARAZZI, Federico; RAIMONDO, Chiara (dirs.) – *Medioevo nelle valli. Insediamento, società, economia nei comprensori di valle tra Alpi e Appennini (VIII-XIV sec.)*. Cerro al Volturno (IS): Volturina Edizioni, 2019, pp. 283-314.

An analysis of these documents clearly shows how the distributive layout of these estates (that gradually enriched the wealth of these institutions) was to create a network linking the urban centre (in this case, Rome) to the sea, the salt pans, the coast, and the mouth of the river Tiber.

Not surprisingly, in the seventeenth century an important dock was located along the Tiber River more or less level with the lands belonging to the Basilica of St. Paul's and the Benedictines from Cassino³⁶. It's no secret that Benedictine monks have always played an important role in organising the areas around their monasteries by inputting into the layout of villages and their productive fabric. These territorial systems 'helped' the creation of urban settlements and encouraged several dynamically complex entrepreneurial and economic activities in which an ascetic vocation did not clash with the desire to interact with the exterior and its diversified prospects. This cultural and architectural phenomenon established a 'system' between Benedictine complexes, one that influenced the development of the city, the territory and the landscape.

Reuse is another aspect of this trend; it was inspired by practical and economic requirements and applied when new buildings were constructed on pre-existing foundations. Sometimes it was influenced either by the devotional importance of a certain site or by a desire to create religious or political continuity with the earlier building. Apart from the usual examples of buildings constructed on old sacred sites – revealing an ideological intent to re-establish the religion itself based on its origins – other more complex situations are linked to the sacred nature of the site, e.g., Montecassino³⁷.

By frequently occupying either pre-existing sites or previously colonised sites, the monks merge a re-memorative custom with economics and reduce the time it takes to build the new complex.

The simplicity and feasibility of the Rule of the Order are reflected by the rather basic architecture and absence of sculptural decorations in the complexes³⁸; these criteria determine the choice of a settlement site and become tangible in the selection of simple, functional building techniques. Careful consideration is given to pictorial art that portrays the reality of the monastic community in images of the abbots, thus conveying, in celebratory events illustrated as narratives, the message of Saint Benedict, founder of the Order.

This cultural and architectural phenomenon that created a 'system' between the Benedictine complexes, one that influenced the development of the cities, the territory and the landscape.

³⁶ PACE, Valentino – “Committenza benedettina a Roma: il caso di San Paolo fuori le mura nel XIII secolo: per Richard Krautheimer”. *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 54, 2 (1991), pp. 181-189.

³⁷ ROSATI, Paolo – “I confini dei possessi del monastero sublacense nel Medioevo (secoli X-XIII)”. *Archivio della Società Romana di Storia Patria* 135 (2012), pp. 31-62; ROSATI, Paolo – “Celle e dipendenze del monastero”, pp. 191-211.

³⁸ CHINAPPI, Eleonora – “Monasteri benedettini nel Lazio meridionale”. *Rivista di Terra di Lavoro-Bollettino on-line dell'Archivio di Stato di Caserta* VI, 1-2 (novembre 2011), pp. 1-17.

“The search for the wilderness as a space and possibility of a more radical religious experience accompanies and marks the development of Western culture, with multiple declinations, from voluntary seclusion or eremitical life to solitary life in more communitarian forms. The search for solitude and eremitism remained and marked the main moments of crisis and renewal in the Western world throughout the Middle Ages and the Early Modernity. All these experiences influenced and accompanied both the development of the city and the peri-urban landscape, with a particular importance in the transformation of territorially more isolated or peripheral areas. At the same time, the seek for solitude and seclusion, either through monastic or hermitic experiences, also flourished in other cultures and religious traditions, from Buddhism to Islam, giving interesting perspectives on the understanding of such religious phenomena in larger terms”.

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