

# Architectural Conservation Studio

Calogero Bellanca







## Esperienze di Studio e Restauro in Europa – 1

# Architectural Conservation Studio

*Calogero Bellanca*

*with contributions by*

*Susana López Verdú and Alejandro Iniesta Muñoz*



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In copertina: Piazza del Campidoglio, Roma. Foto di Calogero Bellanca

*Dedicated to Giuseppe Zander*





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### 3. Sermoneta, the Church of Santa Maria Assunta

*Calogero Bellanca*



Fig. 1. Partial view of Sermoneta, with the bell tower of the Assunta seen from the Pontine Plain.

#### **The Church of the Assumption in Sermoneta**

The Church of the Assumption presents itself today as a compact, oblong block of aggregations of buildings, rising to compose and enclose the space of Piazza Santa Maria as well as that of the sections adjacent to the old town centre. Lacking a true frontal view, the monument can be seen both through the various visual channels determined by the layout of the roads of the residential area and as a raised structure in the panoramic vistas from the surrounding territory of the Lepini Mountains and the Pontine Plains (Fig. 1).

The goal set was that of clarifying the significant moments “of the monument in time”; to this end, a study was initiated with the direct examination of the existing constructions (Figs. 2, 11). At the same time, the historical-critical analysis was carried out, with the aim of identifying the stylistic-constructive and figurative features present, as well as the various phases of construction, through the study of the first additions and transformations affecting the initial nucleus, and afterwards of the first “restoration” interventions of the modern age (Renaissance and Baroque), and also the actions aimed at bringing back to the fore some moments of the history of the monument.

#### **The previous contributions**

Various contributions have been produced on the Assunta of Sermoneta, with, at times, discordant interpretations, both of the sources and of the architectural organism. Chronologically, I would like to mention the writings of Pantanelli, Marocco, Raymondi and Corniola, Enlart, Muñoz, Terenzio and also those of Wagner-Rieger, Tamanti, de Sanctis and, lastly, some observations made in a publication by Longo and Sassoli.

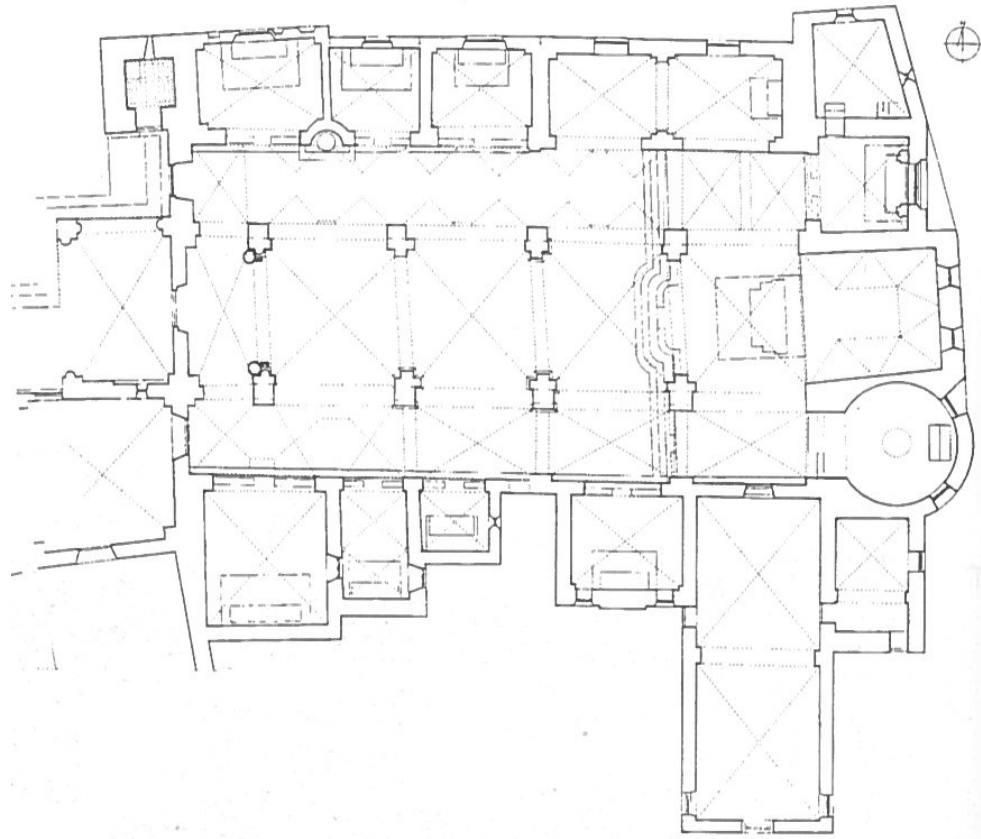


Fig. 2. The architectural survey.  
The plan.

Pantanelli writes:

“The temple is mediocre but of a barbarian structure; having been destroyed around the year 1030 due to the civil wars, by Lano Maggiore... it was then remade, as we can see, accordance to the ignorance of those dark centuries; and, what is worse, thus were all its ancient documents lost; hence its archive has no scrolls older than this period... It is built with vaults, lancet arches, three naves, but originally it did not have chapels. The nave of the Gospel did not communicate with that in the middle, as is clear by the truncated corbels of the vaults, on the occasion of the opening of the arches; hence it is not improbable that it would be used by women in centuries of greater circumspection... The chapels have been erected in different periods by the piety of the faithful and are all dissimilar from one another. Originally, the choir was in the form of a tribune and semicircular” (1).

Marocco mainly focusses on the ancient Altar, on the painting of Benozzo Gozzoli, on the Caetani Chapel and mentions some visits by Pope Gregory XIII, Charles V and Frederick III (2). Raymond and Corniola reprise the citations by Pantanelli and focus on some particulars, among which the collapse of the spire of the bell tower, the construction of the new sacristy of 1733 and the painting in the niche of the bell tower (3).

Enlart reprises from Pantanelli with regard to the citation of the sources and accepts their dating of the destruction and the subsequent state of neglect until the second quarter of the 13th century. He sets the date of the reprise of construction at around 1235, linking the initiative to the intervention of the “School of Fossanova” through a careful philological reading of the monument and considering the dating of the portico to be later than previously thought, although without specifying it; lastly, he cites the date of 1734 as the date of alterations left unspecified (4).

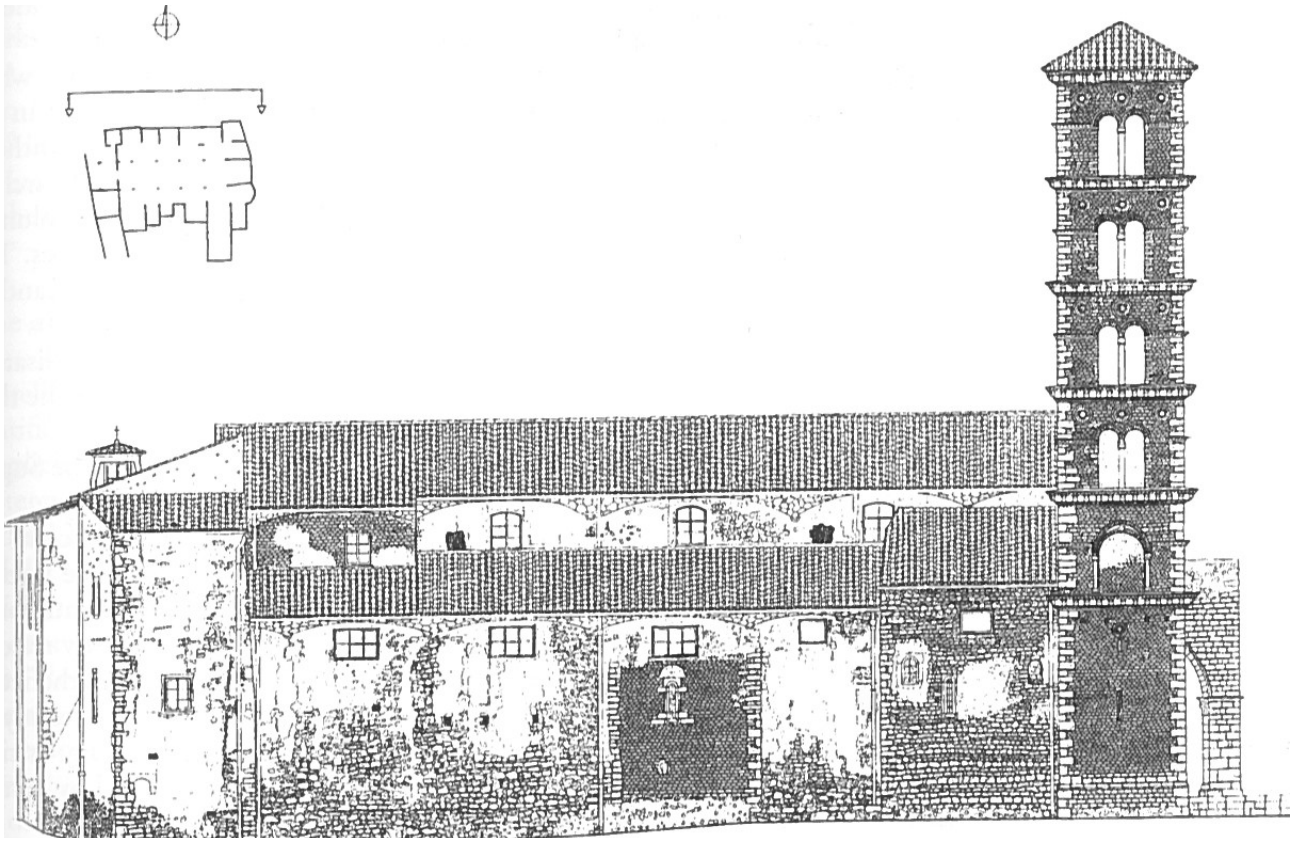


Fig. 3. Southern elevation.

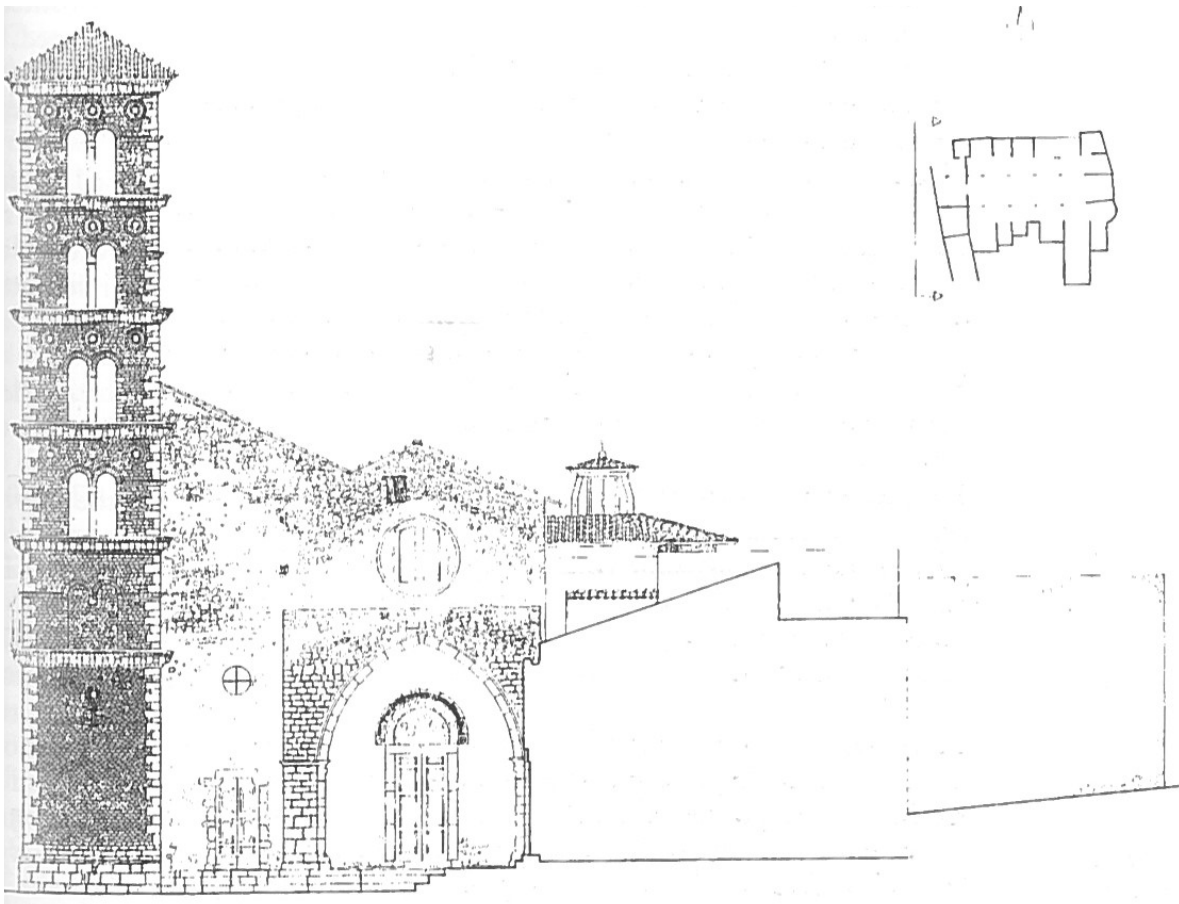


Fig. 4. Western elevation.



Muñoz especially highlights the moment of the constructive renovation, when the church “acquired the gothic character in the restorations it underwent in the 13th century, but unfortunately was reworked in approx. 1734”; he also synthetically describes some emerging features: “the transept, the nave with four arches, the lateral naves, the ribbed vaults which rest on cruciform columns; the columns of the minor naves are, instead, detached from the floor, ending in cones. The capitals have two rows of leaves terminating either in groups of small acanthus leaves, or flowers, or human heads” (5).

Serafini concentrates his attention on the bell tower, hypothesising its realisation to be coeval with the first church, “at the beginning of the 12th century”; he then describes its stylistic features (6). Alberto Terenzio supplies news on the restorations just completed by the Superintendency: for a long time, its gravely deteriorated state was a cause for great concern: the noteworthy overhang on the western side; a broad crack from the base level to the first order; broken and abraded cornices... broken arches in the mullioned windows. In order to strengthen the conditions of staticity, some clumsy restoration work was carried out: the wall of the façade of the church was lengthened to buttress the bell tower, the mullioned windows were walled up, often destroying the cornices of their arches... a clock was installed on its walls; the only ancient entrance to the bell tower was walled up and the another was opened by demolishing the wall of the bell tower communicating with the church.

Among the damages caused by time and those determined by hasty and quick restorations, the bell tower was... compromised... The recent restorations must have been totalitarian... All the walls were then joined together, the lesions stitched up, the corner facing the portico of the church was completely underpinned, the arbitrarily opened door was closed and the ancient one opened... Lastly, the wall between the church and the bell tower was not removed due to static necessity, but was instead consolidated and reduced in height.

Next was the second part of the works, that is to say, to return the bell tower to its initial appearance: the clock was removed, the mullioned windows were reopened excepting those of the second order, replacing their missing or broken columns and capitals, the dividing cornices were reprised... and the ceramic plates... Thus the bell tower was restored its normal, impeccable eurhythm of voids and fills, its bold height, its rich, polychromatic decoration (7).

Wagner-Rieger’s contribution diverges in part from Enlart’s thesis, as it considers the Assunta as being closer to the Church of Valvisciolo Abbey and relates the two of them to the presence of the Knights Templar (1177-1183).

With regard to the “massive rectangular columns” which englobe the previous ones and become the module of the new church, the Austrian scholar proposes a possible derivation from Vaux-de-Cernay, which is superimposed to that of Fossanova and Casamari (8).

Tamanti accepts and develops the hypotheses of Camille Enlart and Renate Wagner-Rieger, reading two constructive moments in them. She describes the present state of the church, dwelling especially on the bell tower and on the works carried out by the Superintendency to Monuments for Lazio in 1963, “which removed the 1700s plaster and brought into view the structure of the columns and the arches”. In fact, the scholar concludes her contribution by comparing the Assunta of Sermoneta with the ruins of the Church of Santa Maria of the Monastery of Mount Mirteto (9).

De Sanctis reaffirms, both for the Assunta and for the Church of San Michele in Sermoneta, a clear Cistercian presence and highlights the role carried out by the works of this order in various instances in the territory. Referring to the studies of

A.M. Romanini, she interprets these experiences especially along the lines that from Fossanova, through Priverno and Sezze, reach Sermoneta and Valviscio (10). Longo and Sassoli's volume does not go beyond a precise description of the Church of Santa Maria Assunta, with its chapels, but its cited as a useful update of the existing periegetic literature on Sermoneta (11).

### **The architectural features**

A preliminary reading of the architectural enclosure reveals a complex structural stratification, albeit in the constant presence of those "features of straightforward simplicity and of solid continuity of the masonry" (12), typical of architecture of cistercian derivation (Figs. 3-11). The initial nucleus dates back to the first years of the 12th century, as other documents also seem to confirm; direct observation and the survey allow the identification of a church with three naves, with a simple absidal termination, without a transept. The breadth of the apse corresponds to the central nave, which is in a proportional ratio of 2:1 with the lateral naves.

The "Romanesque" organism was subdivided by 16 quadrangular columns in nine spans for each side; of these columns only 8 remain at present, englobed in the structures of the subsequent phase, which, with the expansion of the spans, cause the abolition of the missing ones. With reference to the plan, I will report the dimensions, all unique, of the initial columns. Marking the first column on the left with the letter A, the first on the right with the letter B, C the second on the left and so on: A (95 cm x 62 cm, maximum measurement), B (87 cm x 87 cm), C (89 cm x 61cm), D (92 cm x 84 cm), E (95 cm x 64 cm), F (95 cm x 86 cm), G (107 cm x 65 cm) and H (95 cm x 81 cm). For this group of columns, the height of the individual stones, laid horizontally with some exceptions, with a maximum height of 38 cm, varies from a minimum of 10 cm to a maximum of 27 cm. Their rhythm was regular, with an intercolumnal space of 10 Roman palms. Along the walls of the central nave opened 18 single-light windows, 9 a side, some still legible after the "flaying" operations carried out in the 1950s and the '60s. Other, smaller windows opened along the external walls of the lateral naves; of these latter apertures there are traces along the northern and southern façades. The masonry structure, constituted of horizontal layers, was divided into two levels, that of the arches and that of the wall above with the windows. With regard to the initial apse, replaced in the Cistercian phase by the choir, one can hypothesise an assonance with that of the Church of San Pietro in Ninfa, also due to the very similar proportional ratios, which present two organisms (Figs. 8, 10) (13). The covering of the central nave was with a roof, with wooden trusses, while along the lateral naves, slightly lower, there was a simple wooden frame. The building measured 26.45 m in length (equal two 89 Roman feet) without taking into account the thickness of the walls; in width, it measured 14m (47 Roman feet). Also with regard to the raised parts, we can see the use of exact measurements: 10 Roman feet for the size of the arches up to the springer, another 10 feet from the springer of the arches to the base of the single-light windows, which, in turn, measured 5 feet (Fig. 5). Some surviving fragments of frescoes pertaining to this phase are also visible (14). The length-wise perimetral masonry do not show any great divergences, approaching the area of the presbytery, but the surface of the façades seems to be slightly tilted, according to a custom previously studied by De Angelis, linked to motives of urban design and to the presentation of the monument or to more subtle reasons relating to the psychological aspect of its viewing (15). The perspective rapport of the nave will tend to change substantially, as we will see, with the introduction of the

choir and of a gradual gradient at the height of the walkways in the subsequent phases of the life of the monument.

The ensemble of these features shows an architectural language which is clearly influenced “by influences from Southern Italy and, in turn, not exempt from penetrations of northern tastes” (16). See, for the spatial ensemble, besides the “Benedictine” columned churches “of the end of the 11th or the beginning of the 12th century, such as San Liberatore alla Majella or San Pietro ad Oratorium in Capestrano, Santa Maria della Libera in Aquino or San Domenico in Isola Liri” (17), or other constructions which appear similar to the initial organism, such as some southern examples in Apulia (San Giovanni di Patù near Lecce) (18), Calabria and Campania, where Byzantine traces and other central-European and Ottonian influences can be found. Among these, characterised by a longitudinal development of the space, which expresses itself “in the forms of the proto-Romanesque columned basilica”, the Church of San Ferrante (previously Santa Maria di Compulteria) in Alvignano, (7th, 8th or early 9th century,) the Old Cathedral of Santa Severina (1036) and the San Donato in Umbriatico (end of 11th century) (19).

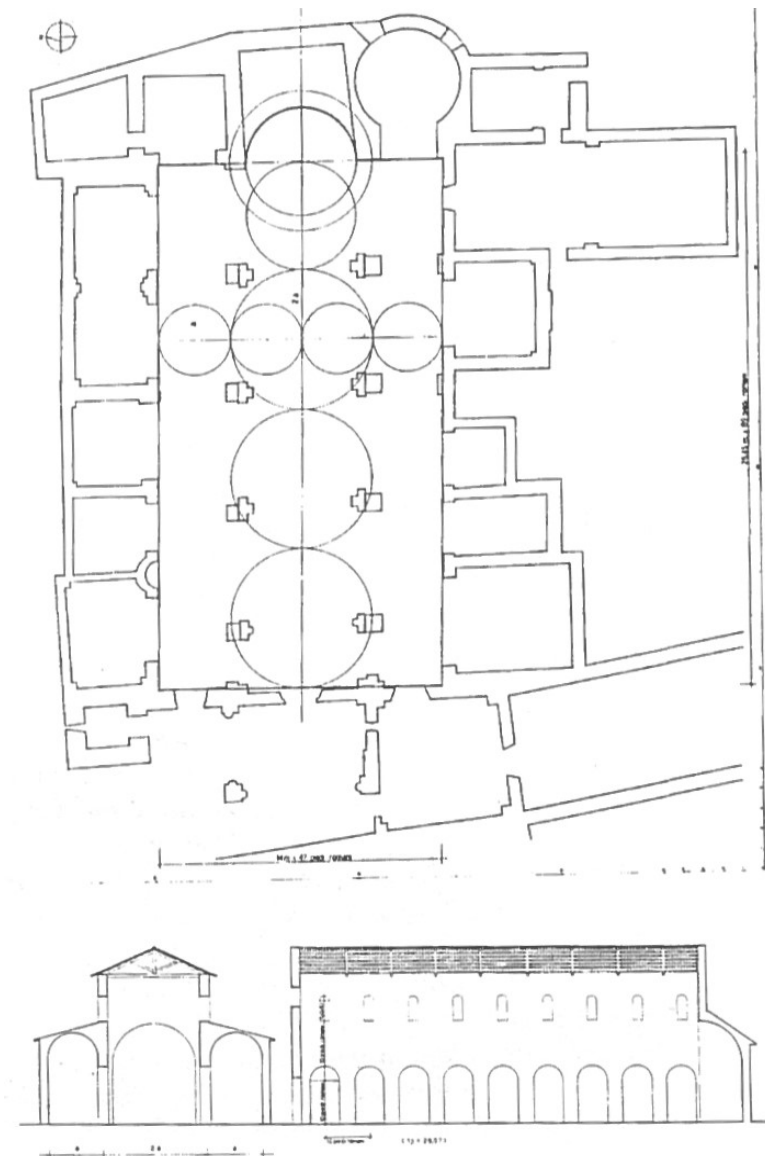


Fig. 5. Metrological-proportional analysis. Restitution of the church *ante* 1230 and metrological analysis of the church with references to the Abruzzo-Campania region.

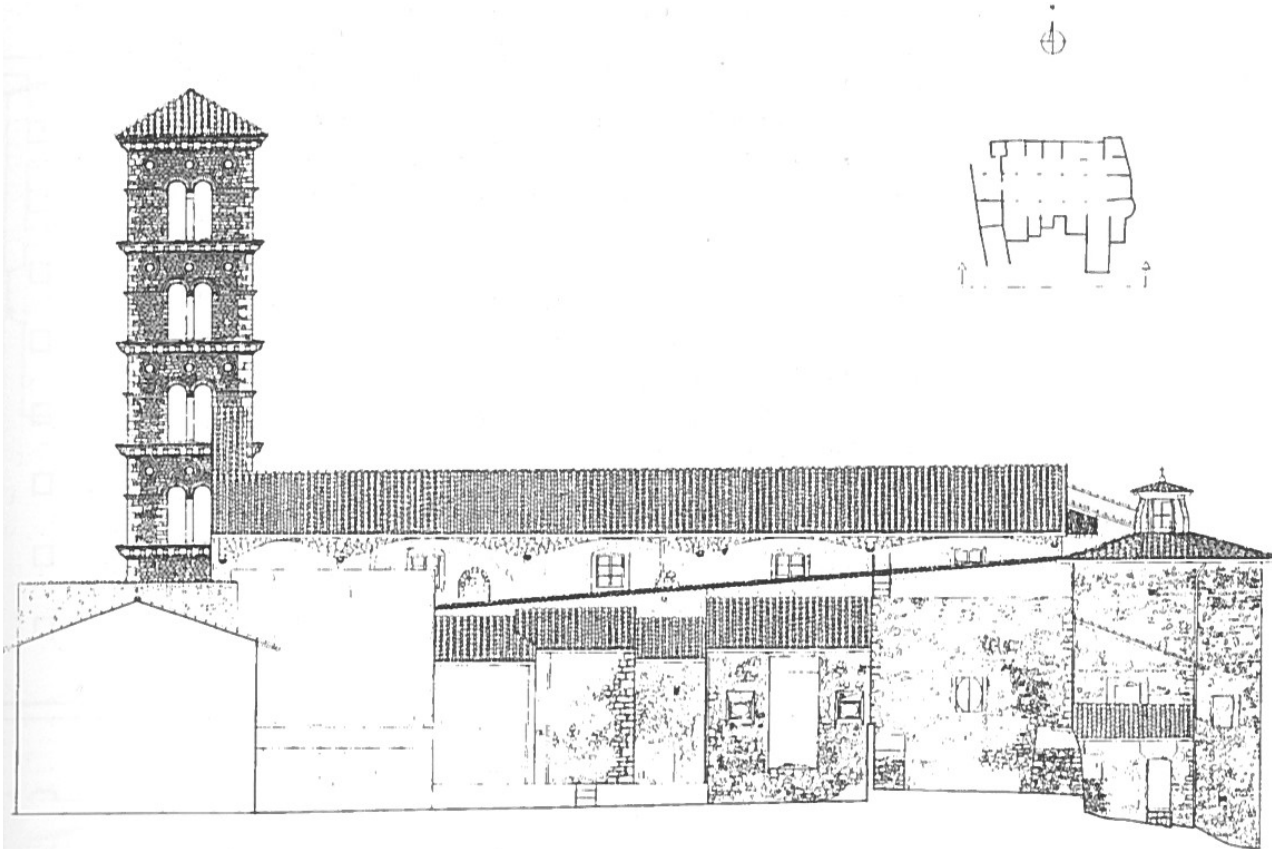


Fig. 6. Southern elevation.

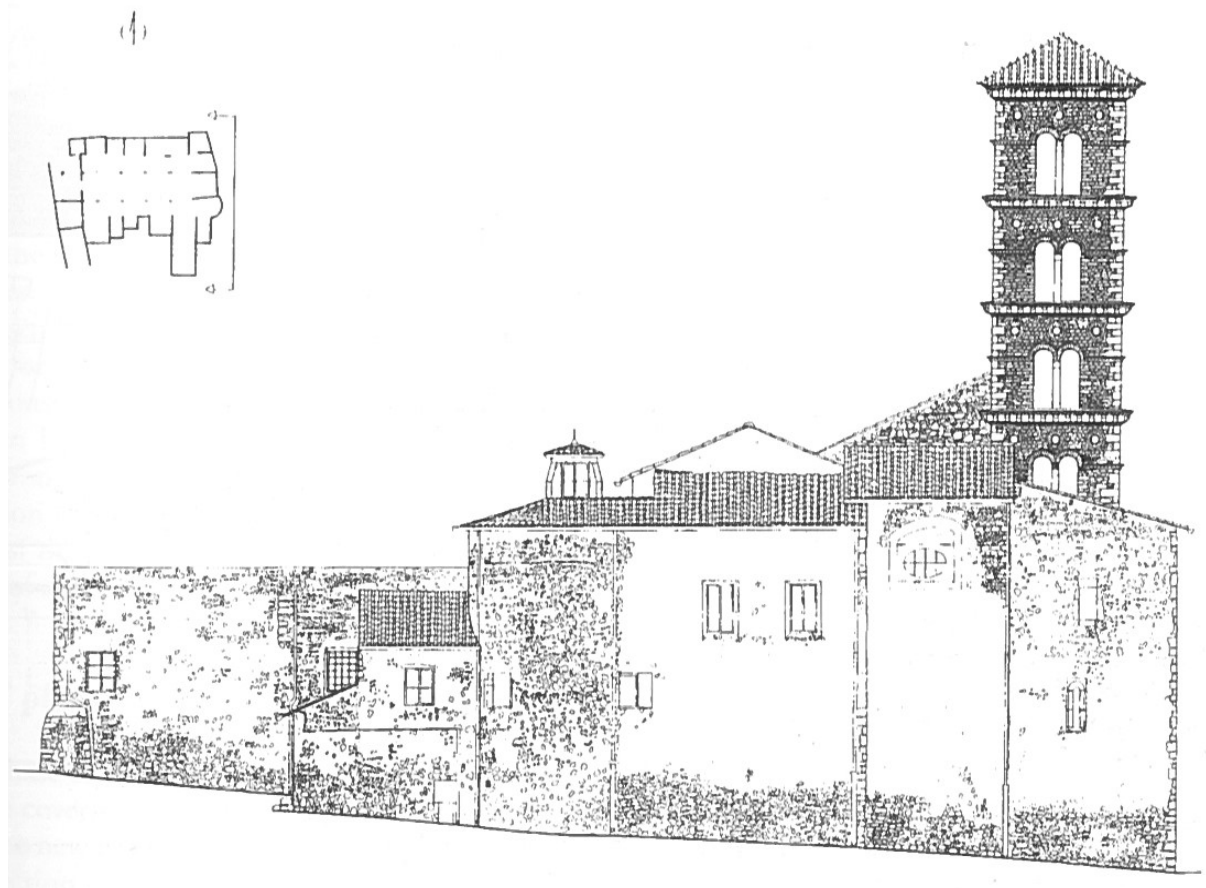


Fig. 7. Eastern elevation.



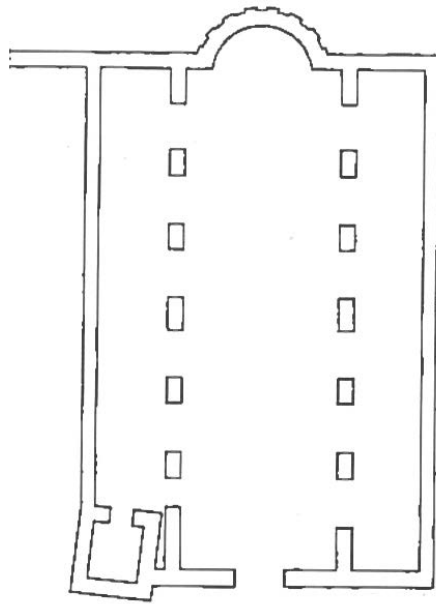


Fig. 8. Ninfa, San Pietro, 12th century. The theme of the plans.

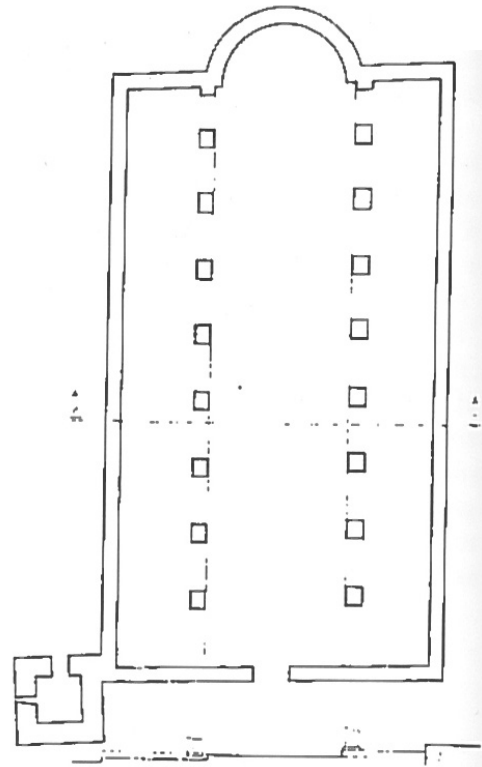


Fig. 9. Sermoneta, Santa Maria Assunta, 12th century. The theme of the plans.

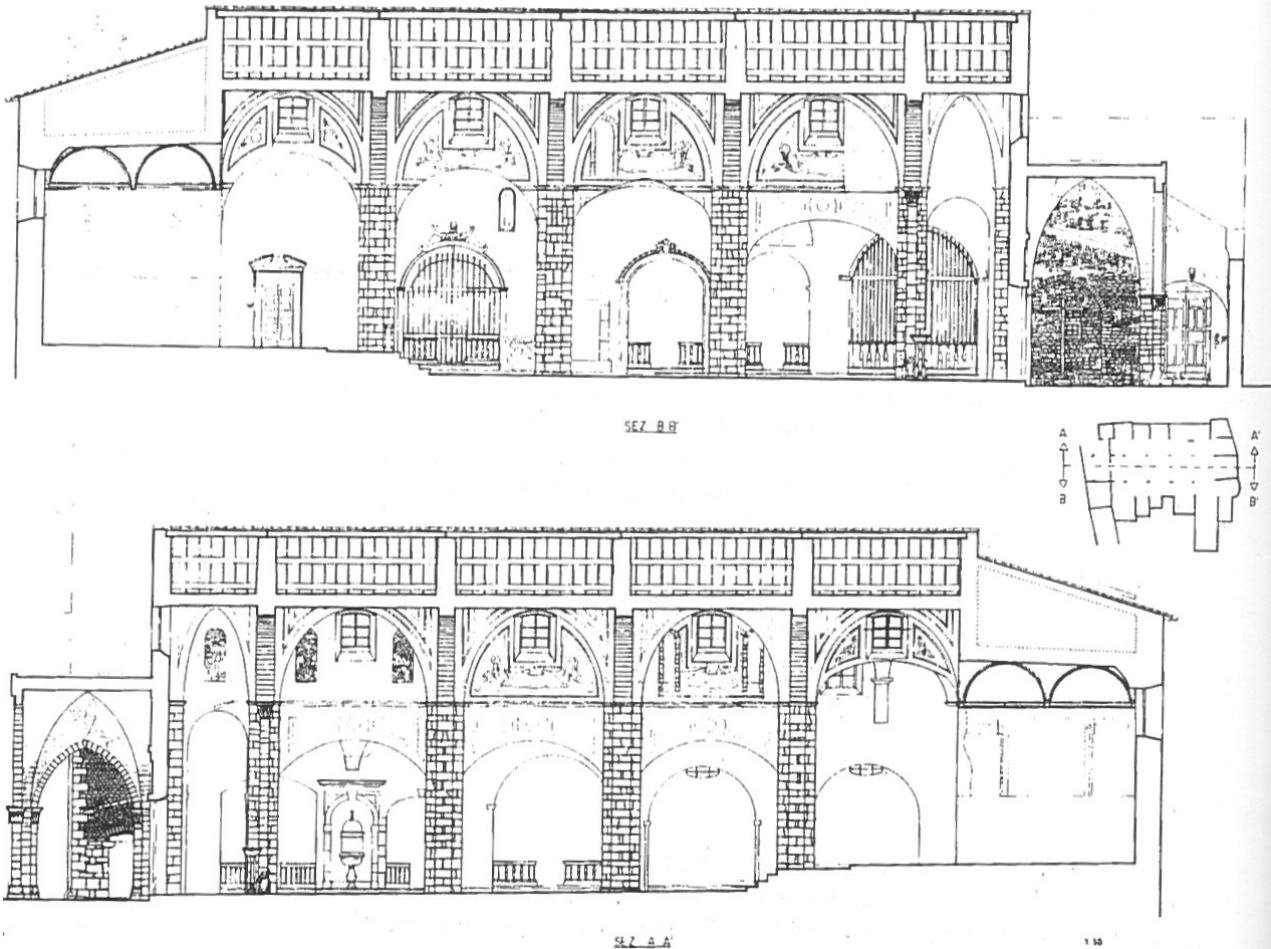


Fig. 10. Santa Maria Assunta, longitudinal sections along the central nave.

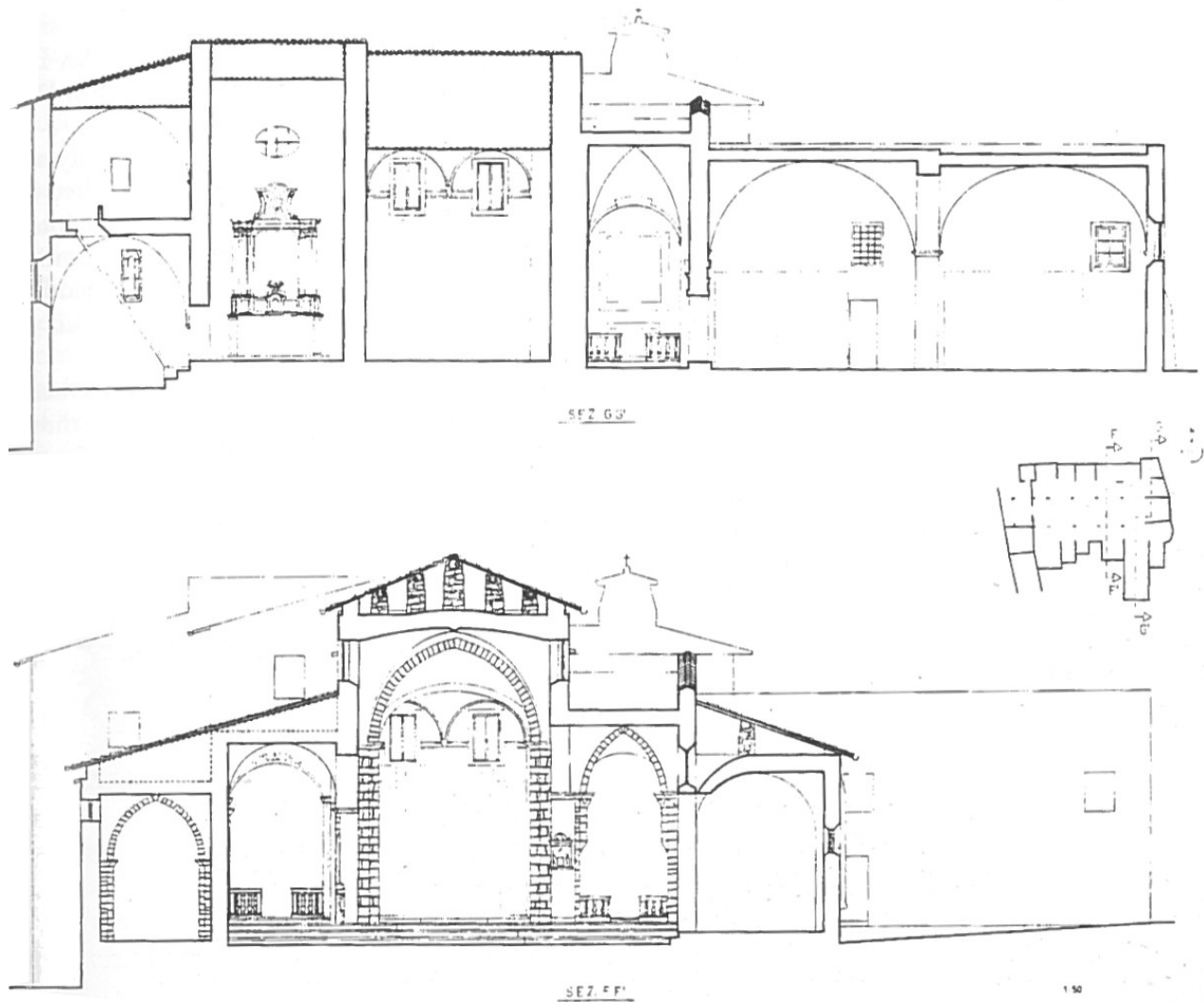


Fig. 11. Santa Maria Assunta, cross sections.

In Europe, the columned church constitutes a very widespread model, with some examples of great importance from the Carolingian and the Ottonian periods, such as the Church of the Saints Marcellinus and Peter in Seligenstadt, Basilica of Steinbach in the Odenwald (both 828-840), Cologne Cathedral, with its Carolingian features, the Cathedral of Augsburg (995-1005), the Church of St. Emmeram of Regensburg (1020-1053) and the Church of St. Gertrude in Nivelles (1046) (20). But for a direct reference, in the immediate vicinity of Sermoneta, clear stylistic and constructive similarities can be found between the Assunta and the Church of San Pietro in Ninfa (previously mentioned in the documents, ante 1237). The strong analogies are based, besides the structural features, especially on the adoption of the same metrological and proportional modules, with the constant use of the Roman foot in both the plans, in the intercolumnal spaces, in the raising of the arches and in the dimensions of the single-light windows.

### “Cistercian” phase

The second phase of the construction of the Assunta is marked by the changing of the wooden covering in the vaulted structure; in relation to this decision is the adoption of the new columns, constructed attached to the existing ones but with a cruciform section to support the new structure and to “check” the new spatial-distributive system. The main dimensions of these added columns, assimilated to the existing rectangular-based parallelepiped are: A (97 cm x 67 cm), B (97 cm

x 68 cm), C (116 cm x 78 cm), D (118 cm x 79 cm), E (116 cm x 76 cm), F (116 cm x 76 cm), G (117 cm x 75 cm), H (116 cm x 78 cm) (Fig. 20).

The date of these works is presumably suggested by the documentary sources. A reconstruction process can be explicitly found from this text cited by Pantanelli: “1235, *Dopnus Gualterius, canonicus. S. Mariae, iuratus et interrogatus, dicit... quod audivit dici quod, propter guerram quam domini de Sermineto olim habebant cum domino Lando Maiore de Ceccano, et propter rehedificationem ecclesie Sancte Marie, fuerunt dicta officia celebranda translata ad ecclesiam Sancti Petri*” (21).

The new taste towards a more unitary and continuous spatiality emerges from the changing of the simple rhythm of Romanesque columns, with the abolition of some of these, together with a greater verticality of the masonry mass (Fig. 12). Furthermore, the configuration of square cross vaults along the left nave is to be noted, while those along the right nave are decidedly more rectangular, suggesting a transformative process of the first Romanesque body covered as by a roof by the new “gothic” construction, in its particular Cistercian version, which was presumably carried out through project changes and second thoughts. The transformations of the Assunta (22) seem, however, to be a kind of “prototype” for the complex constructive processes of the other churches in Sermoneta, especially San Michele Arcangelo and San Nicola. The theme of the 1200s vaulted covering of the naves, originally as a roof, nonetheless is recurrent in the area examined, in examples such as those of S. Pietro and S. Maria Maggiore in Ninfa, as well as the “Cistercian” configuration of the S. Maria della Libera in Aquino (1231-1251) or the renovation of the Cathedral of Anagni (implemented around 1250) (23). Especially close to the transformations of the Assunta is the case of San Lorenzo in Amaseno (in the province of Frosinone), where one can see at least two constructive phases, with a precise date, 1291, for the works completed following the modalities of the “Fossanova School” (24).

The church has a plan of three naves with a terminal choir and two side chapels; in the central nave, the covering is composed of cross vaults over the presbytery, while it is wooden in the other bays; even the side naves maintain the wooden covering. As was previously mentioned, the “Gothic-Cistercian” phase, for the Assunta in Sermoneta, was not implemented univocally, as the direct analysis of the monument shows that the works were divided into at least two main phases, and it seems furthermore to have undergone a prolonged pause in between. This hypothesis, or at least that of an extremely slow progression of the works, finds confirmation in two testaments: “*anno 1266... pontificatus domini Clementis III, anno I, mense februarii, die III, Johannes Sapiens de Sarmineto, sanus mente et corpore, nolens intestatus decedere, de bonis suis nuncupatorium condidit testamentum, in quo testamento instituit suam heredem ecclesiam S. Mariae cujusdam institutionis: dimisit petiam majorem terrarum suarum juxta Templum, viam de Scrinariis et heredum quondam Burganelli. Item totam quam medietatem ipsarum terrarum habet mensa comuna ipsius ecclesiae et aliarum medietatem hanc mensa clericorum et sacristia pro reparatione ecclesie*” (25). The second testament, of a certain Ricardus, dated 13 September 1289, reads: “*Item ecclesie S. Marie de Sarmineto... pro ornamentis ecclesia et edificis et luminaribus*” (26), confirming this date for the probable implementation of further completions. The difficulties of the works appear to be confirmed by the presence of only to *crochets* capitals and by the accentuation of the decorative partition only on the initial part of the nave and not, as is customary, towards the presbyterial area, suggesting a real interruption in the construction, works initiated and then left incomplete.

In fact, there is not the uniformity of the architectural language of the central nave that we can find in Sezze, Priverno and Fossanova, even though the common craftsmanship is indubitable (27). The elements of greatest formal completion are identified in the pair of half columns attached to the two first columns and made of the same stone, delimited above by an astragal and topped by *crochets* capitals (Figs. 12, 13), clearly pertaining to a period in which the expressive language availed itself of direct “Burgundian” influences, retraceable in the Cistercian order, which are expressed in the *oeuvre* by the craftsmen of the “Fossanova School” (28). These are capitals with two orders of leaves, broad, nervate and curved (*crochets*) (29), one of which ends with a corner little heads typical of the 13th century (Figs. 14, 16). An analogous motif can be found in some capitals in Casamari, in the cathedrals of Bisceglie, Troia, and in Sermoneta in the Church of San Nicola. But the motif of the small, stylised corner little heads at the upper vertices was already present in examples of Norman and, in general, French architecture (30). Camille Enlart finds models of these in the Church of Montréal near Avallon (31).



Fig. 12. Santa Maria Assunta, interior, nave and choir.

Fig. 13. Santa Maria Assunta, interior, partial view of foreshortening on the left with the first pilaster, the half-column, the column-bearing lion and the *crochet*. The change in rhythm of the inter-columnal space can be seen, and the medieval light sources and those of the modern addition are visible.

Of note are also the bases of the same half columns. In particular, the one on the left is composed of a cubic plinth, on which a base is set which we can describe as being Attic, with angular claws or *griffes* (32), which can be found in Casamari, Fossanova and Valvisciolo. Resting against the two half columns are two column-bearing lions, unusual elements in Cistercian architecture, which remind one of those employed in examples in the Apulian area, such as the portal of the Cathedral of Trani, in the southern side of the transept of the Cathedral of Bari, that of the façade of the Church of Santa Maria in Siponto and that in the portal of the Cathedral of Bitonto, just to name a few of the numerous examples one could cite. On the basis of these analogies, one can hypothesise that the lions could have initially have been places outside, at the sides of the entrance of the more ancient organism (Fig. 18). In the lateral naves, especially that on the right, we can find evident references to the features of the local architecture, of Cistercian inspiration, from the 13th and the early 14th century. In fact, we can observe some suspended half columns (*demi piliers retombés*), ending at the bottom with a pyramidal section (Figs. 15-17).

The capitals, on the other hand, have a barely hinted-at *cavetto* and are, for the most part, lightly engraved by large squashed or spathiform leaves. As with the *crochets*, even the motif of the pillar of the small suspended column is of





Fig. 14. Santa Maria Assunta, nave, *crochet* capital.



Fig. 15. Santa Maria Assunta, nave, *crochet* capital with the corner little heads.

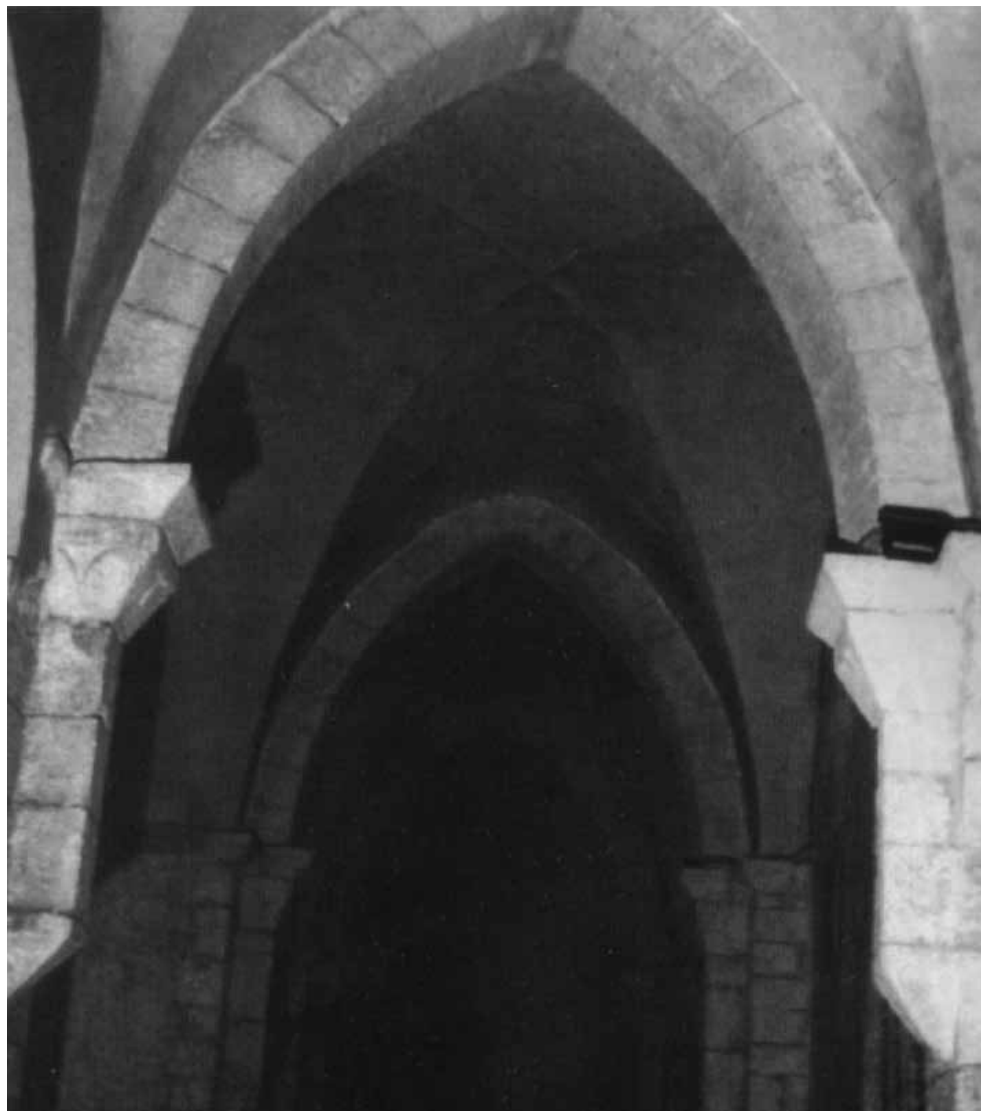


Fig. 16. Right aisle, detail of the suspended pilasters, terminating with a truncated pyramidal section.

Burgundian derivation and can be found in various realisations of the order in central Italy, for example: in Santa Maria of Arabona (Manoppello); it is employed in both the circular and the square section types in the nearby Church of S. Nicola (33). The realisation of the choir's structure can be dated back to the period between the first years and the half of the 14th century, which concludes the medieval construction works; this structure confers the definitive volumetric configuration of the church. De Angelis d'Ossat (34) interpreted the inclination of the choir with respect to the axis of the nave, which can be found in some examples in the area of Umbria and Tuscany, (more precisely in the Church of San Domenico in Cortona, in the San Domenico in Spoleto and in the San Fortunato in Todi), to be a specific visual device aimed at directing the attention of the visitor; a similar effect can be identified for the choir of the Assunta in Sermoneta, while one must exclude, in these cases, the symbolic interpretations linked to the *inclinatio capitis*, or those linked to the presence of existing elements which may have conditioned the execution.

On the outside, the portico is constituted "d'une seule travée" (35); it has a square plan, delimited above by a cross vault (Fig. 20). It is open on two sides, with a large arcade on the west, while the northern side is smaller but still lancet with archivolts of carved rock. It is closed on the eastern side by the

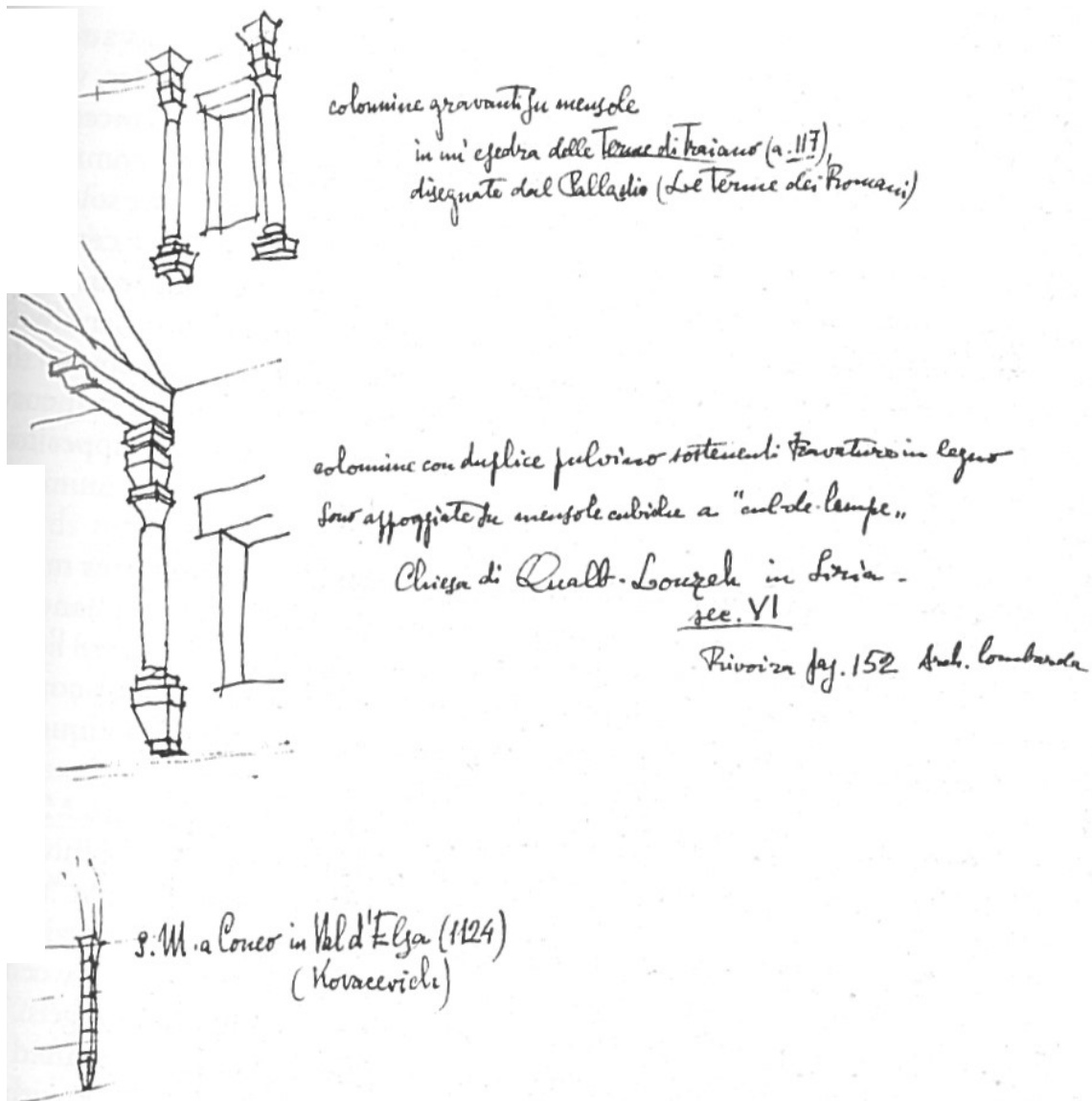


Fig. 17. Origin of the suspended half-pilasters (Drawings by Giuseppe Zander).



Fig. 18. Santa Maria Assunta, nave, detail of the column-bearing lion and the taloned base of the half-column.

wall communicating through the portal with the interior of the church, while on the southern side, after the addition of the Chapel of the Magi, (approx. mid-15th century), with a wall of the same chapel. The half-columns supporting the arcades are attached to half pillars in stone and to the angular pillar; above, they end with *crochets* capitals. The bases, some of which are barely decipherable due to the alteration of the rock, reveal a lexicon of classical inspiration, in the sequence: socle with listel, cyma, taloned plinth, lower tore, listel, scotia and upper tore (Fig. 19).

Enlart describes the portico in detail:

*“les arcades sont en tiers-point et doublées. le bandeau supérieur, très mince, est entaillé en cavet; il repose sur de gros piliers carrés. Le second bandeau, large et sans moulure, retombe sur des colonnes engagées. celles de l’ouest ont des chapiteaux couvert de feuilles d’acanthé; Celles du nord sont couronnées de chapiteaux à feuilles cotelées avec pointes épanouies en bouquets de fleurs”* (36).

The simple rectangular portal, which is rather small, as in the nearby San Michele Arcangelo, is delimited above by a lunette, crowned in turn *“d’un archivolté à moulures”* (Fig. 21), which rests on *“consoles à fleurs sculptées”*, while *“au bas côté répond une porte à linteau sur corbeaux en quart de rond”* (37). In the lunette of the central portal is a fresco depicting the Virgin with the Child between St. Peter and Epaphroditos. In the upper band is a christ among four angels. The façade continues to highlight its simple gabled configuration, but the raised section constructed to contain the system of the vaults is visible (Fig. 22); with the construction of the portico and the chapel on the right, the entrance of the corresponding minor nave was closed from the outside.

### Masonry

I will now briefly summarise, with regard to the masonry structures, the observations concerning the samples examined. Among the materials employed, two types of stone can be distinguished: the first is the so-called *vetrola*, a compact and solid calcareous rock which allows obtaining the *tufelli* in the desired dimensions. This



Fig. 19. Santa Maria Assunta, portico, detail of a base.

Fig. 20. Santa Maria Assunta, detail, portico, partial view of the foreshortening from the left. In the foreground, part of the base of the bell tower and, in the background, part of the gabled façade of the church.

material shows a good resistance to physical-chemical attacks and has an off-white colour. The other is the *saponara* rock, a sandstone used for less regular blocks, spongy and of a yellowish brown colour. The mortars employed are of two types, distinguished in particular by the quality of the *pozzolana*. With the *tufelli* we find a tenacious mortar, characterised by the use of reddish *pozzolana*, of minute granulation, with some black dots, but of a general colour tending towards pink. The second type, obtained with a darker, greyish *pozzolana*, is coarser, with many black and grey granules; it is employed particularly at the base of the bell tower.

From a first mapping, we can distinguish at least eight different types of masonry configurations, present in multiple parts of the construction. Some samples are found at the base of the bell tower and reveal an *opera quadrata* masonry, in dressed local stone, framed and leveled; the length varies between 20 cm and 50 cm, the height between 12 cm and 28 cm; the mortar has a thickness varying from 1 to 2 cm and a flat finish. It has been dated to the initial nucleus of the church, around the 12th century.

Other samples can be found in the bell tower and in the more ancient chapels, such as that dedicated to St. Bartholomew (third chapel along the left nave) (Fig. 23) and the one dedicated to Mary Magdalen (along the right-hand nave). The masonry is constituted by small rectangular blocks, or *tufelli*, with lengths between 9 cm and 25 cm and heights between 5 cm and 8 cm. The mortar is between 2 and 3 cm thick, with a concave finish. The dating oscillates around the middle of the 13th century. Types 4 and 8 (Chapel of St. Peter and the walls closing the south side of the portico) show a masonry which could be described as being transitional, due to the use of rocks of more varied shapes, though tending toward the square, with mortar between 1-3 cm thick. The smoothing is deep. Units 5 and 7, classifiable as an uncertain work, as they show a cruder workmanship, can be seen on the outside of the Chapel of the Passion and the Chapel of St. Joseph. The constructive technique of the more recent masonry presents itself with an ever cruder finishing, less regular and refined; the workmanship changes and ends up being mixed. The finishings are various and there are stratigraphic unities which in some sections are covered by traces of plaster or broad patchwork (Fig. 24).





Fig. 21. Santa Maria Assunta, portico, detail of the lunette delimiting the entrance to the church.



Fig. 22. Santa Maria Assunta, Portico and façade, partial frontal view. The raising of the sides of the roofs, the *oculus* and part of the buttress towards the bell tower.

### Extradossal vaults

Another characteristic feature of the Late Middle Ages (second constructive phase) is the use of extradossal vaults. In these vaults, be they taloned, cross, barrel or cloister, there is a clear reference to the Byzantine construction technique, to the Arabic techniques and to examples which had wide diffusion between the 9th and the 13th century all over the Mediterranean (38). The traces of these extradossal vaults are still legible today along the northern and the southern façades of the Assunta, made particularly visible by the interventions carried out by the Superintendency in the 1950s and th 1960s. In the attics it is still possible to examine the first shape of the vaults and the structure of the covering. The spatial effect must have appeared of intense plasticity, exalting on the outside the articulation of the interior space. There are many references, which find significant similitudes even in the immediate vicinity. It is enough to cite the Church of the Abbey of Valvisciolo, which presented this type of configuration, but the examples multiply further towards the Marittima; in Gaeta, San Giovanni a Mare, Santa Lucia and San Domenico; in Maranola-Formia, Santa Maria; in Minturno, San Pietro Apostolo; (39) then in Capri, the San Costanzo and the Chapel of the Cross or of St. Micheal; in Anacapri the Church of Santa Maria; in Naples, San Giovanni a Mare; in Itri, San Cristoforo. The variety is also found in Apulian churches (40), and in Sardinia, in the Church of San Giovanni in Sinis (in the province of Oristano), in the San Teodoro in Congius and in the Parish Church of Monserrato in Cagliari (41).

The analysis of the materials, carried out through the taking of some samples (42) both from the Assunta and from San Pietro in Ninfa, has revealed the use of a compact and hard conglomerate, with components of fine *breccia*, *cocciopesto* and tufaceous material. The inert material is in high proportion with respect to the binding agent, which reveals itself to be of good quality (Figs. 25, 26).

### The bell tower

To complete the reading of the medieval structures it is necessary to examine the bell tower, which was originally (12th century) separate and accessed from an entrance on the southeastern side, today occupied by the Chapel of St. Peter, built between the 14th and the 15th century. The bell tower, with a square plan, has a height of 24 m with a total of 6 floors above ground (Figs. 27, 28).



Fig. 23. Santa Maria Assunta, right aisle, chapels, detail of some masonries. In the Chapel of St. Bartholomew are the *tuffelli*.

Fig. 24. Santa Maria Assunta, Chapel of the Rosary, exterior masonry.



Fig. 25. Santa Maria Assunta, detail of the extradosed vault.



Fig. 26. Ninfa, San Pietro, ruins with the constructive detail of an extradosed vault.

The masonry component is essentially constituted by *tufelli* set out on regular courses. The corners are constituted of calcareous rock of larger dimensions. Pantanelli describes it as being composed of “*pietre da cento*” (43). The base block has a grade plan approximately twice as high as that of the other individual floors and is open solely by a small slit, greatly widening on the inside. The southwestern side is decorated by three crosses (44). As has already been observed, in such a base one can find different kinds of masonry types, so even without full documentary certainty, the analysis of the constructive features allows us to consider this part as that surviving from the ancient church or Pieve of Santa Maria of Sermoneta, dating back to the first couple of decades of the 12th century (45).

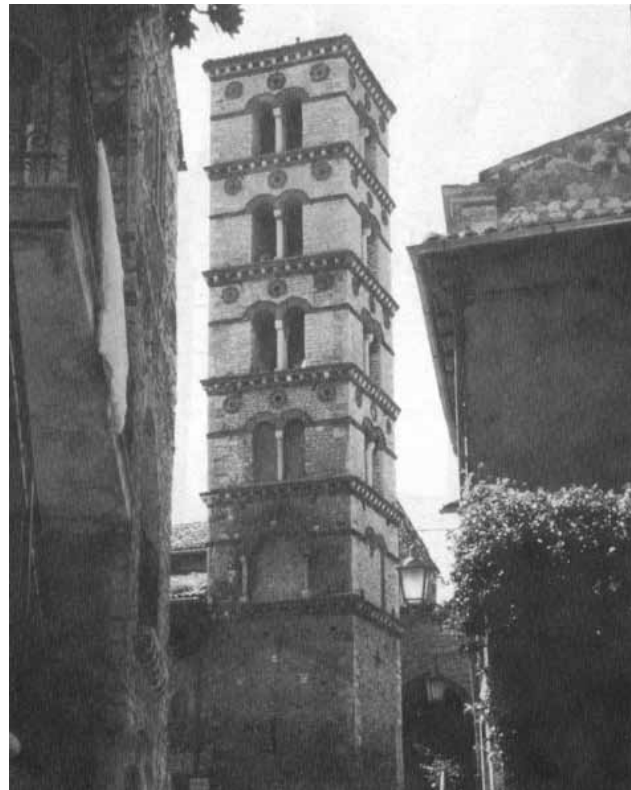


Fig. 27. Santa Maria Assunta, bell tower before Terenzio's intervention (Archive of the Superintendency for the Environmental and Architectural Properties of Rome).

Fig. 28. Santa Maria Assunta, present-day condition of bell tower.

The first, “blind” floor is also built with *tufelli*; on the northwestern side juts out an aedicula composed of two superposed arches, one acute and the other in the dead centre with traces of frescoes on the masonry. The aedicula rests on two small columns set between two jutting shelves. The four upper floors are pierced by mullioned windows with small double marble columns, supported by a single base resting on the sill and delimited above by a single bell-shaped capital. The ensemble of the mullioned window is closed off by two arcades with simple profiles and brick archivolts.

The brick archivolts unfolding horizontally take on the function of an abacus cornice jutting slightly from the actual wall surface. Furthermore, the layout of the masonry layering is articulated by the stringcourses set on jutting shelves and formed by two recesses with dentels and rows in brick. More in detail, such cornices rest on shelves, constituted by 6 or 7 rows of bricks laid out alternately smoothly or transversely or on shelves of calcareous stone, the profile of which is shaped by a listel and by a pronounced ogee (46).

The external surface of the four upper floors is furthermore made more precious by the presence of round coloured majolica, or *scodelle*, laid out in groups of



three. The treatment of the stringcourses, translates, with the use of a more modest material, the model of classical cornices (47); more in general, the character of the bell tower reprises the type of Roman bell towers of the second half of the 11th century with some references to lombard examples (48).

Among the Roman bell towers, those collected by Giovannoni, around the example of Santa Maria ad Pineam (49), besides the difference in the construction material, appear to be more adherent.

The internal section is composed of a single structure, with moveable intermediate lofts. Currently, the bell tower of the Assunta is lacking the terminal spire which was destroyed by lightning in 1576. A graffiti inscribed on the corner pillar of the portico recalls the episode “*lo trone dette al campanile*” (Fig. 29). The panel painting by Benozzo Gozzoli (1452) kept in the first chapel of the right nave, dedicated to the saints Joseph and Leonard, depicting the Virgin’s Assumption with the town of Sermoneta on her lap, shows the bell tower still with “the pyramid in the middle, the other four small ones in the corners” (50) and a triangular tympanum placed in connection between the last order and the spire. The painting is of an extreme historical importance for the reconstruction of 15th century Sermoneta, as we can recognise, on the left, the Church of San Michele with its small bell tower, but also cuspidate.

### Summary of the constructive history in the Modern age

With regard to the Post-Medieval transformations of the complex, given the impossibility of offering a detailed description within the limits of this document, I will limit myself to producing a synthetic chronology of the most important events, in relation to the constructive history of the building.

The most important modifications affected, as is usual in the Renaissance and the Baroque period, the interior space of the building, with the renovation of the masonry surfaces, the light sources and with the opening of numerous chapels, while the façades remained mostly unaltered, excepting the addition of some lateral or later constructive elements (51).

The prevailing *facies* of the building is therefore owed to the works executed in the Baroque and the late-Baroque, as far as the whole image is concerned, but one cannot neglect to mention the further 1800s transformations (pictorial decoration), as well as the effects of the “restorations” which, highlighting the “Romanesque” and “Gothic” aspects of the construction, significantly affect its appearance (Fig. 30). Hence, the most significant events may be, with respect to the current understanding of affairs, thus summarised:

Mid-15th century: the Chapel of the Magi is constructed, thus closing off both the portico on its south side and the entry to the right nave.

1452: Benozzo Gozzoli paints the panel “of the Madonna degli Angeli”.

1460: the clergy of the Assunta concede the land to the Battenti for the construction of their oratorium, previously hosted in the Chapel of the Magi.

1495: the Battenti Oratorium is completed during the pontificate of Alexander VI.

1499: the Chapel of St. Peter is constructed.

1515: the sculptoreal aedicula is set up for the holy oil, between the choir and the Chapel of Saint Francis de Sales, at the back of the right nave.

1565: a lightning bolt topples the spire of the bell tower.

1603: the choir is decorated, upon the initiative of the Americi family, with frescoes depicting the Nativity, the Presentation at the Temple, the

Fig. 29. Santa Maria Assunta, portico, detail of the graffiti of the corner pilaster.

Fig. 30. Santa Maria Assunta, fragments of the mural paintings found on the counter-façade; in the foreground, traces on the “Romanesque” pilasters after the “de-restoration”.



Annunciation, the Visitation and the Assumption.

- 1606: Paul V nominates Bonifazio Caetani cardinal. The De Angelis Chapel is realised and work starts in the Chapel of St. Bartholomew.
- 1615: the De Marchis Chapel is realised, previously named after the Saints Joseph and Leonard.
- 1626: Urban VIII nominates Enrico Caetani cardinal.
- 1628: the Brotherhood of the Rosary is founded by Duke Francesco Caetani, who takes up office in the chapel previously dedicated to St. Francis de Sales and St. Peter in Chains.  
The plan is circular, delimited above by a cupola with a small lantern.
- 1704: the Chapel of the Redeptor is constructed at the back of the left nave.
- 1715: the walls of the Chapel of the Rosary are decorated with frescoes. Furthermore, the New Sacristy is realised, with the addition of a new construction in the existing Chapel dedicated to St. Anthony facing the old cemetery.
- 1737: news of works to repair the left nave, no further details.
- 1740: the greater altar and the canopy are built.
- 1760: the altar is realised in the Chapel of the Redeptor.
- 1796: the Chapel of the Madonna of Vicotry is decorated with frescoes.
- 1829: news of works in the left nave.
- 1942 and 1943: restoration works in the bell tower and on the façade, in the care of the Superintendency for Monuments in Lazio (Terenzio).
- 1954: fragments of frescoes (Last Judgement) discovered on the counter-façade of the church.
- 1960: interventions for the dehumidification of the Chapel of the Rosary, with the “*rifacimento*” of the pavement, the balustrades and the opening of two windows.
- 1963-1965: various “restoration” works carried out on the interior and the coverings.

## Notes

All photos are by the author except when indicated.

1. P. PANTANELLI, *Notizie storiche della terra di Sermoneta*, III, ed. Leone Caetani, Roma 1972 (orig. ed. 1908-1911), especially pp. 72-73.
2. G. MAROCCO, *Monumenti dello Stato pontificio e relazione topografica di ogni paese*, Roma 1834, pp. 84-85.
3. M. RAYMONDI-G. CORNIOLA, *Sermoneta e antichità delle terre Pontine*, Ronciglione 1893, p. 71.
4. C. ENLART, *Origines française de l'architecture gothique en Italie*, Paris 1894, pp. 9, 11, 17, 138-145, 148-149, 255, 266, 269, 273, 277 and 293.
5. A. MUÑOZ, *Momenti d'architettura gotica nel Lazio* in "Vita d'arte", September 1911, n. 45, p. 101. From the brief considerations made by Muñoz, who was at the time a young inspector, an art historian, of the Superintendency to the Monuments of Lazio, one can see how Baroque architecture did not enjoy the same appreciation in the restorations carried out, with respect to studies of the history of architecture, as the preference tended towards the medieval stylistic unity. This reflection on Muñoz was specified first by G. MIARELLI, *Monumenti nel tempo, per una storia del restauro in Abruzzo e nel Molise*, Roma 1979, p. 47. In order to better understand the figure of Antonio Muñoz, see the study by C. BELLANCA, *Antonio Muñoz, la politica di tutela dei monumenti di Roma durante il Governatorato*, Roma 2003.
6. A. SERAFINI, *Torri campanarie di Roma e del Lazio nel Medioevo*, Roma 1927, pp. 120-122.
7. A. TERENCEZIO, *Sermoneta, chiesa di S. Maria della Pieve, restauri al campanile*, in "Le Arti", IV, 1941-1942, pp. 299-300. Also with regard to the restoration conducted by Terenzio, who was then Superintendent to Monuments, the same considerations made with Muñoz can be applied, with the difference that, in Terenzio, the technical aspect prevails in tackling and attempting to resolve the individual issues.
8. R. WAGNER RIEGER, *Die Italienische Baukunst der Gotik. II Sud- und Mittelitalien*, Graz-Cologne 1957, p. 82.
9. G. TAMANTI, *La chiesa di Santa Maria Assunta in Sermoneta* in "Bollettino dell'Istituto di Storia e di Arte del Lazio meridionale", VIII, 1975, 2, pp. 75-92.
10. M.L. DE SANCTIS, *Insedimenti monastici nella regione di Ninfa, in Ninfa una città, un giardino*, Atti del colloquio della fondazione Camillo Caetani, Roma-Sermoneta-Ninfa, 7-9 October 1988, Roma 1990, pp. 271-272.
11. P. LONGO, F. SASSOLI, *Sermoneta*, Roma 1992, pp. 23-43.
12. R. BONELLI, *L'edilizia delle chiese cistercensi, in I Cistercensi e il Lazio*, Atti delle Giornate di Studio dell'Istituto di Storia dell'Arte dell'Università di Roma, 17-21 may 1977, Roma 1978, p. 37.
13. G. CARBONARA, *Edilizia e urbanistica di Ninfa, in Ninfa una città*, pp. 235-238.
14. Under the care of the ministry of Education, the Superintendency to Monuments of Lazio, restoration of the church of Santa Maria Assunta, Report n. 353, dated 30/5/63. The description of the works also includes: the reordering of the currents of water, the arrangement of the coverings between the right nave and the chapels, the reordering of ashlar in the church (June 1964), signed Superintendent R. Pacini. From other documents kept in the archives of the Superintendency, dated 26 July 1970, can be read the intention of repainting the vaults and the walls of the church, "a new appearance would finally highlight its architectural simplicity in the sobriety of the style".
15. G. DE ANGELIS d'OSSAT, *Origine e diffusione dei prospetti ad andamento obliquo nelle chiese salonitane, and ID, Il problema delle facciate ad impianto obliquo negli edifici paleocristiani in Realtà dell'Architettura. Apporti alla sua storia, 1933-1978*, ed. L. MARCUCCI and D. IMPERI, Roma 1982, I, pp. 395-403, 405-413.
16. CARBONARA, *Edilizia*, p. 236.
17. ID., *Iussu Desideri*, Rome 1979, pp. 100, 108, 110-111, 126-128, 141. on the topic of columned churches, especially those in Abruzzo, see also I. GAVINI, *Storia dell'architettura in Abruzzo*, Milano-Roma n.d. (1927-1928) and M. MORETTI, *Architettura medievale in Abruzzo*, Roma n.d., 1971, pp. 14-103.
18. A. PRANDI, *San Giovanni di Patù e altre chiese di terra d'Otranto*, in "Palladio", XI, July-December 1961, pp. 103-136.
19. C. BOZZONI, *Calabria normanna*, Roma 1974, pp. 169-203.
20. Op. cit. and CARBONARA, *Edilizia*, p. 236; specific references for Cologne can be found in M. D'ONOFRIO, *Roma e Aquisgrana*, Roma 1983, pp. 90-94; for Nivelles, H.E. KUBACH – A. VERBEEK, *Romanische Baukunst an Rhein und Maas*, II, Berlin 1976, pp. 860-868; for other references on Belgian churches (province of Namur), op. cit., I, pp. 354-355. See also R. BONELLI, C. BOZZONI, V. FRANCHETTI PARDO, *Storia dell'architettura medievale*, Roma-Bari 1997, pp. 22-23, 27.
21. PANTANELLI, *Notizie storiche*, p. 175.
22. Camille Enlart, with two definitions in line with the prevailing culture of her time in France with respect to monumental existences architecture, explains these works in the Assunta: "Elle a été agrandie et restaurée en style gothique, puis en style baroque", p. 138.
23. CARBONARA, *Iussu*, pp. 122, 124, 144-145.
24. ENLART, *Origines*, pp. 111-116.
25. Ibidem, pp. 139-140.
26. Ibidem, p. 140.
27. With regard to the reading of common general features of Cistercian architecture, see the writings of Anselme

Dimier, Camille Enlart, Marcel Aubert, Alberto Serafini, Renate Wagner Rieger, Wolfgang Kronig, Hanno Hahn, Angiola Maria Romanini, as well as Pietro Toesca, Emilio Lavagnino and one of the last texts by Giuseppe Zander.

28. ENLART, *Origines*, p. 142. This concept was reprised expansively at the convention for study *I Cistercensi e il Lazio* and continuously dealt with by the studies of Angiola Maria Romanini; it can be found, with continuous in-depth treatment, on “Arte medievale” and in the recent *Enciclopedia dell’Arte Medievale*.

29. The use of these capitals with rampant leaves or flames, called *crochet*, also classified in Italian with the terms *rampino*, *gancio*, *uncino*, spread in the 13th century, but they are still of Burgundian derivation. Cf. E. VIOLLET LE DUC, *Dictionnaire raisonné de l’architecture française du ‘XIe au ‘XVIIe siècle*, IV, Paris 1859, pp. 400-418. Cf. ENLART, *Origines*, p. 141. Some more recent considerations on their diffusion can be found in P. PUGLISI, *Capitelli dell’Abbazia di San Galgano*, in *I Cistercensi e il Lazio*, p. 177; G. CARBONARA, *Considerazioni su alcuni impieghi del crochet e della contre-courbe nell’Italia centrale*, in *Saggi in onore di Guglielmo De Angelis d’Ossat*, Quaderni dell’Istituto di Storia dell’Architettura, 1983- 1987, Roma 1987, p. 95 and in A. PERONI, item *Capitello*, pp. 195-196 and C. GHISALBERTI, item *Cistercensi*, in *Enciclopedia dell’Arte Medievale*, IV, Roma 1993, p. 839.

30. PERONI, *Capitello*, p. 196.

31. ENLART, *Origines*, p. 141.

32. For these architectural details, Cf. VIOLLET LE DUC, *Dictionnaire...*, Paris 1863, pp. 47-52 and ENLART, *Origines...*, pp. 279-280.

33. With regard to the origins of the suspended half columns, some examples can be found in the “small suspended columns with which were adorned some rooms of the Baths of Titus, reconstructed by Trajan in Rome and in the nave of the Basilica of Qalb Loze in Syria”. These latter little columns present a two-fold pulvino supported by wooden beams and are paired up on “cul-de-lampe” cubic shelves (6th century). G.T. RIVOIRA, *Le origini della architettura Lombarda*, I, Rome 1901, p. 152. It seems significant to cite a sketch by Giuseppe Zander, found among the pages of a book by Rivoira which accepts these origins for the suspended columns. I would like to thank the Zander family for allowing the publication of the drawing (fig. 17). With regard to the “*demi piliers retombé*”, cf. ENLART, *Origines*, pp. 144-145, 269.

34. G. DE ANGELIS d’OSSAT, *Proporzioni e accorgimenti visuali negli interni*, in AA.VV., *Francesco d’Assisi, chiese e conventi*, Milano 1982, pp. 150-162.

35. ENLART, *Origines*, p. 140.

36. *Ibidem*, p. 142.

37. *Ibidem*, p. 142.

38. In most of these constructions, there is a clear prevailing of the extradossal barrel vault. The procedure followed for the external covering of the vault, made in ordinary masonry, is described to us by Roberto Pane: “it consists in putting down a layer of 15 or 20cm of volcanic lapilli soaked in milk of lime. A team of workers proceeds to its beating for three days, using a mazzoccola (a wooden spatula) with the lower side level and the sides shaped at an acute angle”. In R. PANE, *Capri mura e volte*, Napoli 1965, p. 24. See also G. FIENGO, *Gaeta, monumenti e storia urbanistica*, Napoli 1971, especially pp. 59-72 and A. VENDITTI, *Architettura bizantina nell’Italia meridionale*, Napoli 1967.

39. G. ZANDER, *Precisazioni sulla chiesa di San Pietro di Minturno*, in “Bollettino del Centro di studi per la storia dell’architettura”, 24, 1976, pp. 19-27.

40. For a first approach to Apulian vaults beyond the aforementioned Venditti, see the Atti del IX Congresso Nazionale di Storia dell’Architettura (National Congress of the History of Architecture) (Bari 10-16 October, 1955), Rome 1959, especially the contributions of Berucci, Chierici and Simoncini.

41. For a synthetic reference to medieval vaults in Sardinia see the Atti del XIII Congresso di Storia dell’Architettura (Congress of the History of Architecture), Cagliari 6-12 April 1963.

42. The analysis carried out in the restoration laboratory set up in the Department of the History of Architecture, Restoration and Conservation of Architectural Heritage of the Sapienza University of Rome availed itself of data gathered with reflected light, print magnification proportion between 12 x 4. The type of film used was Kodak EPY 64 ASA, on a stereoscopic Zeiss S.V.8 microscope, upon the preparation of individual samples of approx. 1cm, dry polished and laid out on an elastic support.

43. PANTANELLI, *Notizie*, p. 78.

44. SERAFINI, *Torri*, p. 121.

45. PANTANELLI, *Notizie*, p. 78.

46. G. GIOVANNONI, *L’architettura dei monasteri sublacensi*, Roma 1904, p. 45.

47. ID., *Campanili medievali romani*, in “Atti del IV Convegno nazionale di storia dell’architettura, Milano 18-25 Giugno 1939, p. 10 of the extract.

48. GIOVANNONI, *L’architettura*, p. 49.

49. ID., *Campanili*, p. 11 of the extract.

50. PANTANELLI, *Notizie*, p. 78.

51. With regard to the significance of the interventions on existing architecture before modern restoration, see: G. DE ANGELIS d’OSSAT, *Restauro: architettura sulle preesistenze, diversamente valutate nel tempo*, in “Palladio”, XXVIII, 1978, 2, pp. 51-68; G. MIARELLI MARIANI, *Monumenti nel tempo*, Roma 1979, especially pages 81-108; S. BENEDETTI, *L’architettura dell’epoca barocca in Abruzzo*, Atti del XIX Congresso Nazionale di Storia dell’Architettura, (National Congress of the History of Architecture), l’Aquila 15-21 September 1975,

Roma 1980, pp. 275-312; G. CARBONARA, *Trasformazioni posteriori*, in A.A.V.V., *Francesco d'Assisi, chiese e conventi*, Milano 1982, pp. 162-177; L. BARTOLINI SALIMBENI, *Su alcuni "restauri" di antiche chiese romane*, in *Esperienze di storia dell'architettura e di restauro*, edited by Gianfranco Spagnesi, Atti del XXI Congresso Nazionale di Storia dell'Architettura, (National Congress of the History of Architecture, Rome 1983), Roma 1987, pp. 275-285. I would also like to cite the more recent texts of M.P. SETTE, *Profilo storico in Trattato di restauro architettonico*, edited by G. CARBONARA, Torino 1996, I, pp. 109-299, particularly pp. 109-144, and G. CARBONARA, *Avvicinamento al restauro. Teoria, storia, monumenti*, Napoli 1997, especially the second part, *Note di storia del restauro*.

## Bibliographic Updating

E. BORSELLINO, *Sermoneta 1603. Gli affreschi del coro di Santa Maria Assunta in Sermoneta e i Caetani. Dinamiche politiche, sociali e culturali di un territorio tra medioevo ed età moderna*, Atti del Convegno della Fondazione Camillo Caetani, Roma-Sermoneta, 16-19 June 1993, edited by Luigi Fiorani, pp. 349-361.

A. DI BELLO, *Sermoneta, Cattedrale di Santa Maria, Giudizio Universale (XV secolo), L'arte e i luoghi dell'Aldilà nel Lazio*, in *I percorsi dell'aldilà nel Lazio*, edited by Benedetto Coccia, Roma 2007, pp. 298-307.

F. BILANCIA, *Gli stalli del coro di S. Maria Assunta a Sermoneta*, in A.A.V.V., "Latium: rivista di studi storici", 30/31 (2013/2014), Istituto di storia e di arte del Lazio meridionale, Roma 2015, pp. 255-266.



The book provides a series of reflections on the study of architectural preexistences that have matured during the almost thirty-five years of study and research in Italy and Europe. Furthermore, it shows how the discipline of restoration of monuments is all based in architecture, intended in its many-faceted meanings. The methodical approach to the restoration of historic architecture consists in the historical-critical analysis, central nucleus of the study of architecture and is composed by specific in-depth thematic sessions (the historical iconography; the analysis of the constructive features; the constructive model; the volumetric layout; metrological and proportional analysis; the theme of the figurative model; the analysis of masonry; the theme of decorations; spolia and reemployed; comparisons, analogies and differences; the reading of the architectural organism through the synthesis of the monument in time). The author and his team have collected thematic essays on key issues that have great interest not only in Italy but also abroad. From the general concepts to examples of the application of Italian consolidated restoration methodology to the analysis and conservation of historic architecture.

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