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San Vincenzo al Volturno: the making
of a great Beneventan central-place in the 9th century

Monasteries along with royal central-places played an important part in the making of the medieval economy, as most historians have shown.[1] However, before the later 8th century, it is difficult to define any particular settlement form as a monastery.[2] This changed with «a modish and Carolingian-inspired Romanitas»:[3] the Carolingian Renaissance and the making of so-called monastic cities in the later 8th and 9th centuries. Monastic cities appear to have prospered as a consequence of the reform of Benedict of Aniane, which forbade monks from undertaking manual labour and concurrently (if discretely) re-defined the topography of monasteries to fulfill new economic roles as regional central places. But these places and their leadership played a part in a bigger political story: the monasteries «created the presumption that kings and their acts could and should be policed by churchmen for their morality».[4] The monasteries belonged to a package of changes (the so-called *klosterpolitik*) that was a genuine Carolingian innovation, Wickham has recently observed, and

1. H. Pirenne, *Mohammed and Charlemagne*, London 1939; G. Duby, *The early growth of the European economy. Warriors and peasants from the seventh to the twelfth Century*, London 1974; J.P. Devroey, *Reflexions sur l'economie des premiers temps Carolingiens (768-877): grand domaines et action politique entre Seine et Rhin*, in «Francia», 13 (1985), pp. 475-88; Id., *Economie rurale et société dans l'Europe franque (VIe-IXe siècles)*, Paris 2003.

2. J. Blair, *The church in Anglo-Saxon society*, Oxford 2005, pp. 182-220; see K. Bowes, *Inventing ascetic space: houses, monasteries and the 'archaeology of monasticism'*, in *Western Monasticism* Ante Litteram, ed. by H. Dey and E. Fentress, Turnhout 2011, pp. 315-51.

3. Blair, *The church*, p. 274.

4. C. Wickham, *Framing the Middle Ages*, Oxford 2005, p. 555.

marked out western political practice as different from then on.[5] Peter Brown goes much further. He describes a «major shake-up of the Frankish Church» in AD 789 when Charlemagne dispatched representatives to all regions with an agenda, the *Admonitio Generalis*, addressed to the clergy and laity. This agenda laid the foundation for a new style of "corrected" Christianity.[6] The monastic city was at the heart of this correction, myriad places of uninhibited consumption. More importantly, these places were an exercise in huge investment in labour and materials, bringing about changes in scientific practice. According to Joachim Henning, this was «a command economy».[7]

Monastic cities are characterized by two features. First, according to the written accounts produced in these places either at the time or soon afterwards, these were densely populated islands including large numbers – sometimes many hundreds – of monks devoted to sacred duties. On the bases of the written sources, the early medieval monasteries were centres of administered regional exchange.[8] The monasteries certainly administered large properties, amassed through a mosaic of donations, where some limited periodic trade, in certain cases, existed, although the quantification of exchange remains to be accurately defined.[9] Reading the texts, a strong case has been made for the steady and systematic 9th-century – progressive – development of monastic estates with clear images of the constituent properties.[10] This proceeded, as best can be judged, at different speeds with the pattern of rural intensification involving wool production and cerealization following commercial ventures being most prominent in the Carolingian heartlands,[11] and was less intensified in the peripheries.

5. Wickham, *Framing*, pp. 821-22.

6. P. Brown, *The rise of western Christendom. Triumph and Diversity, AD 200-1000*, Oxford 2003, p. 450.

7. J. Henning, *Early European towns: the way of the economy in the Frankish area between dynamism and deceleration 500-1000 AD*, in *Post-Roman Towns, Trade and Settlement in Europe and Byzantium. 1. The heirs of the Roman West*, ed. by J. Henning, Berlin-New York 2007, pp. 3-40: p. 20.

8. Blair, *The church*, pp. 246-290; Devroey, *Economie rurale*

9. Devroey, *Economie rurale*.

10. J. Nitz, *Settlement structures and settlement systems of the Frankish central state in Carolingian and Ottonian times*, in *Anglo-Saxon Settlements*, Oxford 1983, pp. 249-274; C. Grainge, *Assarting and the dynamics of Rhineland economies in the ninth century*, in «Agricultural History Review», 54 (2006), pp. 1-23.

11. Grainge, *Assarting and the dynamics*.

Exactly how this focused economic direction related to the equally focused religious and architectural histories of these monasteries as peerless spectacles of consumption seems to have been lost in the modern separation between art and textual historians. As for the archaeology, amazingly few of these monasteries have been subjected to modern investigations. This is the elephant in the room…

By comparison with the *emporia* (craft specialization; use of coins, procurement issues), monasteries, notwithstanding their allegedly high populations of monks were quintessential central places, characterized principally by their administration and high levels of consumption including monumental buildings (technically made possible by the renewed use of lime mortar)[12] rather than their economic activity. The emphasis upon the monasteries of St. Denis and St. Germain des Prés as fairs and redistribution nodes has yet to demonstrated by archaeological means.[13] Indeed, it is tempting to speculate whether the rare economic data for early medieval monastic activity is in fact rhetoric, matched only by the architecture and artistic ambitions of these places. This said, these were tightly organized elite regional centres that operated in parallel and competition to the administrative *nuclei* such as royal households occupying largely deserted Roman towns.

Archaeologically, the monastic cities of the Carolingian era are distinctive for two reasons. First, they had highly variegated, formulaic topographic plans. The contemporary texts make this clear as does, of course, the schematic blueprint for such a Carolingian monastery, the St. Gall Plan of c. 820.[14] This plan shows that apart from the main ritual centre – the church, with a crypt, and the *claustrum* – there were many service buildings and associated production facilities. Second, the archaeology, however fragmentary, emphasizes – as with the *emporia* – the procurement of labour services as tribute on an extraordinary scale to bring about the renovation in «180 episcopal sees and 700 great monasteries (in some 300 of which the emperor had a direct interest)»,[15] followed by a shift away from

12. S. Stelze-Hueglin, *"Renovatio imperii" on the Muensterhuegel of Basle? A reappraisal of mechanical mortar mixers*, available at http://medieval-europe-paris-2007.univ-paris1.fr/Stelzle-Hueglin.pdf.

13. A. Verhulst, *The Carolingian economy*, Cambridge 2002, pp. 101-102.

14. W. Horn, E. Born, *The Plan of Saint Gall. A study of the architecture and economy of, and life in, a paradigmatic Carolingian monastery*, Berkeley 1979.

15. Brown, *The rise*, p. 442.

enlisting labour services as abbot's, intermediaries with the supernatural, sought minor elite support for these places. Third, excavated evidence has brought to light evidence of high-quality craft production associated with almost all the monasteries. Glass-making, for example, has been found at virtually all the excavated monasteries, as have traces of metal-working, often associated with book preparation.[16] Without doubt, crafts such as book production and glass-making show that these centres were involved in production, but for what kind of administered exchange?

Until now, unlike the *emporia*, the micro-topography of these places and their evolution as central-places has been defined as much by the rhetoric of the texts as the material evidence. The evidence has had a static dynamic with archaeologists providing glimpses of monumental buildings and traded goods, and the (Carolingian) polyptych records offering detailed snapshots. Sorting through these images it is hard to grasp any interrelationships between the settlement morphology including, for example, its use of script and the material culture, especially in a regional context.

1. *San Vincenzo al Volturno*

Now, however, the archaeology of the one extensively excavated example at San Vincenzo al Volturno in central Italy suggests that it was conceived as a central place commanding a block of territory, but evolved in strategically arranged episodes with the changing political economy of the Beneventan Principality, without fully engaging with the emerging markets of south central Italy. Phase by phase – essentially over approximately four generations – the monastery was transformed from a closed household to a centre with apparent feudal relations. Let us look at this in more detail **(Fig. 1).**

San Vincenzo al Volturno is located on the northernmost frontier of the Principality of Benevento, directly opposite the southern limits of the Carolingian empire. As a case study of an early medieval monastery, San Vincenzo has seemed unhelpful because of its location far from the Frankish heartlands, and indeed, because it patently lies in southern Italy beyond the apparent reach of the Carolingians. As Peter Brown persuasively

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16. *Ibid.*, p. 275; R. Hodges, S. Leppard, J. Mitchell, **San Vincenzo 5. San Vincenzo Maggiore and its workshops, London 2011.**

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put it: in comparison with the Byzantine empire, «the Carolingian empire never developed a single, all-absorbing centre. Instead, the court acted as a "distribution centre" […] for personnel».[17] Aachen's reach was, it has been supposed, limited to "advisers". Then, too, historians have been sceptical of the significance of these extensive excavations because, as Balzaretti observes: «San Vincenzo will always be atypical, simply because nothing was built over the amazing remains».[18] Yet, as we shall see, the individual elements – buildings and activities – are hardly exceptional, being known from many different remaining churches and monasteries from all parts of Latin Christendom as well as from the written descriptions of monasteries.

The sequence of monastic plans now apparent at San Vincenzo encompassing the 8th and 9th centuries shows a shift from an essentially sacred nucleus in phase 3c to one in phase 4 where, with San Vincenzo Maggiore constituting the majestic centre-piece of a new order, there is a powerful distinction between the sacred and the secular. The 8th-century phase 3c monastery was tightly organized, rather in the manner of the earlier Roman *villa rustica* with the main church and major residential dwelling (for an abbot or the Beneventan duke) being almost contiguous. Its material culture including its artistic ornamentation was negligible **(Fig. 2).**

By contrast, in the next phase (4), spanning the early 9th century, the monastery was terraced, as though in the antique sense there was an intention to conquer nature, and planned in a modular form (using a Beneventan *passus* and a system of grids) with corridors and, of course, thresholds (mostly taken from antique buildings) creating a well-ordered and prominently signalled separation of two different worlds. Stone, marble *spolia,* timber, mortar, tiles, plaster, paint, glass, lead and iron were consumed on a colossal scale.

The binary psychological authority created by this new order should not be underestimated. Space and distance were evidently designed with a view to defining new controls in the monastery. Corridors and terracing, in particular, are features of Italian monasteries of this period, notably Farfa,[19]

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17. Brown, *The rise*, p. 443.

18. R. Balzaretti, *Review article: San Vincenzo al Volturno: history rewritten*, in «Early Medieval Europe», 8 (1999), pp. 387-399: p. 397.

19. C.B. McClendon, *Imperial Abbey of Farfa: architectural currents of the early Middle Ages,* New Haven 1987.

Monte Cassino[20] and S. Pietro in Palazzuolo (Monteverdi), Tuscany[21] and presumably were emulating the new Frankish monasteries at places like Fulda, Lorsch and St. Denis. Similar ceremonial corridors also connected palaces to their private churches in "monastery-palaces".[22]

The archaeology of the sequential monastic plans in phases 3c, 4 and 5 bears witness to important changes with far-reaching consequences. To begin with, let us examine each phase in turn:

Phase 3c has been dated approximately to the period between the 780s, when the Cassinese chronicler Paul the Deacon describes San Vincenzo as a large community, and the early 790s, when the construction of a new abbey-church, San Vincenzo Maggiore, began **(Fig. 3)**.

Little of this monastery has been exposed, but it appears to have been a unitary nucleus gathered around a main church, San Vincenzo Minore. Immediately to the south lay a *claustrum*, with a refectory measuring 21 metres long and 11.6 metres wide serviced by a kitchen in a contiguous building. The refectory had a seating capacity of approximately forty. A major residential building – the abbot's house or a royal palace - lay between the church and the refectory, attached to which were what appear to be three or four water mills. The monks's dormitory probably occupied the tower complex of the 5th- to 6th-century *villa rustica.* Did the abbot live in this tower too **(Fig. 2)**? Associated buildings may have extended as far south as the pisé workshops found south of San Vincenzo Maggiore, but there is no evidence of any segregated sectors.

Phase 4 marks an important transformation dating to the era of Abbot Joshua (792-817) (**Fig. 4).** No exact chronological evidence exists, but the 12th-century *Chronicon Vulturnense* ascribes the construction of a new abbey-church, San Vincenzo Maggiore, consecrated in c. AD 808 to Joshua's abbacy. Three different sectors were created by using thoroughfares as means of separation, lending the monastery the character of a monastic city. These were: (i) a proprietary palace significantly occupying the old monastic

20. *San Vincenzo al Volturno 2: The 1980-86 excavations. Part II*, ed. by R. Hodges, London 1995.

21. R. Francovich, G. Bianchi, *Prime indagini archeologiche in un monastero della Tuscia altomedievale: S. Pietro in Palazzuolo a Monteverdi Marittimo (PI)*, in *IV Congresso Nazionale di Archeologia Medievale*, ed. by R. Francovich, M. Valenti, Florence 2006, pp. 346-352.

22. J. Blair, *Palaces or ministers? Northampton and Cheddar reconsidered*, in «Anglo-Saxon England», 25 (1996), pp. 97-121: p. 121 and p. 103, fig. 4.

church, San Vincenzo Minore; (ii) a new, expanded *claustrum* including a large abbot's palace **(Fig. 5)** and expanded accommodation for the monks (bisected by a channel carrying water); and (iii) the new basilica of San Vincenzo Maggiore and its elevated atrium – a cemetery for the monks.

The proprietary palace and *claustrum* seem to have had a binary arrangement, separated by a simple vestibule. This was the palace technically outside the monastery precinct, as opposed to the earlier *palatium intramuraneum*.[23] San Vincenzo Maggiore, on the other hand, was the point where the distinguished guests and the monastic community could meet, having arrived by different passageways. The monastic route to the abbey-church passed over the tombs of deceased brethren (in paradise), whereas distinguished visitors passed over their deceased forebears housed in a small cemetery inside the entrance hall adjoining the palace, before skirting around the *claustrum*, and passing along a thoroughfare that offered an exceptional vantage point. Note should be made that the location of the two-storey abbot's palace would appear to have been able to follow either of these routes. His was a dwelling of noble proportions (similar to the aristocratic dwelling found in the Forum of Nerva, Rome)[24] adjacent to the possible warming room where the monks involved in administering the monastery met. It had accommodation for servants and a first-floor reception room, reached by an internal (as opposed to external) staircase lit by a magnificent stained-glass window. Conditions for the monks could not have been more different: they were crammed into a long airy building with the minimum of facilities.

A 50-kilogram bell housed in a simple bell-tower attached to the front of the atrium ordered the new temporal rhythm of the community's lives. "Church time" was now marked for all to hear: for the privileged visitors to the monastery it served to emphasize not only the rhythm of monastic life but also the time of sin and the time of death, encouraging the need to do good works and offer pious gifts «against the hour of the frightening passage into the hereafter».[25]

23. C.R. Brühl *The town as a political centre: general survey*, in *European towns: their archaeology and history*, ed. by M.W. Barley, London 1977, pp. 419-430: pp. 426-427.

24. R. Hodges, *The 9th-century abbot's house at San Vincenzo al Volturno*, in *SODALITAS. Studi in memoria di Don Faustino Avagliano*, ed. by M. Dell' Omo, C. Crova, F. Marazzi, Montecassino 2016, pp. 473-490; R. Santangeli Valenziani, *Edilizia residenziale in Italia nell'altomedioevo*, Rome 2011, pp. 80-88.

25. J. Le Goff, *Time, work and culture in the Middle Ages*, Chicago 1980, p. 38.

The use of script distinguished this new monastic phase. The majority of the floor tiles were signed. Painted inscriptions were deployed in the decorations of the rooms. Reused Roman inscriptions denoted thresholds and key points in the place, and the monks within the monastic graveyard were each graced with tombstones. In death the monks almost achieved parity with the abbot.

Alongside the south side of San Vincenzo Maggiore lay the Collective Workshop, separated by the intervening atrium from the *claustrum*. Access by a south staircase permitted monks to visit the craftsmen working and living here. In these workshops, like the Collective Workshop illustrated on the (later) Plan of St. Gall (c. 820), precious objects were made, in this case, glassware, metalwork, ivories and bonework.[26] The model for the collective operations, where a variety of glass and metal activities were practiced, appears to be a late antique workshop form, best-known from Sardis.[27] Many similar examples are being discovered in Italy from the later Roman period, such as at the cabotage port of Spolverino at the mouth of the river Ombrone, Tuscany.[28]

In phase 5, now dated to the 820s and early 830s,[29] significant alterations were made to the bi-polar monastic plan **(Fig. 6)**. First and foremost, San Vincenzo Maggiore was furnished with an annular crypt and an imposing eastwork was constructed as a new façade for the atrium, reminiscent of the Lateran in Rome. The two most important features of these new building works were: (i) a north lodge in the eastwork giving access by way of a narrow staircase to the elevated atrium for visitors coming from outside the monastic city, and (ii) the annular crypt, presumably containing the relics of St. Vincent brought from Spain. The architectural aggrandizement of San Vincenzo Maggiore extended well beyond the building. In front of the elevated atrium lay an outer atrium or courtyard which reached much of the way across the open area towards a new bridge over the river Volturno, the *Pons marmoreus*. This new bridge complemented bridges to the palace

26. *San Vincenzo 5.*

27. J.S. Crawford, *The Byzantine Shops at Sardis*, in *Archaeological Explorations of Sardis*, Harvard 199.

28. E. Chirico, M. Colombini, E. Rubegni, A. Sebastiani, *Relazione preliminare alla prima campagna di scavi archeologici a Spolverino*, in «The journal of Fastionline», available at http://www.fastionline.org/docs/FOLDER-it-2011-232.pdf, 26 March 2013.

29. The dating of phase 5 has now been assigned to an earlier date, the 820s spanning abbots Talaricus and Epyphanius, approximately a decade earlier than is described in *San Vincenzo 5*, p. 439. A future publication will set out the evidence for this.

and to the cloister and therefore, it is surmised, was designed for a new class of visitors to the abbey-church. Presumably these were secular pilgrims who might also access a back passage to the Collective Workshop. At the same time the Beneventan proprietory palace was enlarged and refurbished, as was its passageway linking it to San Vincenzo Maggiore. Finally with these changes, the monastic *claustrum* was now directly connected to the Collective Workshop by way of a vaulted tunnel below the eastwork, a major engineering feat. Output from these workshops was clearly deemed to be of importance to the monastic community. The midden of rubbish amassed by the craftsmen at this time reveals a diet of beef, suggesting privilege, as opposed to a peasant diet largely of goat or sheep. The community enjoyed high standards of living at its apogee.

Phase 5a1, in sum, marks the moment when visitors (who were also probably donors) comprised two different classes: those who occasionally resided (and in some cases were interred) in the palace complex, and others who after crossing the *Pons marmoreous* proceeded by way of the north lodge to the elevated atrium and San Vincenzo Maggiore. In this phase, then, San Vincenzo was no longer the monopolistic monastery of one secular group (a Beneventan princely family), but opened up to others, presumably of lesser social status.

In phase 5a2 **(Fig. 7)** there were further significant alterations. The north lodge in the eastwork of the atrium was downgraded, and a new outer porticoed atrium with an accompanying church, according to the *Chronicon Vulturnense*, was constructed in 842-844 by Abbot Toto. Lesser visitors were being received with greater attention to the rhetoric of the buildings.

These alterations coincided with the reorganization of the Collective Workshop. The direct connection to the *claustrum* was closed off by a midden of rubbish, as a new passage ran in between it and the great church. More substantive alterations were made too. Room C, occupied since the early 9th century (phases 4 and 5a1) by a glass-maker, was now made into the modestly elegant dwelling of a monastic official, probably a chamberlain, whose dwelling was connected by way of a stone staircase to the adjacent elevated atrium and basilica. This official, it is surmised, oversaw the division of the workshops with the eastern two (or more) rooms still dedicated to producing high-quality prestigious goods, while at least one of western rooms was turned over to agricultural use and for a period was a granary. In sum, the official supervised two key components of the monastery – its production of important prestige objects – primitive valuables – and its grain storage.

How does this sequence of plans shed light on the economic and social history of this central place? Let's begin with the nucleated settlement itself, then examine its interaction with its immediate territory.

First, if phase 4 is indeed to be associated with Abbot Joshua (792-817), then we might assume that the enlargement of the early 8th-century monastery in phase 3c should be attributed to his immediate predecessors who negotiated substantial support from the Beneventan dukes as Charlemagne was exerting pressure upon central Italy. The phase 5 re-building of San Vincenzo Maggiore with a crypt and elevated eastwork, whether or not associated with the acquisition of the relics of St. Vincent from Saragossa during the Frankish-Umayadd truce of c. AD 815-820, appears to begin either in the era of Abbot Talaricus (817-823) or his immediate successor, Abbot Epyphanius (824-842). The exact historical dates, of course, cannot be determined from the archaeology.

The archaeology of the monastic plans, then, shows that phase 3c in spatial terms was an enlargement of the original nucleus, which was a donation made in c. AD 703 by the Duke of Benevento. The original donor, we can surmise, was persuaded by the new political circumstances to support the expansion of his monastery under Abbot Paul (782-792). The phase 4 monastery, however, with its bi-polar form comprising a palace complex and a separated claustral complex strongly suggests that a proprietary donor, presumably a Benevantan duke or prince, took over the monastery and re-constructed it as a palace complex including a burial ground. Given the chronology, the most likely candidate would be Prince Grimoald III, the son of Prince Arichis II who as a young man was sent by his father as a hostage to the Frankish court. The context for what appears in historical terminology to be a proprietary monastery in phase 4, we must surmise, was when the new abbot, Joshua, persuaded his Beneventan donor to support the construction of a new monastic complex and new abbey-church on a huge scale. This ambition, of course, was presumably predicated on the ability of the abbot to attract an architect and appropriate artisans making possible the labour mobilization to undertake these huge works.

With the making of the phase 5 plan, the direction of the monastery was unexpectedly altered with the monastery now covering at least 5 hectares and involving the procurement of labour and resources on an unprecedented, urban, scale. Two new elements were introduced into the settlement plan. This occurred either in the age of Abbot Talaricus (817-823) or more probably early in the abbacy of his successor, Epyphanius (824-842). What had been

effectively a (monopolistic) proprietary monastery for almost one hundred and twenty years now – in the 820s or 830s – permitted, indeed, encouraged, the reception of lesser visitors, and conceivably, ultimately their burial within the monastic precinct. The *Pons marmoreus* and the north lodge entrance in the eastwork were the two principal new investments in this new category of visitor, while the palace, notwithstanding the change to the exclusivity of the monastery, was also notably aggrandized (Fig. 8). The number of visitors, of course, should not be exaggerated. The north lodge entrance for minor visitors was modest, while the annular crypt inserted into San Vincenzo Maggiore showed no signs of wear. The new category of visitors was also surely donors as well. Besides being able to visit the shrine in San Vincenzo Maggiore, the passages suggest these visitors were encouraged to visit the Collective Workshop. Indeed, the status of the workshops seems to have soared, to judge from the investment in the vaulted tunnel now linking the *claustrum* to these specialist craftsmen. After 842-844 the importance of the visitors (and donors) approaching San Vincenzo Maggiore from the *Pons marmoreus* was recognized by the aggrandizement of their entry facilities. At this time the connection from the *claustrum* to the Collective Workshop was blocked and, tellingly, an official made his dwelling in room C, presumably to directly oversee the operations here.

The second new topographical feature in the 9th century and probably from the 830s onwards was the creation of a *borgo*, a settlement of post-built dwellings, where small-scale artisanal activities also occurred[30] **(Fig. 8)**. This lay across the river from the monastery. There is no evidence of market activity here, although in the 19th century, as it happens, this was the location of a sheep fair.

2. Terra Sancti Vincentii

The archaeology of San Vincenzo's hinterland – its *terra* – following a field survey and selective excavations could not contrast more remarkably with the monumental character and material affluence of the monastery.

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30. O. Gilkes, M. Moran, S. Tremlett, *Excavations outside the monastic precinct: The Samnite and Roman settlement and the early medieval industrial complex*, in *San Vincenzo al Volturno 4. From Text to Territory. Excavations and Surveys in the Monastic* Terra, ed. by K. Bowes, K. Francis, R. Hodges, London 2006, pp. 93-133.

Limited historical evidence suggests that the settlement of the 7th- to 9th-centuries might have been small hilltop villages, engaged in small-scale agricultural activity and not involved in regional networks of production and distribution. The archaeological evidence is largely negative. Although the survey failed to locate early medieval sites, it is highly unlikely that the landscape was entirely abandoned after the 6th century. At a scatter of sites across the *terra*, located in ecological niches – fertile points where subsistence agriculture could readily be practised – evidence was found for settlement dating to all periods from the Bronze Age, through the early, middle and late Roman periods, and then again during the high and late medieval periods, often up to the present day. These niches are unlikely to have been abandoned during the early medieval period. The invisibility of such sites in the archaeological record suggests, firstly, that the structures were likely either post-built or *pisé*, with thatched roofs (see the workshop buildings at San Vincenzo),[31] which have left only a modest imprint upon the archaeological record, and secondly, that the inhabitants were *not* interacting with the monastery sufficiently to be receiving the same forms of pottery used in the monastery, or other materials which might be readily recognised in the archaeological record.

The construction of churches and shrines by the monastery in the late 8th and 9th centuries may suggest that, even if the population of the territory was small, the abbey considered it important to provide facilities for cult centres outside the monastery itself. These buildings, modest though they were in their architectural proportions, appear to have been roofed with tiles and decorated with painted frescoes inside. In comparison to the proposed post-built or *pisé* peasant dwellings with their thatched roofs, these were distinctive and well-built structures. The dimensions of the churches at Campo La Fontana and Colle Sant'Angelo indicate that the chapels were cult centres, rather than churches serving a regular congregation.[32] They appear to have been ritual *foci* in the landscape; their purpose, we may surmise from the remains of their plans, paintings and glass ware, was to promote the monastery through the cult of relics and saints.

However, the pattern of life in the valley abruptly altered in the late 9th-early 10th century. This is vividly illustrated at Colle Castellano, where a new fortified village was created on a hill previously occupied on a much

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31. ***San Vincenzo 5.***
32. *San Vincenzo al Volturno 4*, pp. 225-261.

smaller scale.[33] The intervention of the monastery is testified in three forms: the creation of the enclosure wall, the prominent materialism (ceramics and other moveable goods) of the community, and the managed livestock regime. This picture is supported by the more fragmentary archaeological evidence obtained from the survey and other excavations. These discoveries are consistent with the picture provided by the 10th-century foundation charters of the *castelli* that illustrate the monastery's concern to manage the landscape and the human resources of the upper Volturno more effectively.[34]

3. *Discussion*

The archaeology of this central place and its immediate territory has to be interpreted alongside Chris Wickham's seminal analysis of the land charters pertaining to San Vincenzo's gifts of monastic lands throughout central southern Italy.[35] He identified four phases of donations:

- before 800: Beneventan court gave blocks of land
- 800-819: many small donations
- 819-830s: no donations
- 830s-881: many small donations.

This history of landed donations would presuppose that San Vincenzo was essentially a Beneventan ducal monastery that prospered with the rise of the short-lived Beneventan kingdom. Abbot Joshua, we might conclude, attached San Vincenzo's fortunes to those of the embryonic Beneventan kingdom. However, by c. AD 819 the monastery must have sensed that its star was waining, and suffering a dramatic decline in donations, it set out to re-establish itself. It is a chicken-and-egg argument as to whether first, the relics of St. Vincent were acquired, or the annular crypt and accompanying eastwork were built following an architectural model already familiar in Rome to encourage a new category of donor. Plainly, in this new era, the production of luxury goods in the adjacent Collective Workshops formed

33. *Ibid.*
34. C. Wickham, *Monastic lands and monastic patrons*, in *San Vincenzo al Volturno 2*, pp. 138-152.
35. *Ibid.*; H. Zielinski, *Codice Diplomatico Longobardo*, vol. IV/2. *I diplomi dei duchi di Benevento*, Rome 2003.

part of a new strategy. This strategy, as far as we can detect, was sustained without further alterations until AD 881.

This interpretation of course begs many questions about relations with the Beneventan court, as well as relations with papal Rome as the phase 5 abbey-church took its final 9th-century form. The scale of the phase 4-project dwarfed, for instance, any comparable project outside Rome in the age of Pope Leo III. Yet, as we have seen, the phase 5-aggrandisement of San Vincenzo Maggiore has all the hallmarks of Pope Pascal I's building projects in Rome.[36] The archaeology also invites us to question how San Vincenzo used donations to sustain itself as its political support weakened in the later decades of the 9th century. Above all, the sequence of monastic plans reveals an unfolding agency that was drawing upon a wide range of concepts and human resources to develop a strategy that, as of phase 5 in the 830s if not before, became a norm for monasteries throughout Latin Christendom.

More specifically, conceived of as the sacred centrepiece in an expansive gesture, the vaunting construction of San Vincenzo Maggiore around AD 800 almost certainly belonged to the brief period when, under Prince Grimoald III, the Beneventans not only were sympathetic to Charlemagne and the Carolingian revolution but also increasingly affluent.[37] Like the neighbouring monastery of Monte Cassino, San Vincenzo served as a bulwark to deter the wilful attempt by Pope Hadrian to acquire these northern regions of the principality.[38] More to the point, San Vincenzo and Monte Cassino were colossal *ex novo* enterprises in bald contrast to Pope Hadrian's programme of refurbishment and renewal in Rome[39] but in line with Leo III's ambitious and magniloquent new buildings at the Lateran, the two great triclinia of 798-799 and c. AD 800-801. The rhetoric of

36. C.J. Goodson, *The Rome of pope Pascal I: papal power, urban renovation, church building and relic translation, 817-824*, Cambridge 2010.

37. W.R. Day, *The monetary reforms of Charlemagne and the circulation of the money in early medieval Campania*, in «Early Medieval Europe», 6 (1997), pp. 25-45.

38. O. Bertolini, *Carlomagno a Benevento*, in *Karl der Grosse*, vol. I, ed. by W. Braunfels, Düsserdolf 1965, pp. 609-671: p. 635; M. Costambeys, *Power and patronage in Early Medieval Italy*, Cambridge 2008, pp. 70-71.

39. R. Krautheimer, *Rome, a profile of a city, 312-1308*, Princeton 1980, pp. 112-113; *Roma medievale: aggiornamenti*, ed. by P. Delogu, Florence 1998; P. Delogu, *The Popes and their town in the time of Charlemagne*, in *Encounters, Excavations and Argosies. Essays for Richard Hodges*, ed. by J. Mitchell, J. Moreland, B. Leal, Oxford 2017, pp. 105-115.

Abbots Joshua and Gisulf's architecture (and ornament) at San Vincenzo and Monte Cassino respectively cannot have been lost on the papacy. A generation later, the likely insertion of the annular crypt – probably a direct result of acquiring the relics of St. Vincent – belongs to the moment when San Vincenzo considered it strategically important to diversify its resource base. It set about persuading minor donors and pilgrims to support it. Its model this time was Pope Paschal's campaign to build new basilicas in Rome.[40] Rome, it appears, once more set the standard in the rhetoric of church-building. San Vincenzo embarked on its imitative venture either in the early 820s, or more probably under Prince Sicard in the 830s, as the Beneventan court actively attempted to alter its political and economic directions. Finally, in the 840s, as the Beneventan Principality succumbed to civil war, Abbot Toto of San Vincenzo and his successors invested in aggrandizing the facilities for donors and pilgrims. Fascinatingly, fresh paintings, the continuing production of literate display and memorials as well as the production of such items as glass lamps were no longer considered as important as before. Indeed, the earlier, largely phase 4-decoration of the monastery seems to have been considered perfectly satisfactory and merited only modest repair in the forty or so years prior to the sack in AD 881. In all probability the monastery no longer had access to the skilled artisans and artists that had brought lustre to its imposing architecture. We can conclude that its political capacity to mobilize labour no longer existed. Perhaps too, given the political instability, the monastery was investing elsewhere, conceivably in a treasury like the one at Monte Cassino[41] as a safeguard against catastrophe. In process, then, was cultural shift with profound social and economic outcomes.

Henning interprets the production in Carolingian-period monasteries as part of a pronounced market activity.[42] This is difficult to demonstrate at San Vincenzo. Little is known about the productivity of its farflung estates and their economic contribution to the monastery. By contrast, the workshops undoubtedly furnished the monastery itself with prestige goods, reinforcing its appearance as a centre of consumption. But then, as the connection to the *claustrum* was blocked and the workshop official gained his own dwelling

40. Goodson, *The Rome of pope Pascal I.*
41. O. Citarella, H.M. Willard, *The ninth-century treasure of Monte Cassino in the context of political and economic developments in south Italy*, Montecassino 1983.
42. Henning, *Early European towns,* p. 21.

in the complex with direct access to the church of San Vincenzo Maggiore, it looks as though a new economic strategy was in place. Conceivably, the workshops were now producing for a marketplace (as Henning proposes). Matthew Innes has challenged this: «we should not assume that the social imperatives of giving were secondary to a modernizing market logic».[43] Given the nature of the products found in and around the workshops at San Vincenzo including book fastenings, ivories, fine metalwork and enamelled objects, an interpretation considering social exchange and elite consumption appears more appropriate. Excavations in *terra* do not indicate that these objects were destined for local consumption. Nor were these now needed within the monastery itself. So, a third option is that the activities of the Collective Workshop were re-directed towards producing countergifts.

Countergifts were tokens for benefactors and provided a managed solution to the practice of making donors's possessions inalienable. These were gifts given in return for another, and thus part of a reciprocal exchange. Gift and countergift are often thought to be of the same value, although this was frequently by no means the case. Often, the countergift might be of a lower value, merely recognizing the act of gift-giving. The most celebrated illustration of this recognitive act of gift-giving was Charlemagne's most countergifts to the Abbasid caliphate Harun al-Rashid, from whom he received the war-elephant Abu-Abaz and a brass water clock. The gifts indicate the Caliph's cultural and political superiority, constructing the Frank as a barbarian. Charlemagne, however, interpreted these gifts as signs of eastern acknowledgement of his imperial success and responded accordingly.[44] Were the circumstances at San Vincenzo so different? The anthropologist Mary Helms describes this succinctly: «in the process the cosmology and the actuality of political structure and operation are matched to achieve a reasonably functioning fit between action and legitimation».[45] The abbot was offering a resting-place after death, with possible interment in the cemetery overlooking the abbey church, in return for the lands and labour needed to sustain the monastery. Countergifts were modest material

43. M. Innes, *Framing the Carolingian economy*, in «Journal of Agrarian Change», 9 (2009), pp. 42-58: p. 51; see also: C. Wickham, *Conclusions*, in *The languages of gift in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by W. Davies, P. Fouracre, Cambridge 2010, pp. 238-261.

44. J. Nelson, *The settings of the gift in the reign of Charlemagne* in *The languages of the gift*, pp. 116-148: pp. 133-134.

45. M. Helms, *Craft and the Kingly Ideal*, Austin 1993, p. 214; Id., *Sacred landscape and the early medieval European cloister*, in «Anthropos», 97 (2002), pp. 435-453.

indices of the reliability of this relationship, made in the monastery's workshops, to be interpreted by each recipient in his own personalized way. At stake, transacted through these objects was a contractual arrangement involving trust and reciprocity. Here, in the midst of the Beneventan political upheaval caused by civil war, a modified economic strategy was enacted that connected workshop output to the cult of St. Vincent and the annular crypt in San Vincenzo Maggiore. This effectively prefigured a new (post proprietary monastery) era for the Benedictines.[46]

The topographic archaeology of San Vincenzo al Volturno between c. 780 and 850 reveals a series of explicit steps by the monastic community. First, around AD 800 (in phase 4) the proprietary monastery was aggrandized with considerable architectural rhetoric, presumably as both a political and sacred expression based on the Beneventan *passus* of 1.76 metre (Fig. 9).[47] Corridors characterized this new plan, presumably providing ritual pathways for «purifying, demon-thwarting circumambulatory processions».[48] At the same time the Collective Workshop provided the monastery with a wealth of moveable material culture. As such this was a central place designated for elite consumption. Second, in the 820s (in phase 5a1) this unitary economic strategy was compromised when other secular donors were encouraged to visit the monastery. It is noteworthy that with the arrival of this new order both the abbey church and palace were both enlarged. By now the Collective Workshop was serving the monastery and its donors. Third, soon afterwards in the 840s (phase 5a2), even greater status was paid to these new visitors, presumably as support from the Beneventan court diminished alarmingly amidst the civil war, and with this, a managerial presence was created in the monastery's Collective Workshops to oversee the production, symbolically next to the abbey church. These prestige goods, it is suggested, affirmed a redistribution pattern in which relations with donors to the monastery were cemented in return for moveable gifts, land and services. Coinciding with this third stage dating to the 840s, a new official apparently overseeing these workshops, not only had a direct access by his own staircase to the abbey-church, but also made a granary in the workshop next to his residence.

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46. S.D. White, *Custom, Kingship, and Gifts to Saints*, Chapel Hill 1988.
47. ***San Vincenzo 5****,* p. 6, fig. 1.7.
48. Helms, *Sacred landscape*, p. 447.

The issue of countergifts is not new and of course, being a hypothesis will remain disputed.[49] Yet, following in the footsteps of Marcel Mauss' *The Gift* (1925),[50] historians Stephen White[51] and Barbara Rosenwein[52] showed that gifts by 11th- to 12th-century land-holders to monastic communities were indeed gifts in the sense intended by Marcel Mauss. Critically, though, these were not complete alienations of the right of the donor of the property; this was in fact «keeping-while-giving».[53] A key motive for what appears to be an ambiguity was the apparent difference between the gift and countergift. Families donated real property in exchange, so Rosenwein and White – and most recently Angenendt[54]– contended for the intercession (by means of regularly scheduled masses) which monks and their patron saints provided in heaven. Angenendt has gone further: «from the perspective of the monastic movement's original intentions, it seems quite unthinkable that early medieval monasteries would own vast landed property».[55] Nevertheless, he shows how during the later 8th and 9th centuries priestly ordinations to perform penances, including celebrating masses, served to foster a system which made the monasteries the greatest landowners of their time. Philippe Buc explains the underlying purpose of this gift-giving: «giving […] to the holy in such a way that the gift would be displayed – memorialized the gesture and its meaning – froze them, as it were, into sempiternity».[56]

San Vincenzo's history, in short, followed a pattern throughout Latin Christendom. «The [charter] records […] made these monasteries into political powerhouses, allowing their abbots to become political players of the first rank».[57] Further, «in the townless society […] the monasteries' properties allowed them to realize extraordinary cultural achievements that

49. See *The Languages of Gift in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 116-148.

50. M. Mauss, *The Gift, the form and functions of exchange in archaic societies,* Glencoe 1954 (I ed. 1925).

51. White, *Custom, Kingship.*

52. B.H. Rosenwein, *To be the Neighbour of Saint Peter*, Ithaca 1989.

53. A.B. Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions. The Paradox of Keeping-while-giving*, Berkeley 1992.

54. A. Angenendt, Donationes pro anima: *gift and countergift in the Early Medieval liturgy* in *The Long Morning of Medieval Europe: new directions in early Medieval studies*, ed. by J. Davis, M. McCormick, Aldershot 2008, pp. 131-154.

55. Angenendt, Donationes, p. 145.

56. P. Buc, *Conversion of objects*, in «Viator», 28 (1997), pp. 99-144: p. 100.

57. Angenendt, Donationes, p. 147.

would have been impossible without great endowments. Just to produce one Carolingian Bible required the hides of 200 animals».[58] Note should be made, though, that Rosenwein had previously contended that the donation was not explicitly a gift in return for prayers but «rather expresses the salvific effects of charity».[59] In other words, these were not simple purchases of spiritual gifts. In this context the Collective Workshop at San Vincenzo presents a new dimension to this issue, quite possibly in common with other monastic workshops of this era throughout Latin Christendom, of which only small parts have so far been excavated. So, to quote Janet Nelson, «the social register of a family's endowment of a church […] was distinct from the legal register of that gift's recording, yet these were understood as belonging within one language».[60] Clearly, early medieval worlds were far from simple, and not surprisingly the connections between power, gifts and the supernatural strike us as foreign but by the 9th century were almost certainly commonplace.

As we have seen, though, San Vincenzo's workshop complex by the 840s was not a facility for supplying the monastery or indeed a regional market, as Joachim Henning, for example, has supposed: «monastic substitutes for "normal" towns seem to mark a Carolingian detour in European town development that was dearly paid». True, «these curious "monastery-towns' remained but an episode»[61] but, as is now apparent at San Vincenzo, craft production formed part of a strategic step from the proprietary monastery with its powerful single donor, towards a monastic type that, with many social changes in motion, needed multiple donors in order to survive. Given the ubiquity of production at 9th-century monasteries, as Henning notes, does the San Vincenzo illustration shed light on the shift from one type of monastic production mode to another, as these places, encouraged by the **reform Benedictine code**, became genuine central-places, administering **of the?** regions. Central to this was the production of prestige goods like glassware that sustained extant patterns of elite redistribution and consumption. Providing objects with explicit monastic biographies as part of the package of countergifts were deemed essential, so it seems, to secure the survival of

58. *Ibid*., p. 153.
59. Rosenwein, *To be the Neighbour*, pp. 136-141; n.89.
60. Nelson, *The settings of the gift*, p. 117.
61. J. Henning, *Strong rulers – weak economy? Rome, the Carolingians and the archaeology of slavery in first Millennium AD*, in *The Long Morning of Medieval Europe*, pp. 33-55: pp. 51-52.

the monasteries as their place in an increasingly stratified society was eroded. Constructing such relations connecting the present to the afterlife by using material culture inevitably involved taking the risk of salesmanship. Just how risky is evident from the archaeology of San Vincenzo where on the 10 October 881, the Arab attack, undertaken with the support of the Bishop of Naples, targeted the abbot's house and entry into the Collective Workshop, and left the palace and San Vincenzo Maggiore largely undamaged.[62] The assailants clearly had specific aims on that fateful day which terminated the monastery's century of extraordinary affluence and status, and consigned it to a subsequent, modest regional status.

One last issue regarding donations: of the moveable gifts and donations to the monastery we know little apart from the recorded transactions of lands described by Wickham.[63] Yet, long-distance transportation of perishables on a regional scale clearly happened.[64] One of the most vivid illustrations of this is the discovery of marine fish-bones in a drain adjacent to the kitchen of San Vincenzo al Volturno; this was clearly abandoned on the day the monastery was sacked in 881. The sieved contents of the drain contained the remains of 44 fish, of which 18 (comprising principally red mullet) were from saline waters, almost certainly the lagoons, then part of the monastery's farflung (lagoonal) property, at Lesina on the Adriatic Sea.[65]

In sum, San Vincenzo appears to have adapted to the changing economic circumstances of its region between c. 780-881. It was a Lombard rather than a Carolingian monastery, and therefore its history combined a Frankish concept with Benevantan best practice. The opportunity to see more than one snapshot of its evolution makes it important. Its economic base was initially facilitated by its patrons, the Beneventan royal household,

62. R. Hodges, S. Leppard, J. Mitchell, *The sack of San Vincenzo al Volturno reconsidered*, in «Acta Archaeologica», 83 (2011), pp. 286-301.

63. Wickham, *Monastic lands*.

64. R. Hodges, *Trade and culture process in a 9ᵗʰ-century monastic statelet: San Vincenzo al Volturno*, in *Migration, Integration and Connectivity on the Southeastern frontier of the Carolingian Empire*, ed. by D. Dzino, Milošević, T. Vedris, Leiden 2018, pp. 268-286.

65. F. Marazzi, A. Carannante, *Dal mare ai monti: l'approvvigionamento ittico nelle cucine del monastero di San Vincenzo al Volturno nel IX secolo*, in *Vie degli animali. Vie degli uomini*, ed. by G.Volpe, A. Buglione, G. De Venuto, Bari 2010, pp. 107-118; on the rarity of evidence for this trade in fish: F. Salvadori, *Zooarcheologia e controllo delle risorse economiche locali nel medioevo*, in «Post-Classical Archaeologies», 1 (2011), pp. 195-244: pp. 224-225.

but with the calamitous decline of that patronage, the monastery redefined its economy deploying the rhetoric of architecture and its skills base to do so. This involved obtaining a workforce as well as tripling its number of monks; it also involved acquiring stone, *spolia*, materials for the floors and decorating the walls, as well as metals for a miscellany of construction purposes and glass for making the vessels used to light the new buildings. Although the major rebuilding of the monastery in the early 9th century undoubtedly drew to San Vincenzo new donations of lands, it is not at all clear that its spectacular conspicuous consumption was related to a strategy of agrarian intensification. Certainly, its early 9th-century use of material culture such as glass was entirely intended for its own consumption. This altered from the 840s onwards. The monastery adapted to the significant regional social competition by engaging in exchange with other donors, while beginning to invest in its agrarian production and repopulating its territory.[66] Investment in conspicuous consumption (for example, new buildings; new decoration; even perhaps foodstuffs), though, diminished remarkably. Instead, in the face of the rise of competing magnates,[67] San Vincenzo was taking a step towards participating in an early feudal arrangement, exploiting its control of salvation (physically reinforced by countergifts) in exchange for lands, their products, their workforces and services, as well as initiating by c. AD 840 a belated intensification of the agrarian potential of its own territory. Can the case study of San Vincenzo be used as a type site for the phased transformation of a centre of monastic consumption in the Carolingian era? Obviously, quibbling historical particularism aside, more such excavations, especially in the Frankish heartlands are needed to put this reading of monastic history into European perspective. But does San Vincenzo shed light on three major steps that characterize this *intermezzo* involving monastic cities:

1. Pre- late 8th-century monasteries were mostly small, under-developed central places seldom with any material distinction. They were characterized by self-sufficiency.

2. During the late 8th century huge conspicuous investment/consumption occurred at hundreds if not thousands of monasteries in Latin Christendom. This involved the mobilization on a huge scale, and simultaneously it stimulated a sudden and important spike in the procurement of materials

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66. Costambeys, *Power and patronage*, p. 92.
67. Duby, *The early growth*, p. 110.

to support the rhetoric of the *renovatio*. Supported by a small number of donors, this defined these ritual central places. Agrarian intensification, however, was limited to serving the needs of the central place.

3. With the decline of major patronage, the monasteries, being major central-places, began to adopt a twin track programme comprising the investment in new, intensification of agriculture in their landscapes, and concurrently strategies to widen their donor bases. Investment in conspicuous consumption accordingly diminished strikingly.
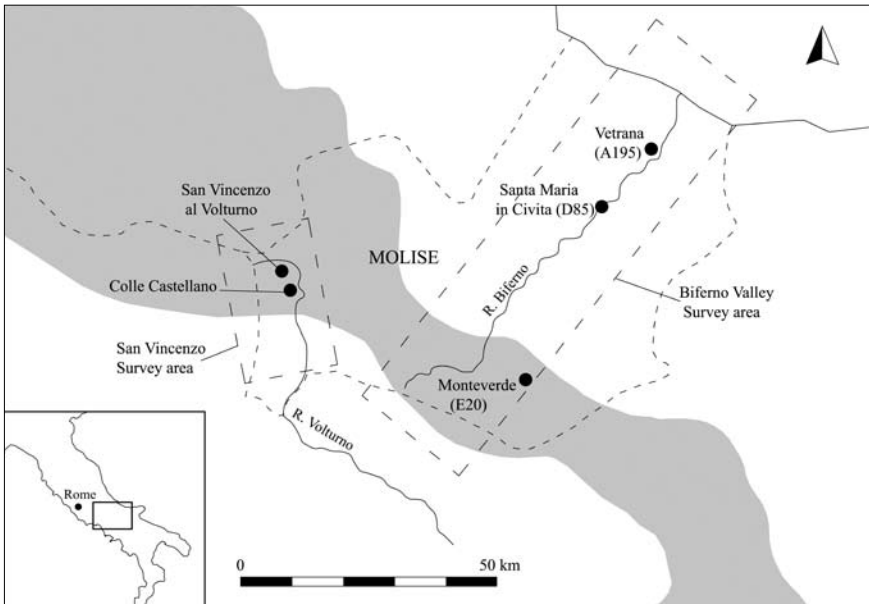
Fig. 1. Map showing the position of San Vincenzo al Volturno.

A - Crypt Church
B - South Church
C - Tower?
D - Dormitory?

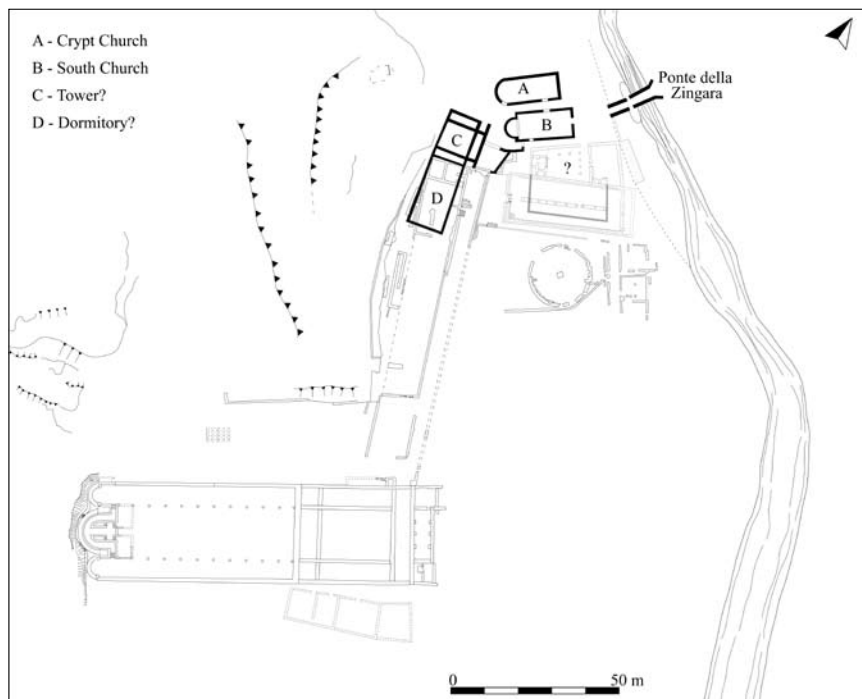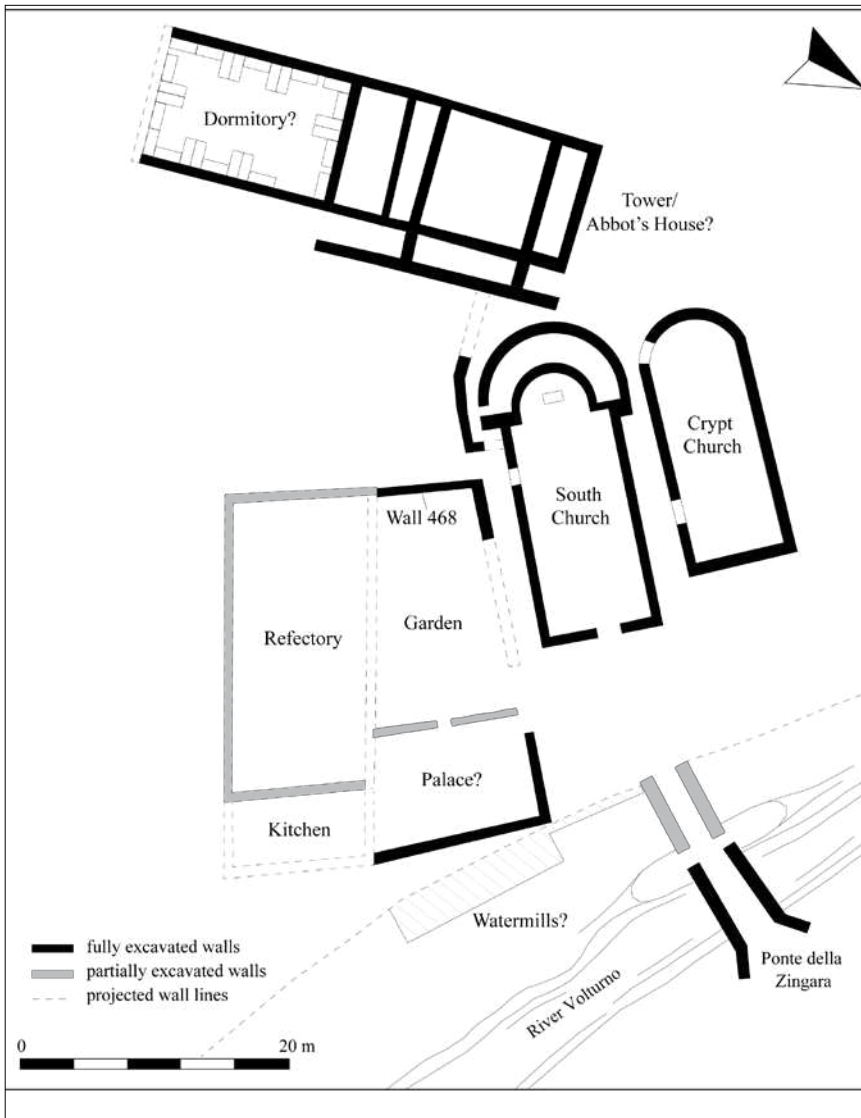Ponte della
Zingara

0   50 m

Fig. 2. Hypothetical plan of San Vincenzo al Volturno in the early 8th century (Phase 3b).

Fig. 3 Hypothetical plan of San Vincenzo al Volturno in the second half of 8th century (Phase 3c).

A - Crypt Church
B - South Church & Guest accommodation
C - Garden Courtyard
D - Tombs 499 & 500
E - Entrance Hall
F - Vestibule
G - Proposed stair to Terrace 3
H - Refectory
I - Assembly Room
J - Warming Room
K - Abbot's House
L - Monks' Dormitory
M - Tile stairway
N - San Vincenzo Maggiore
O - Atrium
P - FF/1 stairway
Q - Construction yard
R - Possible south stairway
S - First Collective Workshops

Ponte della
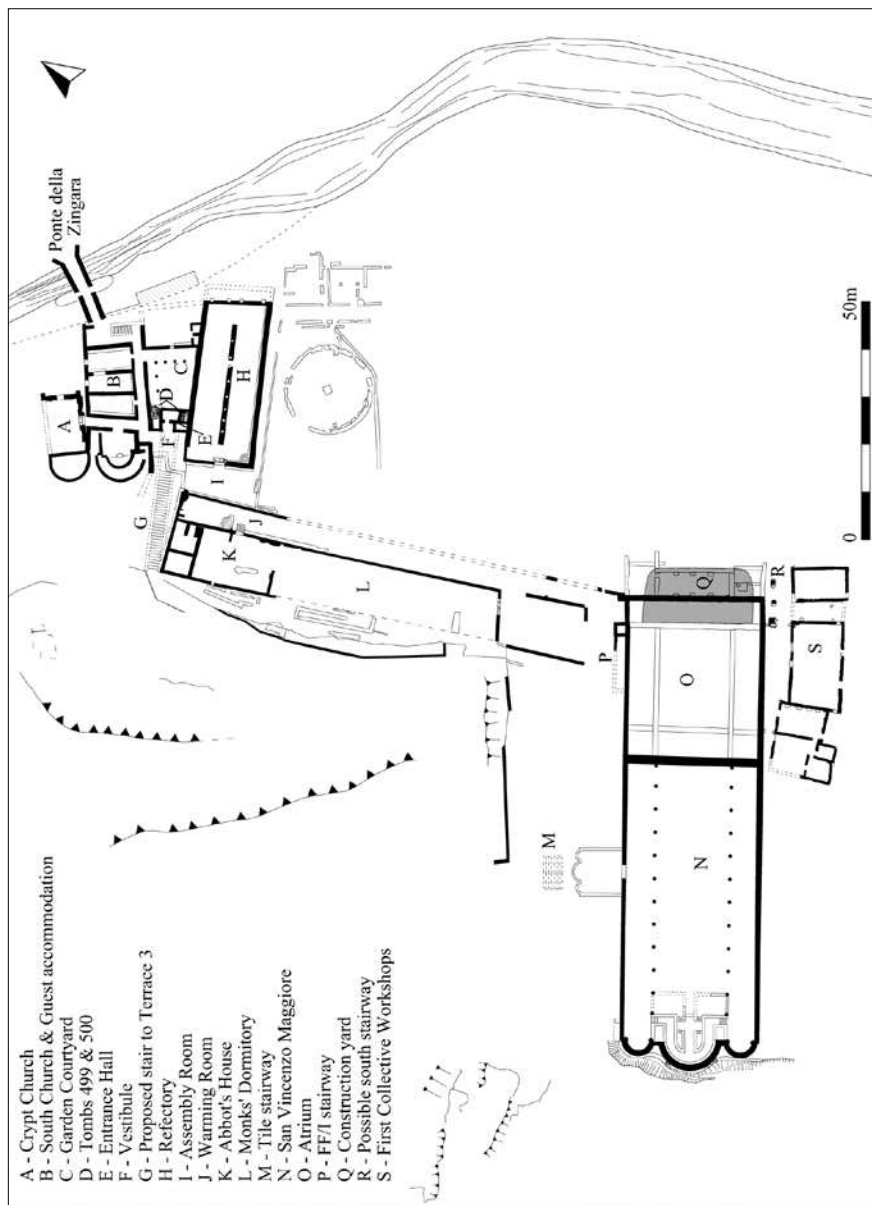Zingara

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Fig. 4. Plan of San Vincenzo al Volturno in the early 9th century (Phase 4).
Fig. 5. Reconstruction of the abbot's house (by Simona Carracillo).

Fig. 4. Plan of San Vincenzo al Volturno in the early 9th century (Phase 4).
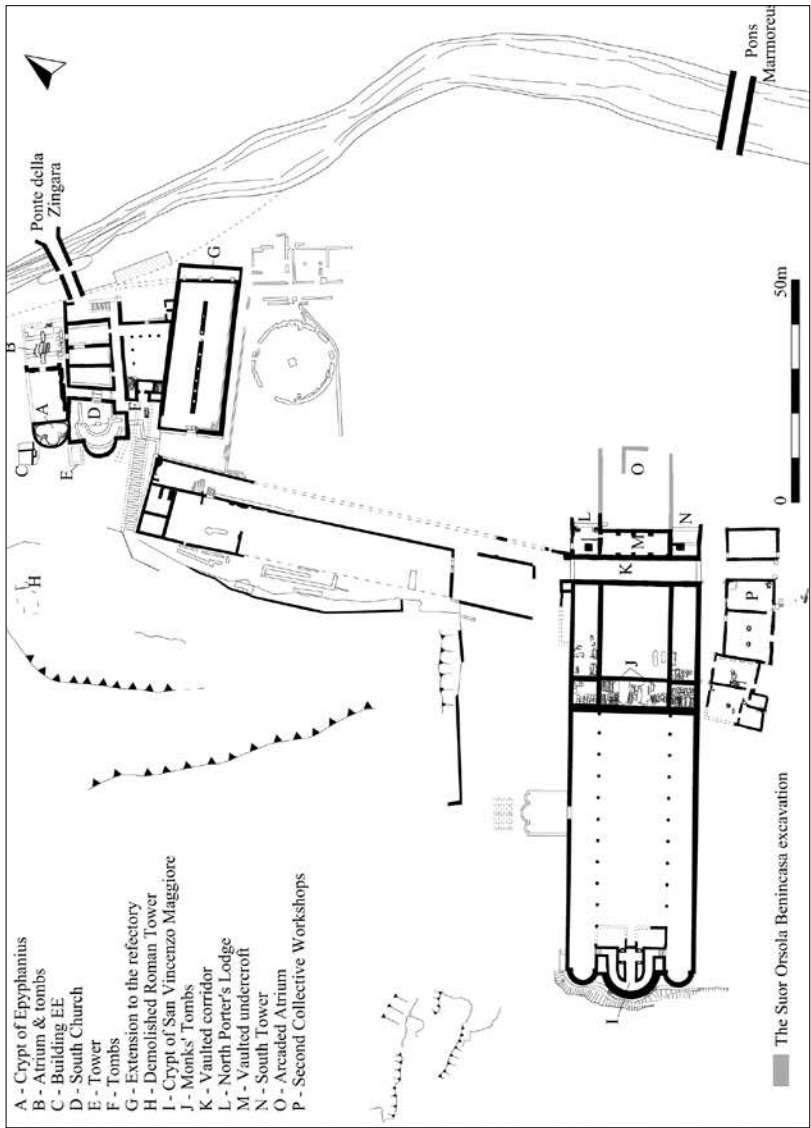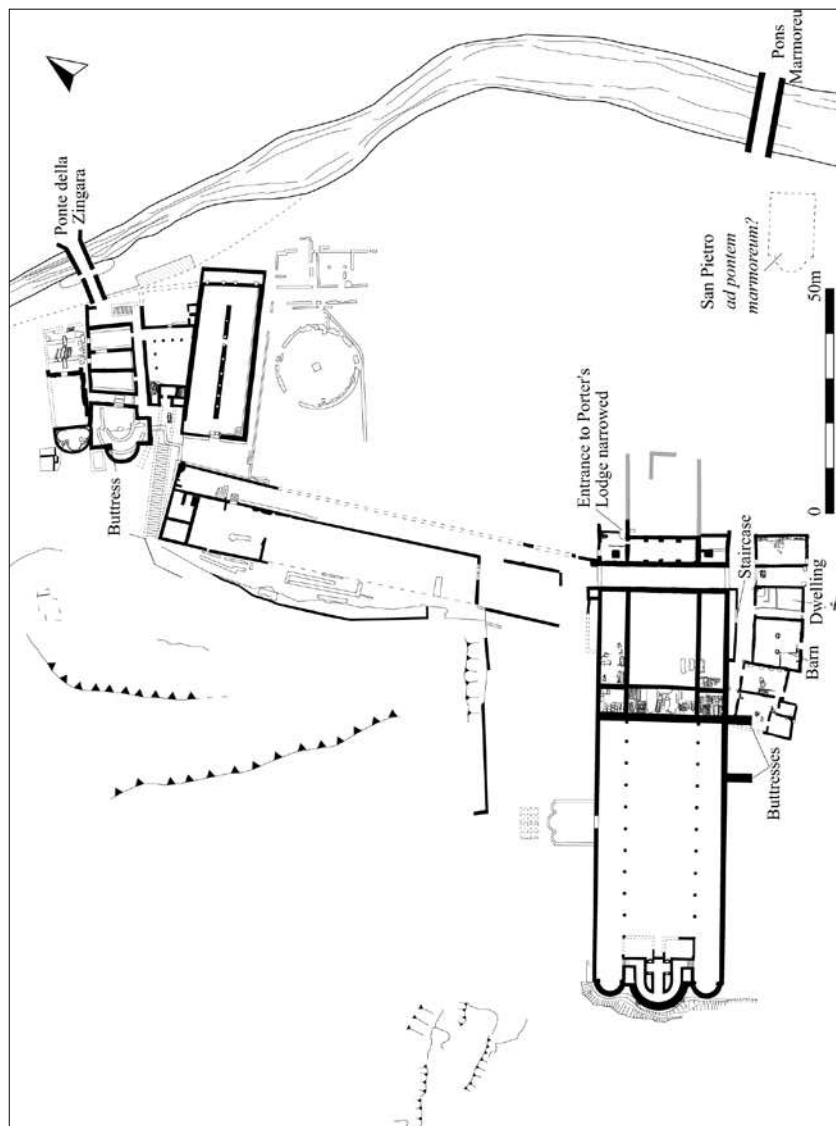Fig. 5. Reconstruction of the abbot's house (by Simona Carracillo).

A - Crypt of Epyphanius
B - Atrium & tombs
C - Building EE
D - South Church
E - Tower
F - Tombs
G - Extension to the refectory
H - Demolished Roman Tower
I - Crypt of San Vincenzo Maggiore
J - Monks' Tombs
K - Vaulted corridor
L - North Porter's Lodge
M - Vaulted undercroft
N - South Tower
O - Arcaded Atrium
P - Second Collective Workshops

The Suor Orsola Benincasa excavation

Fig. 6. Plan of San Vincenzo al Volturno, 820s-830s (Phase 5a1).

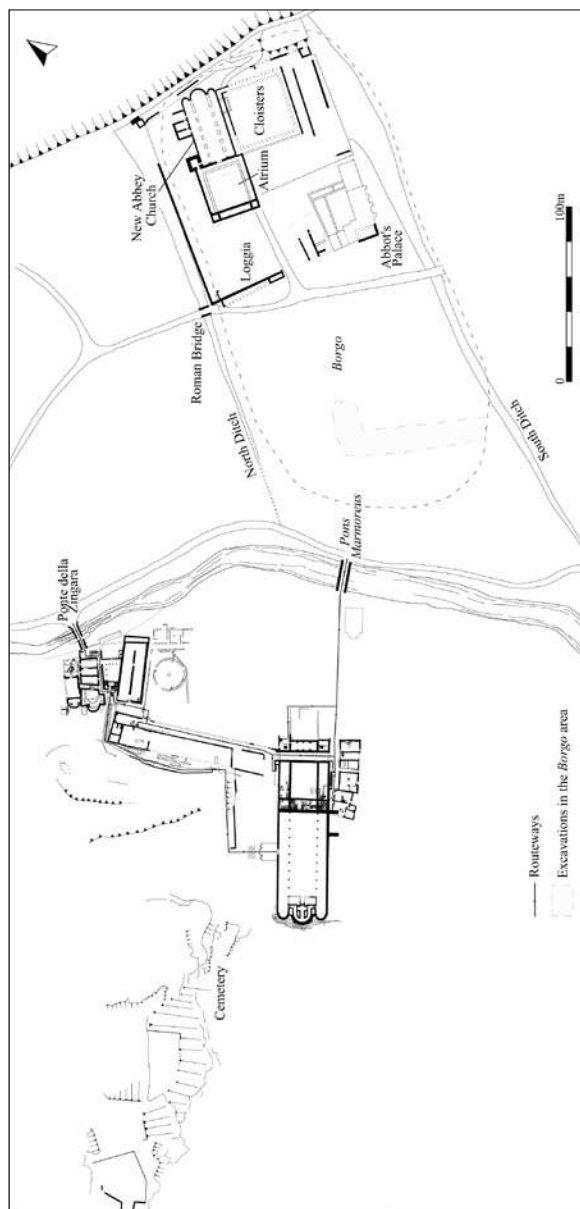Fig. 7. Plan of San Vincenzo al Volturno, 840s (Phase 5a2).

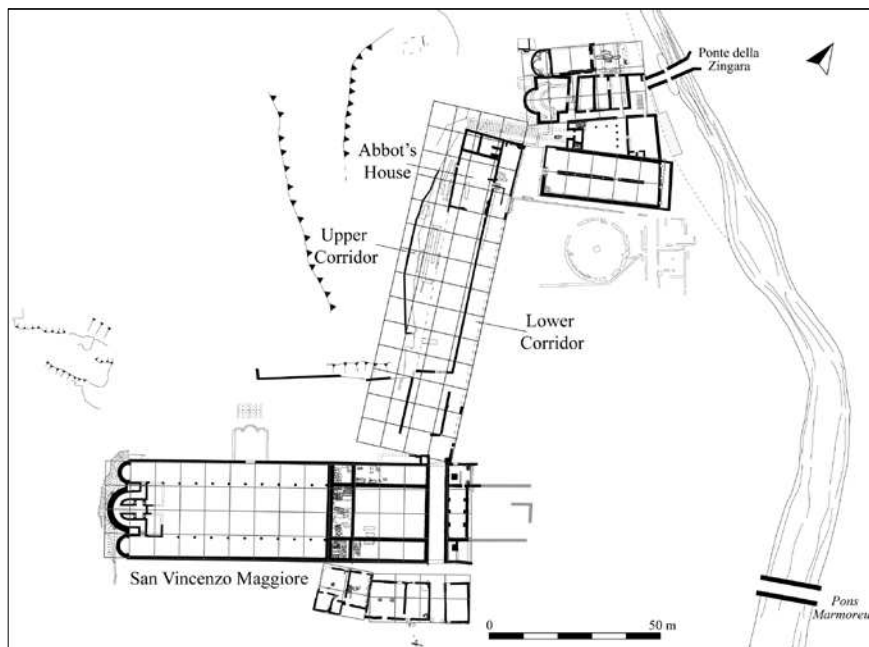Fig. 8. Plan of the monastery and its village in the second half of 9th century (Phase 5b).

Fig. 9. Grid reconstruction with a Beneventan passus 1,76 m.