

## Overview

By Richard Hodges

The interpretation of San Vincenzo al Volturno in the previous volumes on the 1980-98 San Vincenzo Project (Hodges 1993; Hodges 1995; Mitchell and Hansen 2001; Bowes, Francis and Hodges 2006) is based upon an understanding of the dialectical relationship between the three principle sources at our disposal: the written history in the form of the *Chronicon Vulturnense*, the archaeological evidence in the form of stratigraphically phased buildings within a sequence of settlement forms, and the art historical evidence, principally the crypt of Epyphanius which names the abbot depicted in the cycle of paintings as Abbot Epyphanius (824-42).

The interpretation in other words seeks to accommodate the sources into a holistic model, or rather a sequence of models. Clearly, new evidence provides new means to examine these models, weighting the dialectical relationship between the sources. Of course, great emphasis is placed upon the archaeology and as more of the settlement becomes excavated, so its overall shape as well as the internal and chronological relationships inevitably becomes clearer.

Great emphasis has been placed upon a coherent phasing of the building units. Each building unit has been phased using the excavated stratigraphy, but with reference to:

- (1) the history of the site (as described in the *Chronicon Vulturnense*)
- (2) the logic of the overall plan of which each unit constitutes a part
- (3) the finds pertaining to the contexts, depending upon whether these were recovered in primary or secondary circumstances. A primary deposit is a stratigraphic unit created by a particular action (such as the sack layer ascribed to AD 881), and not subjected to any subsequent action until it was found in the excavations. A secondary deposit is a stratigraphic unit subjected to some subsequent treatment in the past, prior to being found in the excavations (such as tips containing mixed material to make a terrace).

Every effort has been made to accommodate the stratigraphy of each unit into the logic of the sequence of settlement plans. So, to give some examples, San Vincenzo Maggiore simply cannot have existed alongside the small phase 3 monastery. The history of Italian archaeology and architecture makes this extremely unlikely in architectural and planning terms. Likewise, the recent Suor Orsola Benincasa team have contended that the great basilica of San Vincenzo Maggiore had no atrium in the 9th century, leaving the connecting corridors dating to this time to terminate in an open and indeterminate space (Marazzi et al 2002: tav 19). They have argued instead that the atrium is an 11th-century construction (Marazzi 2006a: 64-65). Apart from the fact that the archaeological stratigraphy shows two phases of the atrium to belong to the 9th century, the archaeology and architecture of 9th-century San Vincenzo would be extremely odd were there no atrium and only an indeterminate space in front of the great basilica. There can be no doubt that the Suor Orsola Benincasa team have not only confused the two major 9th-century phases of the atrium, but also unwittingly challenged the history of 9th-century monastic planning (cf. the atrium in front of the comparable church of San Salvatore at

Monte Cassino: Citarella and Willard 1983: 40). Similarly, following the logic of their interpretation of San Vincenzo Maggiore at its apogee without an atrium, they have associated the glass workshop under the atrium of San Vincenzo Maggiore with the workshops belonging to at least two phases (or more) of the Collective Workshops created immediately south of San Vincenzo Maggiore (Marazzi et al 2002: tav. 19; D'Angelo and Marazzi 2006; Marazzi 2006b: fig. 4). Again, they have confused the phasing of the stratigraphy and challenged the logic of the building units in assuming that at least three phases of activities and buildings belong to only one operational episode.

Therefore, in the final volume of the series, we persist with some basic chronological assumptions, established in the course of the project. These are:

- (1) The South Church sequence has an important relationship to the adjacent Crypt Church. It is believed that the ground floor rooms of the Phase 5 South Church were blocked and the building had been re-constructed when Abbot Epyphanus (824-42) dedicated the crypt of the Crypt Church (at which time a new atrium blocked entry into the ground floor South Church rooms) (Hodges and Mithen 1993: 186).
- (2) It is assumed that the pilasters decorating the east front of the atrium of San Vincenzo Maggiore, sharply cut from local travertine blocks, were made and used at approximately the same time to decorate the north wall of the basilica of San Vincenzo Maggiore, as well as the Entrance Hall encasing the staircase on the south side of the South Church (Hodges 1993: 218).
- (3) Two major phases of painting can be distinguished at San Vincenzo in the period ranging from the later 8th to the later 9th century. The first is a highly professional variant of an idiom which seems to have been widely diffused in the old Lombard centres of Italy in the second half of the 8th century, best represented by the sequence of Prophets under a running arcade on the west wall of the Assembly Room. The second is fixed by the paintings in the crypt of Epyphanus dated to his abbacy, 824-42. These show a development on the earlier manner of the Prophets, with figures and features more precisely defined by line and more tightly articulated with colour. The dating and chronological sequence of the major surviving programmes of wall-painting of the period in Italy are currently hotly debated; and the phases of painted decoration at San Vincenzo, demonstrably related to particular phases of construction of the monastery, should provide relatively secure fixed points of reference in this shifting corpus (Lomartire 1998; Exner 2007, 107-9).
- (4) The tomb of Talaricus (817-23). The finely painted and decorated tomb with an inscription dedicated to Talaricus – undoubtedly the abbot of this name described in the *Chronicon Vulturense* – was high up in the graveyard, immediately north of the door into the basilica of San Vincenzo Maggiore (Hodges, Mitchell and Watson 1997). The named tomb shows clearly that the atrium and the cemetery had been in use for some time when the abbot died in AD 823. The Suor Orsola Benincasa team contend, however, that the tomb was somehow moved here in the 11th century (Marazzi et al 2002: 229). Given the fragile nature of the painting in the tomb, this seems highly unlikely.

- (5) Some buildings display traces of bending or bowing, and in certain instances are buttressed. These features, we believe, are an outcome of the earthquake of AD 848 which had its epicentre at Isernia, 20 kms to the south (Guidoboni 1989: 614-15).
- (6) A conspicuous burning horizon, in certain cases associated with heavy arrow-heads (fired from a composite bow), is attributed to the Saracen attack of 10 October 881, and described in some detail in the *Chronicon Vulturense*.

It is important to address some of the assumptions implicit in these fixed points in the archaeological chronology of San Vincenzo al Volturno.

First, the archaeological phasing, while respecting the stratigraphy, must be treated with caution when deployed between unconnected building units. Some of the buildings are likely to have taken so long to construct that one feature – such as pilasters or the style of painting, for example – might belong to the end of one phase and the beginning of another.

Second, the evidence of events such as the AD 848 earthquake and the AD 881 Saracen attack must be interpreted with caution and in the context of the archaeology of each building unit. Other seismic events, doubtless not chronicled, as well as later attacks on the monastery in the 11th century potentially weaken the value of these two horizons. Again, each must be interpreted in terms of the building units and in particular take account of the stratigraphy. So, for example, the destruction of workshop B in the Collective Workshop by a fire involving numerous arrows, with 9th-century pottery and other objects being both covered and within the burnt layer, provides an almost indubitable point of reference for interpreting the buildings around it. Notwithstanding, an absence of more precise dates in the form of, for example, coins or C14 dates, it is a viable model to ascribe the destruction to the sack of AD 881. The model takes account of all the archaeological and art historical evidence. More to the point, the stratigraphy sealed by this fire provides the evidence for the genesis and operation of the 9th-century Collective Workshop and demonstrates that the adjacent atrium of San Vincenzo Maggiore had long been built when the conflagration occurred (*contra* Marazzi 2002 et al: 268-69; tav. 19).

The volume, that this report accompanies, describes the annular crypt of San Vincenzo Maggiore, excavated in 1993-95, the excavations of the atrium and eastwork excavated in 1989-95, and the 1982-83 and 1989-96 excavations of the associated workshops – first, the temporary workshops below the eastwork, then the so-called (first and second) Collective Workshop immediately to the south of the atrium. It is our contention that the history of San Vincenzo Maggiore in the 9th century was closely connected to the output and management of the Collective Workshop. Their shared histories gave San Vincenzo al Volturno its international and, importantly, its regional status, attracting donations and sustaining support.

The documents contained in this archival report consist of the available resources used to interpret the annular crypt and atrium, the eastworks, temporary workshops and

Collective workshops excavations along with the full archive of available site plans, section and elevation drawings, site photos and finds drawings.

Hodges, R. Leppard, S. and Mitchell, J. (Forthcoming) *San Vincenzo and its Workshops*. London, British School at Rome.