

FF ROOM C AND C/CORRIDOR - REPORT ON THE 1996 EXCAVATIONS

The room known as Room C (or "Workshop C") is one of the range of collective workshops to the south of the atrium of San Vincenzo Maggiore. This room has been excavated over many years, lying, as it does, at the junction of the eastern (collective) and southern (builders yard) workshop ranges. A corridor ran between the atrium and the collective workshops, and was excavated in three sections (C, D and E), following the limits of the rooms to the south.

Room C was first excavated in FF83. This trench was extended twice during that same year and Room C fell into both the western and northern extensions (FF83WX and FF83NX). This area was explored again in FF84. In 1989, the area to the immediate south was excavated as FF/A, and in 1991, the remaining part of the eastern half of the room was excavated as FF/D. In 1996, the excavation of Room C was completed within trench FF96 - this being the part to the west of the 11th century cloister wall that divided the room in two - along with the part of the corridor directly to the north. These excavations were supervised initially by Sally Martin and then by Lucy Watson, under the direction of Karen Francis.

THE 1996 EXCAVATIONS

In 1996, Room C was excavated down to the floor level at the time of the major fire that destroyed this complex of buildings, attributed to the Saracen attack of 881. It is clear however, from the archaeology of the adjoining rooms and from the previous excavations in Room C, that this room underwent many changes, and was in fact extremely short-lived in the form we see it (see below). This report will describe only the 1996 excavation of Room C, in the context of the other 1996 excavations. A full report on the archaeology of this room, combining the results of the different trenches will follow, but necessitates the unification of the different recording systems and of the different context numbers used in each trench.

PRE-CHURCH PHASE: CLAY BONDED STRUCTURES - POSSIBLE EVIDENCE FOR PHASE 3 ACTIVITY

ROOM C

The earliest structures located in the area of FF96 were a row of at least three buildings with clay-bonded walls, lying at an angle to the church and atrium of San Vincenzo Maggiore. The buildings were found beneath Rooms D and E, as well as in SVM16 in 1995. The 1996 excavations in Room C did not reach this level, though wall 3330, which runs roughly west-east across Room D, seems to continue under 4305, the dividing wall between Rooms C and D. Further excavation of Room C is therefore required in order to understand to what extent this range of buildings continued to the east.

The clay-bonded structures pre-date the basilica of San Vincenzo Maggiore, but by how long remains uncertain. They may belong

to the construction phase of San Vincenzo Maggiore; construction that began at the western (apsidal) end of the church, while the area to the east and south was used as a builder's yard where mortar mixers were located as well as kilns for the production of tiles, glass and metals for use in the building programme (the area of the 1991-1993 excavations). The clay-bonded buildings could have been store-rooms and workshops for this construction phase.

The principal argument in favour of an earlier date for these buildings is their alignment at a distinct angle to the church and its atrium. Excavations beneath the eastwerk of San Vincenzo Maggiore showed that the foundations of the basilica complex were laid out as part of a planned programme of construction, prior to the builder's yard activity, with the upstanding walls being built at a later date, after the destruction of the kilns. It therefore seems unlikely that a row of buildings would be constructed at such an angle to the church complex at this time. This raises the exciting possibility of the first evidence for phase 3 buildings in the area to the south of Colle della Torre. Only further excavation will elucidate this issue.

PHASE 4A: CONSTRUCTION PHASE: THE BUILDER'S YARD

ROOM C

No deposits attributable to this phase were uncovered in Room C in 1996.

C-CORRIDOR

Excavations in the corridor area stopped at a rough white mortar spread (3323). This forms a very poor surface and does not compare with the pre-881 mortar surface at the western end of Room D Corridor. Above this was a limited spread of tile and rubble (3309). On first appearances, the rubble layer seemed to belong to the destruction of the monastery in 881, and the mortar surface to be contemporary with the later 9th century cocciopesto floors evident at a similar level in Room C (see below). However, the tile and rubble layer (3309) was seen to underlie the wooden threshold (3305) between the corridor and Room C, therefore predating the room's construction. A possible explanation for both of these layers is that they belong to the builder's yard phase and are the result of dumping broken tile fragments and mortar while the tile kiln and mortar mixers were in use.

PHASE 4b: COMPLETION OF SVM: RE-ALIGNED COMPLEX WITH MORTARED WALLS

ROOM C

The range of clay buildings was demolished and the workshop complex rebuilt on a new alignment, probably about the same time as the construction of the atrium wall (4618). The clay-bonded building discovered below Room D was rebuilt with mortared walls, respecting the line of the atrium wall, and moved further to the south in order to create a wider thoroughfare/corridor

between the atrium and the workshop complex. One large room was created, comprising both of what were later divided into rooms C and D. This room measured 00 by 00 and was bounded by walls 3228, 4809, 4008 and 4306 (to W, N, E & S). Wall 4809 was plastered (but seemingly not painted) at this time. Again, 1996 excavations in Room C did not reach the floor levels relating to this phase, except possibly for the exposure of a mixed charcoal and white mortar layer (3362) butting wall 4809 but underlying the later floor make-ups in the north-east corner of the excavation.

C-CORRIDOR

A clay layer (3304), containing few finds was deposited over the layers of mortar and tile debris, levelling the area in advance of construction in this area. This layer was cut by a construction cut (3302) for wall 3270, (which continues to the west as 3076), probably in this phase, though it may date to phase 5. This wall runs parallel to the atrium wall, 1.2 metres away from it, creating a narrow corridor. At a later date (see below), walls 3076 and 3270 fell to the south, part of it landing in one piece (numbered 3243), thereby preserving some interesting features that provide clues as to its possible function while standing. At the eastern end of the wall, one half of an archway is preserved, linked to the wall by a fine pilaster strip (the northern face being visible). This arch poses one obvious problem: it leads directly to the atrium wall, just 1.2 metres away. So where did it lead? This suggests that the atrium wall has been rebuilt (and various building lines are visible in this wall) to close up a second arch or doorway in line with the fallen one, which led into a space within the atrium, the floor level of which could have been little if any above that of the corridor. The possibility of such an undercroft or crypt has long been postulated as the explanation for the ventilation holes in corridor wall 4603 and for the deep tip layers that fill the atrium, seen in the small trench FF/C-1W in the SE corner of the atrium, but the idea has never been so strongly supported as by this fallen archway.

A second interesting feature of fallen wall 3243 is a small square window, lined with inscribed tiles, a little to the west of the archway. The presence of this window has led to the suggestion that the narrow space between wall 3076 and the atrium may have been a mausoleum with a confessional window. Some doubt about this idea is aroused by the fact that the window would have been too high to see into from the corridor level, and from the fact that above the window is a plastered area of wall decorated with a zig-zag pattern of tiles. This does not seem consistent with the mausoleum theory, the decoration being on the inner side of the wall, and too high to have been seen clearly.

An alternative interpretation of this feature is that it may have supported a staircase, leading from the workshop corridor up to the facade of San Vincenzo Maggiore, allowing quick and easy access to the church for the monks working in the workshops. This would make more sense of the high up decoration and the window, allowing light into the stairwell from the corridor, or perhaps itself holding a lamp. The presence of

diagonal scar on the atrium wall, beginning roughly at the position of the archway and rising to the west, indicating a rebuild, lends support to this theory. Which of these interpretations (if either) is correct will only be confirmed by excavation of the area between the two walls, not yet undertaken due to the dangerous state of the wall above.

PHASE 5A1: FURTHER CHANGES: THE SUBDIVISION OF ROOM C-D

Room C was created in a redesigning of the workshop complex that may have been a part of the aggrandizement of the monastery by Abbot Epyphanus. Room C-D was divided by wall 4305, with access provided by a doorway at its southern end (threshold 4416). The section of trench FF83, shows a floor layer associated with this new room surviving within Room C, below the levels reached in 1996.

PHASE 5A2/5B: CREATION OF A CORRIDOR WITHIN ROOM C

Some time after the creation of Room C, a corridor was created on the western side of Room C, by means of a plaster partition (3355). Both the room and the corridor were re-floored with cocciopesto, the floor in the corridor being c. 0.13 m higher than that in the room. The method of construction is not clear and will only be clarified by further excavation, but it can be tentatively suggested that a slot (3337) for the partition was cut through the earlier floor of Room C-D (visible in section) and the level then built up over the earlier floor, possibly using some kind of shuttering to maintain the partition slot. On the eastern side, a layer of cobbling and mortar (3361) was laid, while on the western side, where the floor level was to be higher, a layer of mortary tile rubble (3360) was used to raise the level before the laying of a similar layer of cobbles (3359). The partition (3355) was then constructed, with tile fragments and a mortar and ash deposit used as packing in the slot, before the cocciopesto floors 3288 (west) and 3322 (east) were laid. Wall 4305 was plastered at this time.

The partition is made of a kind of rough burnt plaster, with a white lime wash, and still stands to a maximum height of 0.39 m.

It was recorded in 1983 as being made of daub, but appears to contain little or no organic material. A sample was taken for analysis. In order to stand up, this plaster would have required wattle or wooden posts at intervals along its length. This may explain the deep foundation of the slot, designed to insert wattle posts. Full excavation of the partition slot is required to understand this. An area of carbonized wood (3363) was found at the base of the slot at its southern end, close to the edge of trench FF83.

The corridor does not run parallel to the walls, but is wider at its northern end. A series of burnt and broken tiles lying flat on the corridor floor probably date to the later fire (see below), but their nearly regular spacing may indicate that they were placed there deliberately, at some point prior to the fire.

A second division may have run east from partition 3355, further subdividing this room. No partition comparable to 3355 exists, but the coincidence of an unburnt strip running east-west across the floor, with the division between layers 3353 and 3321, suggest that some sort of low division may have existed at this point, resting on the floor and protecting it from being burnt during the fire. This may correspond to a beam slot recorded in FF/D 1991, in roughly the same position.

PHASE 5C: THE SARACEN ATTACK OF 881

The destruction of the monastery by fire, attributed to the Saracen attack of 881, is clearly apparent in Room C. The walls and cocciopesto floors were badly burnt, discolouring the plaster, stone and mortar. Charcoal-rich deposits were found covering the whole floor to varying depths, deepest along wall 4305. Parts of in-situ timbers were found concentrated along the walls and at the southern end of the room (3354, 3326). These were overlain by a layer of burnt plaster (3307) along wall 4305 and other burnt sandy deposits (3353, 3334) which may also derive from the mortar and plaster on the walls. The tile roof collapsed and fell onto the floor below, along with its supporting timbers. Good evidence that this occurred during the fire and not afterwards was obtained in FF/D (1991) where two adjoining pieces of tile corbelling from the roof were found, burnt to very different degrees, indicating that they broke during the fire. The layer comprising the fallen roof and the fallen partition, together with charcoal from burnt timbers and other material (3293), had been disturbed and mixed by later robbing activity, leaving no clues as to how the roof and partition fell. The roof tiles included both flat tiles with raised edges and curved imbrex. A number of both types bore inscriptions. The burnt upper surface of the surviving jamb of the door leading to Room D suggests that this door may also have fallen during the fire, as the burnt surface would otherwise have been internal to the wall.

Within charcoal layer 3321, a number of interesting finds were recovered. The finest of all was a perfectly preserved set of iron pincers used for forging (SF3486). The pincers are heavily burnt to a deep pink-red colour and are of the type known as "flat-box", used for gripping narrow objects, one end bent around the other to prevent the object slipping out sideways. Also found on the floor was a hoard of iron and lead (SF3484) that was concentrated to such an extent that it must have been in some sort of container or bag. The group comprised 57 iron nails or points of a type not present in the old excavations at San Vincenzo - thin, with a roughly square section and highly pointed, but without heads - also four lead strips and a lead sheet, an iron chisel and a key. Other objects recovered from this layer included three further examples of the same headless nails, four more lead strips, and an iron door bolt (SF3543) of the same type as found in D (1983) and in FF(D) in 1996. These finds were scattered across the floor, perhaps suggesting that they had been on a work bench or hung up on the wall when the fire started. This does slightly call into question the interpretation of this room as a high status dwelling, although

the fine floors are not suggestive of a workshop.

C-CORRIDOR

Wall 3076/3270 of the "mausoleum/staircase" probably fell shortly after the fire (numbered 3243 once fallen). The fallen wall directly overlies the heavily burnt collapsed remains of the tile roof of the corridor, but bears no obvious signs of burning on its upper surface, suggesting that the fire was out before it fell. Further excavation is required to better understand the fire in the corridor, including the removal, at least in part, of the baulks of soil left at the western, northern and eastern limits of the corridor.

A second wall fell on top of 3243 - possibly wall 4809 falling to the north, having been destabilised by the falling of 3243. An intervening period of unknown length is indicated by a layer of plaster above 3243, that had come off wall 4809 due to exposure to the elements after the fall of the roof.

PHASE 6A: THE RETURN OF THE MONKS TO THE RUINED MONASTERY

The Chronicon tells us that the monks took refuge at Capua after the fire, returning to San Vincenzo in 914-6, after an absence of 33-35 years. Following the return of the monks, some changes were made to Room C that are difficult to fully understand. The doorway at the southern end of 4305, leading into Room D, was blocked at this time (as was perhaps a corresponding doorway at western side of Room D). The burning and rubble deposits from the fire were heavily disturbed and mixed (layers of burnt tiles, the fallen partition, wall plaster and charcoal) suggesting that the rubble was searched through for re-usable material. A number of features were found, cutting through the rubble, but sealed by the later levelling tips. These include the robbing of the part of wall 4809 to the east of the doorway into the corridor (3308), the removal of sections of the partially standing partition which involved cutting through both floors in places (cut 3335) and another cut through floor 3322 and layer 3321 and 3293 above in the south east corner of the room (3339). While the robbing activity is nothing unexpected in the post-fire search for re-usable items, the door blocking and the removal of part of wall 4809 both indicate an early redesigning of the complex for re-use.

C-CORRIDOR

The extent of 10th century activity in the corridor is even greater. Some time in the period between the falling of the wall (post 881) and the dumping of levelling layers (attributed to the 11th century), the eastern half of the archway was removed and the area cleared of rubble. It is unclear as to why only half of the arch was robbed, but it may be that the eastern side of the arch broke up to a much greater extent than the western side and the rubble was removed to clear this area for re-use. This may explain why no 9th century floor was found in the Room C Corridor, relating to the archway and staircase/mausoleum phase, (whereas in D-corridor a mortar floor was found), as well as the lack of evidence for the fire. It would seem that any floor surface was removed along with the

overlying demolition debris, clearing this area down to pre-Room C levels.

A silty clay layer with charcoal, ash and fragmented tile inclusions (3277) abuts the un-robbled remains of the fallen arch. This deposit postdates the robbing of the arch and may well represent an occupation layer (pottery, bone and iron objects were found trampled into the surface) dating to the 10th century return to the monastery, prior to major rebuilding programmes.

PHASE 6B: DEMOLITION AND LEVELLING IN ADVANCE OF REBUILDING

Both Room C and the associated corridor were infilled with rubble during this period, sealing over the tops of the fallen/dismantled walls and the fallen arch prior to the 11th century rebuilding programme. Tip lines indicate that this material was dumped from the north-west. The greater concentration of rubble to the north indicates the initial dumping of larger blocks (3276, 3266A), followed by tips of smaller rubble and mortar silt (3286, 3287, 3059).

PHASE 7: REBUILDING THE MONASTERY

Three distinct 11th century phases are present in Room C.

PHASE 7a

After the dumping of 3059 to raise the ground level in this area, a wall (4056) was constructed running south from the atrium wall, bisecting Room C and continuing south beyond the workshop range. The wall, believed to form a part of the new cloister range designed by Abbot John in the second half of the 11th century, was built within a construction trench (3328), which is sealed below two mortar surfaces (3266B and 3234). The wall may have been built in two phases as there is what appears to be a second, very narrow construction cut through surface 3234. It is possible that a planned building programme was followed, as in the ninth century, with wall foundations being laid out early on, but the upstanding wall not being built until much later, following an intermediate period of use. If this is the case, the "slot trench" could represent the redefinition of the foundations that had been partially covered over. The other possible explanation is that this "slot trench" was actually caused by natural processes of rainwater draining down the wall surface and disturbing the layers that butted it.

PHASE 7b

After the construction of 4056, the area to the south of the atrium wall was used as a builder's yard, as it had been during phase 4. The surface of rubble layer 3266 was compacted into a rough working surface. Two temporary hearths, or kilns were constructed, the first (3256) a simple construction of two tiles, heavily burnt along with the mortar (3266B) in which it was set, the second (3267) comprised a hollow or basin made into the rubble below. No finds were associated with these hearths to suggest the nature of their use. A thin layer of sandy loam

(3265) overlay the kilns, representing an occupation, or perhaps an abandonment layer.

PHASE 7c

A second yellow mortar spread (3234) sealed the kilns and abandonment layer. During this phase, postholes (3247, 3261) and pit features (3249, 3252) were cut, possibly relating to the building of a new flight of stairs, leading from the marble threshold and doorway (4757) in cloister wall 4056, following the line of the atrium wall. The drystone foundations of this staircase (3224) were cut into the mortar surface, (cut 3263) and laid on a bedding layer of fine silty sand (3233). A rough wall (3246) was built over the centre of the arch to stabilise the rubble below and to support the staircase, creating a space between the stairs and the atrium wall which was partially filled with midden-type deposits (3254, 3225) rich in animal bone and pottery fragments.

PHASE 8 - MODERN: ABANDONMENT

Some time after the 12th century abandonment of the monastery and its reconstruction of the far side of the River Volturno, this area was terraced for agriculture. Soil was imported to create terraces over two metres above the 9th century floor levels, on which olives and vines were planted and continued to be cultivated until 1994. At the southern limit of the workshop range, south of the terrace wall, deep ploughing in recent years damaged the archaeological deposits, as seen in FF83. The atrium wall continued to deteriorate over the centuries, as shown by rubble 3236 and later 3226, sealed between the topsoil and the subsoil next to the wall.