

Summary Report On Trench SVM 13

The south wall of San Vincenzo Maggiore was first excavated in the summer season of 1994. The wall itself had some interesting archaeology which was used to determine its function. Firstly there was the existence of two ninth century tombs - 2529 and 2507. Both of these butted the south wall at its foundation level making use of its south facing elevation. It was postulated that the wall may have had a narrow ledge for the capstones of the tombs to rest upon, thus narrowing it at this point.

Secondly, a threshold - 2358 was constructed to lie upon the foundation ledge of the south wall. This threshold sealed both of the tombs and hence was a later addition. It has been dated to the eleventh century when the wall was altered to insert a doorway between the south aisle and the Chapter house.

During the twelfth century when the Chapter house fell into decay, there occurred a robbing episode, during which the south wall was robbed to its foundation level and what is seen today.

From the period between January to March 1995 five trenches were opened; all were extensions of trenches that were already excavated. Their purpose was to uncover the main walls of the basilica in time for the easter service to be conducted by the Abbot of Monte Cassino.

The extension trench for the south wall first took place in SVM South, with the aim of continuing to uncover the line of the south wall (2521). The trench measured 13.0m long and 2.0m wide. After removing the topsoil, as previously, a yellow crollo layer was reached (2285). This was a silty matrix with travertine and limestone pieces within it. Finds included a small quantity of fresco fragments. The presence of this crollo layer fits in with the idea that once the Chapter house was out of use, decadence took over with rubble layers slumping. Observations of this crollo layer include that a variation is seen in its depth and its positioning. It is at its deepest at the western end of the trench next to SVM South but towards the eastern end a gradual disappearance can be seen, to the extent that part of the south wall is covered only by topsoil and subsoil. Regarding the positioning of this layer, it only occurs on the south side of the wall and seems to be continuing southwards underneath the trench edge. Meanwhile, on the north side of the wall, there occurs the clay foundation packing of the nave floor. Due to the robbing incident during the twelfth century, all that can be seen today is a residual of this clay edge.

Beneath the crollo layer is situated the south wall foundations. The wall itself is again seen to be robbed to below pavement level, presumably for building material purposes. This robbing is at its deepest to the west of the trench, in particular to the west of terrace wall 2174 which can be seen in the south facing section of the trench. Regarding this terrace wall it can be seen that it is butted by topsoil and was built over crollo 2285; hence postdating the robbing episode.

The south wall foundations consist mainly of limestone and travertine with inclusions of tile. All of this has been partially mortared over. This general foundation construction

style respects the rest of the Church. In other words, the wall was built using rough limestone blocks, either unfaced or finished which were packed into a sand based mortar. This would then have been roughly coursed with tile in areas, to provide a flat platform onto which large well cut travertine blocks would have been laid.

Towards the eastern end of the wall foundations, there occur some voids. These are of a sandy topsoil nature which could very well be the consequence of agricultural activity such as ploughing, resulting with the mixing of topsoil with the crollo.

Excavation was also carried out in trench PP which originally began in 1986. It was in this trench where the south wall was first originally discovered (10010). Once again, the wall can be seen to be robbed down to foundation level. Evidence for the return of the crollo layer can be seen with it still being absent from the north side of the wall.

Whilst revealing the wall in PP, an interesting discovery was made - another wall running in a southward direction butting up against the south wall was discovered. Previously in 1994 in SVM 6, wall 10061 was discovered in line with the facade wall (10052). This also ran southwards and butted the south wall. It was excavated to a depth of 2.0m but its foundations were not reached. Wall 10061 measured to a width of 2.0m; its substantial nature suggested that it was built as a load bearing wall with its thickness proposing that it may have been a bell tower. A significant quantity of bell mould was found to back this up. If this is the case, then wall 10061 forms the east end of the bell tower whereas the newly found wall makes up the west end. This wall measures 2.2m in width. It is made up of travertine blocks with a wattle infill. Since this wall is butted rather than bonded to the south wall it suggests that it may not have been ninth century in date but eleventh century; also in the Chronicon it is stated that the Abbot Ilarius erected a new bell tower during this period. However, the findings from wall 10061 seem to point to it as being part of a ninth century structure that was still in use in the eleventh century. The area enclosed by both the east and west walls is 15.0m making the tower quite a significant building.

Excavation was also carried out in the interior of the bell tower where a mortar floor (10015) was discovered and assumed to be the floor of the bell tower. The layers below this floor level were also excavated revealing the south facing limestone foundations of the south wall. This limestone foundation stops very close to the level of the mortar floor. Above this, the south wall becomes a travertine construction. To the extreme east of the trench, the south wall can be seen to have a smooth faced foundation continuing all the way down rather than having a rough foundation. This may be explained in terms of the presence of the cloister.

In conclusion, the south wall is still continuing and is in correct alignment with regard to the Church as a whole. It has undergone heavy robbing in the twelfth century down to ninth foundation level. This has thus resulted with the lack of appearance of archaeological changes being made to the wall in the ninth and twelfth centuries. However, the west wall of the bell tower has been located butting the south wall. This has resulted with the full width of the bell tower being known.