

SVM 4 Crypt area reports.

The construction of the church, c.808. (NOV. 1994. KF)

The earliest deposits around the area of the apse, comprise a number of clean clays (2397, 2305, 2545), which are either natural deposits or artificial terracing. Such deposits are known to have been imported at the east end of the church for the purpose of raising and levelling the site prior to the construction of the basilica. **The archaeological sequence supports the theory that the church was constructed from west to east: from the apsidal end to the facade and consequently, initial building levels would have to have been maintained.**

Construction cuts were made into the clay layers for the rubble raft identified in SVMN (2484) and for the foundations of the three apse walls. In addition to this, a large hole was dug into the natural clay to house the sunken crypt. It is also possible that the large drainage canal (2477), was cut at this time. The apse walls (2119, 2143, 2235), were constructed first, followed by the curving walls of the annular corridor (2392), the two supporting piers and the central crypt chamber. The construction of the church then continued east towards the river with the north and south outer walls (2149, 2521) and the nave.

At sometime after the construction of the apse walls, a substantial wall (2434, 2241, 2183) was built within the clay-cut canal, out of large travertine blocks and waterproof *opus signinum* mortar. The wall curves around the exterior of the three apses and continues east along the outside of the north wall of the church. Its' function was to direct rain water and colluvial deposits away from the crypt. It is not known whether the drainage system was preconceived initially or whether an episode of flooding within the sunken crypt provided the momentum for its construction soon after.

The only remaining features dating to the ninth-century are two stone tombs that are built against the exterior south wall of the church. A third, adjacent grave is more likely to be later. There are no archaeological deposits within SVM4 that can be tied to the documented Saracen attack of 881. However, a silt deposit (2344, 2410) excavated above the crypt floor may be evidence of the thirty-five years during which the monks were in exile.

SVMEast prelim report Oct 1994. (KF)

The church of San Vincenzo Maggiore was dedicated in c.808 by Abbot Joshua. The earliest stratigraphy within SVM East is represented by the ninth-century walls of the crypt, all of which are broadly contemporary although it is possible to make a few distinctions relating to the construction of the building. For instance, the main body of the central apse wall 2143 appears to have been constructed first, followed by the curving walls of the annular corridor. These include the inner "skim" wall 2392 which was attached to the interior curve of the central apse. The central crypt chamber was the last part of the crypt to be built, possibly at the same time as walls 2123 and 2339 - the eastern stairway walls of the crypt.

The two pie-shaped supporting piers were packed with sterile clays before the niches within the crypt were built and painted. Interestingly, the fills of the two piers are different; the green clay of the north pier and the brown clay of the south pier respect the

change in colour of the natural clays visible in the edge of drainage ditch 2477 in SVMW. It is possible that the piers were constructed at the same time as the ditch was cut, and the excavated clays used in the adjacent structures.

During the excavation, no evidence was found of the Saracen attack of 881 which is described in the twelfth-century *Chronicon Vulturnense*. There is however, evidence of disuse and abandonment in the form of a silt deposit, 2410, lying above the remains of the *opus sectile* floor of the crypt (2350). This may be evidence of the thirty-five years during which the monks had fled.

October 1994 WB

The construction of the ninth century church.

A large semi-circular cut was made through a deposit of clay (2397), possibly artificial terracing. This cut which probably covers the whole area of the northern aisle was filled with mortared rubble (2484) which formed a foundation for the construction of the church. This foundation was visible in the bottom of the phase 3 robber cut (2320). Following the laying of this foundation, the walls (2235) and (2149), respectively the apse and north aisle walls, were constructed. In the interior of the walled area a further deposit of clay (2396) was laid down prior to the deposition of a gravel layer (2367) which formed a base for an *opus sectile* floor (2307, 2372, 2520). The walls were then plastered and painted. Traces of red plaster were discovered on the surviving parts of apse wall (2235) as well as a frescoed dado on the aisle wall (2149). The plaster on the apse wall overlaid the remains of the *opus sectile* pavement which only survives immediately next to the apse wall.

To the west of the apse wall a large ditch (2477) was dug. This ditch, which was some 1.50m deep was rivetted by a low wall (2434) which butted the apse wall. The ditch and the wall are thought to be for the purpose of drainage, collecting water running off from Colle delle Torre to the north and the water running from the roof of the church. The wall presumably prevented the water from draining back into the crypt. It is unclear whether the ditch and wall were part of the original construction phase of the church or were constructed shortly after.

During the excavation of SVM North no evidence was found of the Saracen sack of 881, which chronologically occurs during Phase 1.

A sub-phase; 1B comprises the silting up or deliberate backfilling of ditch (2477) with the fills (2389, 2403, 2432, 2517). Prior to analysis of the ceramic evidence it can only be said that this occurred prior to the reconstruction of the abbey in the early eleventh century.

The 1994 excavations of San Vincenzo Maggiore have shown that the construction of the church spanned at least two generations. The work has been assigned to two phases: phase 4, which represents the age of Abbot Joshua (808-824) and phase 5a, (824-48). The latter phase incorporates the age of Abbot Epyphanus (824-42) until the earthquake of 848. After the Saracen attack of 881 (phase 5c) the church lay in ruins for over a century. By the eleventh century, a new phase of refurbishment had been instigated by Abbot John IV. The Chronicon Vulturnense tells us that Abbot Ilarius

(1011-45) added new decorations and a bell-tower. The Chapter House is assigned to the age of Abbot John V (1053-76) who also constructed a new internal and external cloister. **KDF February 1995**

KDF/David Fellows Oct 1994

Regarding the chronology of the site, the very earliest deposits comprise a number of clean, plastic clays (2305, 2545). These pre-date the construction of the basilica in 808 and represent natural deposits or alternatively, imported terracing levels. Presumably, if the church was constructed from the apsidal end to the facade in an easterly direction, the initial levels of the building would have to be maintained. A third clay deposit (2544) contained copious quantities of burnt sand and stone, bell-mould and bronze "splashes". It has not yet been established whether 2544 pre-dates or immediately post-dates the construction of the church. However, in 1993, an almost identical deposit (5562) was identified in FF/C-2, close to the front of the church, where it was used as a levelling deposit prior to the building of the walls.

In SVMS the foundations of south aisle and south apse walls (2129 and 2119) were cut into clays 2305 and 2545, and the upper walls built up slightly narrower, leaving a 'lip' at foundation level. After the construction of the south apse wall, another substantial wall (2183), was built from large, rectangular, travertine blocks bonded with *opus signinum*, a waterproof mortar. Wall 2183 runs north-south and curves around the exterior of the south apse. The same wall also extends into SVMW and SVMN as 2241 and 2434 respectively and is interpreted as a drainage wall, built to direct rain water and colluvial deposits away from the sunken crypt. In SVMW and SVMN the same wall was found to be constructed within a large clay-cut ditch. No such feature was found pre-dating the wall in SVMS, perhaps because it wasn't deemed necessary: the adjacent two trenches are situated immediately below the steep slopes of Colle Della Torre and would have required a canal to channel the overland flow down to the south. By comparison, the area around the south aisle in SVMS is quite flat, extending onto the Rochetta Plain.

The only other ninth-century features within SVMS are three tombs; 2507, 2529 and 2524. All are strongly constructed of dressed travertine blocks and tiles. 2507 and 2529 both butt the exterior foundations of the south aisle wall and are of identical construction. In contrast, tomb 2524 is of a much larger and more elaborate build. This structure is on a completely different alignment to Tombs 2507 and 2529, respecting if anything, the slightly askew nature of the later chapter house. Consequently, the tomb is tentatively assigned to the eleventh-century, although the stratigraphic sequence makes it difficult to be more precise at the present time.

San Vincenzo Maggiore West 1994

Report by Lucy Watson, Site Assistant and trench supervisor.

The apsidal end of San Vincenzo Maggiore was built directly into the natural hillslope of Colle della Torre, no earlier archaeological deposits being present in this area, unlike other parts of the monastic complex. The earliest features are therefore the construction cuts, made directly into the natural clays, which vary in nature from pure to sandy clay and in colour from orange-brown to green.

At the apex of the central apse wall (2143), a robbing trench outside the church (2439) which removed a section of the drain wall (2241) which bounds the apse walls, revealed in section, evidence of the construction of this central apse wall. A large hole must have been excavated to hold the sunken annular crypt, the edge of which was vertical at this point, and the wall built directly against the clay edge, leaving a skim of mortar roughly 20 mm thick on its outer face, butted up to the natural clay. This resembles in some respects one half of a 'slit' trench, such as those used to construct the eastern end of the church, as excavated in 1993. At no other point is it possible to view the outside of the apse walls due to the drain wall built directly outside them, but we can assume that all followed a similar construction method.

San Vincenzo Maggiore is a tri-apsidal church, the central and southern apses of which fall within SVMW. Both the central (2143) and southern (2119) apse walls are robbed to foundation levels, revealing a rough foundation construction of mixed travertine, limestone and tile pieces. The outer face is roughly finished but the core very irregular with large areas of hard yellow-pink mortar. Wall 2143, the central apse wall is of a different construction to 2119. Above foundation level, the main load-bearing part of the wall narrows to the outer edge of the foundations and an inner 'skim' wall is butted against it, lining the annular corridor, into which are set the remains of three windows or lamp niches (2155, 2427, 2478), an expected fourth to the north being totally robbed out. The inner face of this wall is frescoed, forming part of the grand annular corridor. This inner skim wall is numbered 2392, stands higher than 2143 at its south-eastern end but is totally robbed elsewhere, leaving a 'step'-like impression in wall 2143.

The crypt of San Vincenzo has an annular corridor, entered from the north and south aisles, leading to a central corridor which gives access to a cruciform central chamber. Two piers on either side of the central corridor supported the superstructure of the church above. The walls stand to a height of roughly 1.5 m, the ceiling and altar levels above not having survived. The crypt floor was of opus sectile marble tiling (2356). Small patches of this floor survive at the edges of the corridors, set into a mortar base (2489) on a gravel and marble-chip make-up layer (2428). The lower rubble layers that filled the crypt on discovery contained many marble tile fragments, some exotic marbles but predominantly white, the more valued pieces having been taken away to re-use elsewhere. The crypt was richly decorated with frescos on every wall, as described in detail elsewhere.

The southern apse (2119) still contains the surviving remains of a flight of three steps at foundation and make-up levels (2400, 2401, 2402), which would have led to an altar of some kind. Fragments of a mortar floor also survive at the top of the steps (2308), likely to have been the base for a further opus sectile pavement.

Outside the church walls, a deep drainage ditch was dug into the natural clay and a drain wall constructed along the outer edge of the apse walls, lined with waterproof *opus signinum* mortar to keep water out of the sunken crypt. The original ditch cut (2300) is further cut at its base by a shallow slit trench for the drain wall into which a base of *opus signinum* was laid, on top of which the wall was built, one course of extremely large travertine blocks with two courses of smaller stones and tiles surviving at the north end, all mortared with *opus signinum*, some traces of which survive on the face of some of the large blocks. Over the course of the life of the church this ditch had

to be recut and emptied on several occasions (e.g. 2465, 2472) due to the silting-up problems from the movement of soil from Colle della Torre.

The only other deposits in SVMW dating to the period when the church was in use are layers of clay built up outside the southern apse wall, which may well have been deliberately dumped to level the area around the church.

There were no archaeological layers in SVMW that directly record the Saracen attack of 881 but there is evidence for the period of abandonment that followed the flight of the monks after the event. The lowest infill layer in the crypt corridors (2344) was a layer of inwashed silt and gravel directly over the floor suggesting the passage of time before the destruction of the crypt and the laying down of the deep crollo layers.