

Monasteries in Medieval Tuscany: the example of the Monte Pisano area

Sauro Gelichi, Antonio Alberti

Tuscany; monastery; settlement

The geographical area under examination includes the so-called Monte Pisano, a group of hills reaching their highest point at the central Monte Serra (910 m.a.s.l.).

The Monte Pisano area stretches from the lower Valdarno and Pisa in the south to the area around Lucca in the north, this position making it one of the most contested areas between the two cities during the Middle Ages (fig. 1). The Benedictine monasteries built in the Monte Pisano area between the tenth and twelfth centuries formed part of the great flourishing of monastic foundations that took place in those centuries, during which the creation of about 130 monasteries according to Benedictine rules was documented in Tuscany (Ceccarelli, in press).

This wave of foundations was undoubtedly encouraged by the politics of the Marquis Ugo of Tuscany and his mother Willa, who, at the end of the tenth century, were the direct supporters of the foundations of the following monasteries: the Florentine Badia; the reconstruction of the ruined abbey of S. Ponziano in Lucca; the abbey of Capolona near Arezzo; the abbey of Marturi in Poggibonsi; the re-founding of S. Salvatore of Sesto near Lucca (Kurze 1989b, 307).

There were genuine, strongly religious motives in the support of these foundations. The monasteries, however, were also given the task of promoting the social and political achievement of the founding family. For Ugo, the monasteries functioned as centres for the organisation of his fiscal property, for other secular families the monasteries were private, the co-ordination centre of their territory, able to support the lordly establishment of the founders, especially those whose powers, of public

origin, became dynastic. Seen in this light, the foundation of the monasteries may be said to be a phenomenon parallel to that of 'incastellamento'.

Below is a list of the monasteries mentioned in the text (the number refers to the site number on the general map [fig. 2]).

Among the enterprises of Ugo of Tuscany, that which led to S. Salvatore of Sesto becoming an imperial monastery directly involved the Monte Pisano area. S. Salvatore, first recorded in

Fig. 1: Regional location of the Monte Pisano area. S. Salvatore, first recorded in

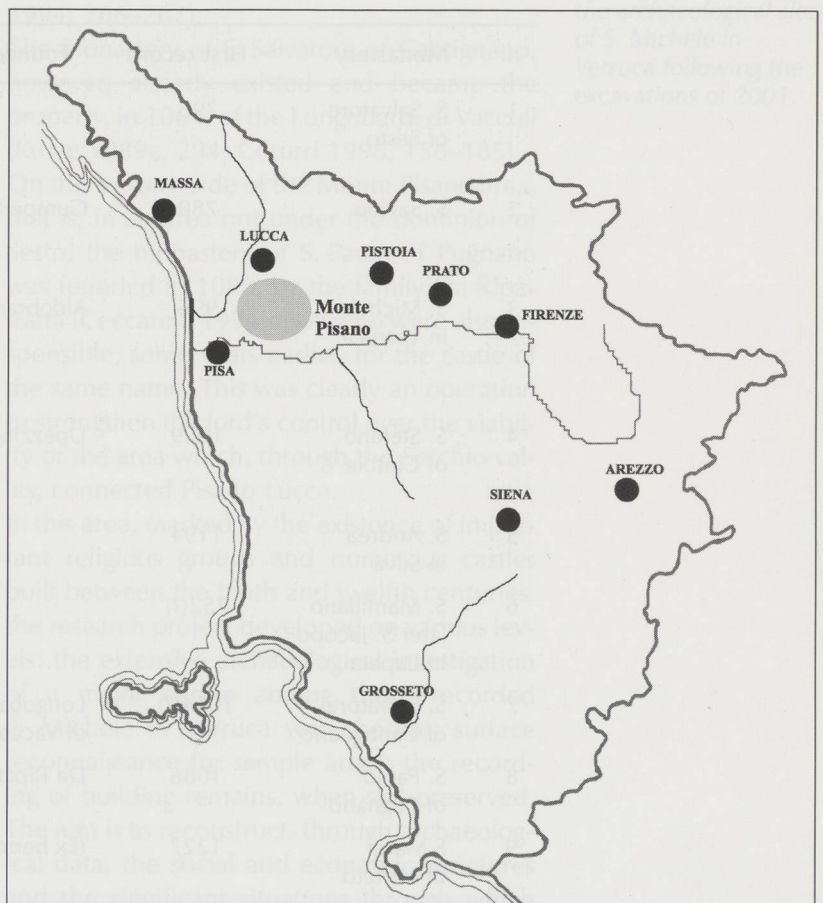




Fig. 2: Map of distribution of the monasteries mentioned in the text (the number corresponds to the number in the table).

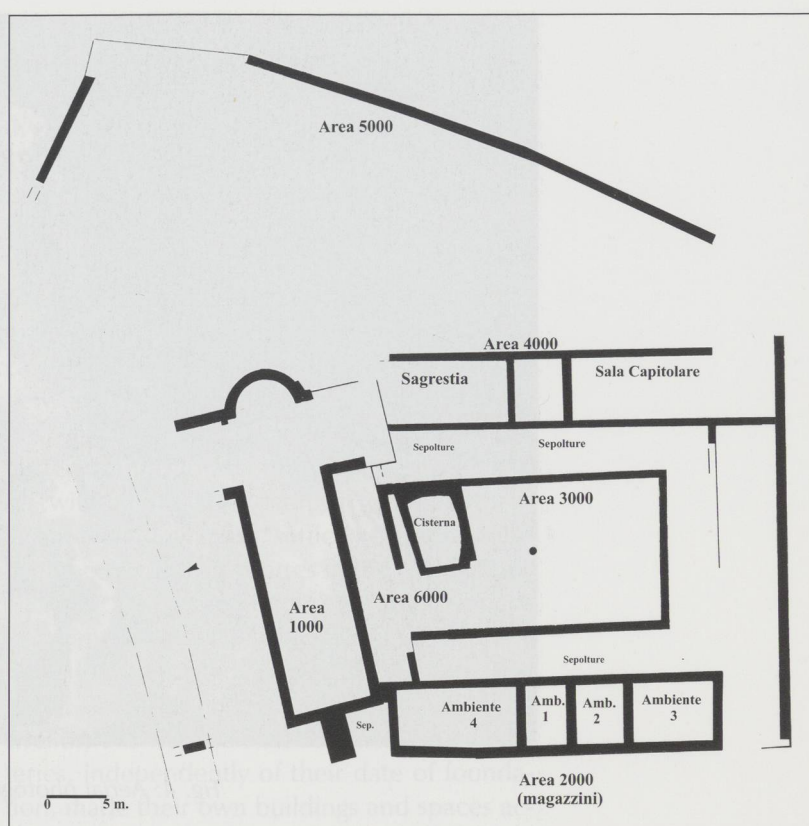
n.	Monastery	First record	Founder	Monastic order	Present site
1	S. Salvatore of Sesto	796		Benedictine, Camaldolese from 1120	Villa Ravano – Porcari (LU)
2	S. Savino	780	Gumperto	Benedictine, Camaldolese from 1111	Badia – village of Cascina (PI)
3	S. Michele in Verruca	996	Aldobrandeschi?	Benedictine, Cistercian from second half of XIII century	La Badia, Vicopisano (PI)
4	S. Stefano of Cintoia	1099	Upezzinghi	Benedictine, Camaldolese from 1113	Villa la Badia – Buti (PI)
5	S. Andrea in Silva	1194		Benedictine	S. Andrea in Lupeta–Vicopisano (PI)
6	S. Mamiliano later S. Jacopo in Lupeta	752(?)		Benedictine	S. Jacopo – Vicopisano (PI)
7	S. Salvatore of Cantignano	1064(?)	Longobardi di Vaccoli	Camaldolese from 1113	La Badia – Guamo (LU)
8	S. Paolo of Pugnano	1086	Da Ripafratta	Benedictine	Pugnano (PI)
9	S. Maria of Mirteto	1227	(Ex hermitage)	Cistercian	Mirteto (PI)

796, was located on the eastern slopes of the hills and looked out on the ancient lake of Sesto, which, in the Middle Ages, still extended from the plain of Lucca in the north to the lower Valdarno of the Pisa area in the south. The donations received with the imperial diploma of Otto III in 996 and the subsequent diplomas confirming rights and new privileges granted by Heinrich II (1020), Konrad II (1027), Heinrich III (1053), are indications of the considerable autonomy of the monasterie at both an administrative and legislative level. It was this pre-eminent position which enabled the coenoby of S. Salvatore to practise a policy of capillary control in the area, not only around the monastery and the nearby lake until the end of the eleventh century, but also through the direct foundation or acquisition of castles (Verruca, Castelvechio, Compito, Orentano) and the dependence of a monastery like S. Michele in Verruca (Onori 1984; Kurze 1989b; 1991). During the twelfth century, its control of the area increasingly weakened, even though property interests in the immediate vicinity of the coenoby continued to form the economic basis of the declining monastery throughout the thirteenth century.

At the end of the political dominion of Sesto, at least in the north-eastern part of Monte Pisano, there were a series of events that brought new protagonists onto the political and economic scene in this area.

In 1097, the first mention of an abbot of S. Michele in Verruca marks the end of this monastery's dependence on Sesto (Lucchetti 1966–1967). Its consolidation and establishment in the area is also evident from written documents which, especially from the twelfth century onwards, become more numerous, recording the purchase of land and church dependencies. The economic development of the coenoby relied not only on the exploitation of agricultural resources in its dependent land but also on the working of Verrucan stone quarries, as recorded in written sources from the first decade of the twelfth century (Andreazzoli, in press).

In the eleventh century another monastery is also recorded in the Monte Pisano area, that of S. Stefano of Cintoia, founded in 1099 by a member of the noble family of the Upezzinghi, in an area of great property interests for Sesto. The same Upezzinghi family must have had an important role in the building of the



nearby castle of Buti, also in 1099 (Carratori 1994, 266–267).

The monastery of S. Salvatore of Cantignano, however, already existed and became the property, in 1064, of the Longobardi di Vaccoli (Kurze 1989c, 294; Coturri 1998, 158–185).

On the western side of the Monte Pisano area, that is, in an area not under the dominion of Sesto, the monastery of S. Paolo of Pugnano was founded in 1086, by the family Da Ripafratta (Ceccarelli 1994, 237) who were also responsible, some years earlier, for the castle of the same name. This was clearly an operation to strengthen the lord's control over the viability of the area which, through the Serchio valley, connected Pisa to Lucca.

In this area, marked by the existence of important religious groups and numerous castles built between the tenth and twelfth centuries, the research project developed on various levels: the extensive archaeological investigation of a major centre among those recorded (S. Michele in Verruca was chosen); surface reconnaissance for sample areas; the recording of building remains, when still preserved. The aim is to reconstruct, through archaeological data, the social and economic structures and the significant situations through which

Fig. 3: General plan of the archaeological site of S. Michele in Verruca following the excavations of 2001.



Fig. 4: Aerial photograph of the monastery.

this phenomenon originates and develops. The archaeological investigation, carried out on the site of S. Michele from 1996 onwards, brought to light a large part of the monastery buildings which indicate an organic and structured project of rebuilding dating back to the first half of the twelfth century (fig. 3). Of the previous monastery, first recorded in 996, so far few structural remains have been found, which, at least initially, do not appear to follow an organised plan (Alberti/Gelichi 1998, 117–126; Gelichi et al. 2000, 336–356). Towards the middle of the twelfth century the centre consisted of a single-nave church and bell-tower, a large courtyard to the south with a great reservoir for the collection of water, and a series of rooms (chapter house, refectory, kitchens, storerooms) which entered out onto the courtyard. Two burial areas have been identified, for different uses: along the cloister colonnades for the monks; in the churchyard in front of the church for the people.

The excavation not only made it possible to define the layout of spaces and rooms at the most important time in the monastery's history, but also enabled its history to be followed through successive periods, marking various chronological sequences of abandon. The ab-

bey church, for example, must have been the last of the buildings to be abandoned after the fifteenth century and it underwent a series of considerable adaptations when the Cistercians arrived in the second half of the thirteenth century, which are clearly indicated by the excavations. The service areas, located on the western side of the complex with many other buildings, were abandoned no later than the end of the fourteenth century. The stationing of Florentine troops in the monastery, when they were at war with the Pisans barricaded in the castle of Verruca in the fifteenth century, is also evidenced in the excavations: traces of such an occupation are, in fact, recorded in the abbey church and in the chapter house.

The investigation of the monastery of S. Michele also involved a very detailed analysis of the construction techniques in evidence on the site; this investigation was the basis of a model to be compared with other similar situations in the Monte Pisano area.

An initial important result comes from a comparison with the still-preserved buildings of the monastery of S. Savino. S. Savino lies in the lower Valdarno of the Pisa area and was founded on April 30, 780, by the brothers Gumperto, Ildeperito and Gumprando, the

sons of Auricausi, in a church owned by them 'at Cerasiolo, in the area of Pisa'. Following a damaging flood of the Arno the monastery was later rebuilt in a safer place from 1117 onwards; the abbey church was consecrated by Innocent II on April 29, 1134 (Ceccarelli 1994, 335). Of the twelfth century *facies* there remain, in their entirety, the church and a good part of the monastery. As is the case with S. Michele, the plan shows the typical appearance of a Benedictine coenoby: the abbey church, usually to the north of the complex; a large cloister with reservoir around which the rooms of the monastery are located facing onto the gallery (Macalli, coll. 24–48). Regarding the wall-building technique, the sole use of Verrucan stone is found together with a certain type of surface work and sizing of ashlar or corbels which, in S. Savino as in S. Michele, but also in the other centres, is linked to specific parts of the building: medium and large ashlar with smoothed surfaces or hammered to shape for the front façade and apse walls of the abbey churches or surrounding the main entrances to the monasteries; small ashlar or simple corbels with irregular joints and layout in the general internal areas of the monastery. Other dated comparisons can be found in the façades of the church of S. Salvatore of Cantignano which, judging by the ceramic 'bowls' inserted in the northern transept wall, date back to the second half of the eleventh century (Berti 1990, 331; Ciampoltrini 1995). The surviving church of the monastery of S. Paolo of Pugnano still retains a large part of the wall decoration from the late eleventh century (Redi 1990, 221–222).

The remains of the monastery of S. Maria of Mirteto, however, are only datable through comparisons of type and architectonic decorative elements (Redi 1990, 234–235; Garzella 1994, 249), as are the remains of the monasteries of S. Jacopo in Lupeta and S. Andrea in Silva (Del Chiaro/Renzoni/Trombi 2000, 107–110, 115–117).

The model reconstructed on the basis of the extensive investigation of S. Michele in Verruca (founded during the tenth century, *floruit* between the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, decadent and abandoned between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries) seems to be, with all due consideration for the particulars of individual cases, sufficiently representative of other similar centres in the Monte Pisano area. It is interesting to note the existence of a general phase of enthusiasm for building which may be dated roughly between the end of the eleventh century and the first half of the twelfth; this was the time in which the monasteries, independently of their date of foundation, made their own buildings and spaces according to an organic and unitarian plan. Sesto, rebuilt approximately after its re-founding following the imperial diploma of 996, might have become an architectural model to imitate; unfortunately, however, little remains today of this monastery which was so important for the whole area (only the external northern walls of the bell tower and the sacristy remain). They constitute, however, an important source of study and reflect the desire of a wealthy patron who was able to draw on specialised experts who used similar building techniques throughout the whole area.

Bibliography

Alberti/Gelichi 1998

A. Alberti/S. Gelichi, "Archeologia di un monastero medievale: San Michele alla Verruca. Resoconto della campagna di scavo 1996–1998", in: *Archeologia Medievale* 25, 1998, 117–126.

Andreazzoli, in press

F. Andreazzoli, "Archeologia dell'architettura di un monastero medievale sul Monte Pisano: S. Michele alla Verruca", in: *Monasteri e Castelli fra X e XII secolo. Il caso di San Michele alla Verruca e le altre ricerche storico-archeologiche nella Toscana occidentale*, Atti del Convegno, Liveto Terme, Pisa 17–18 novembre 2000, in press.

Berti 1990

G. Berti, "Ceramiche islamiche del Mediterraneo occidentale usate come 'bacini' in Toscana, Sardegna e in Corsica (secoli XI–XIII)", in: S. Scuto (ed.), *L'età di Federico II nella Sicilia Centro Meridionale*, Atti delle Giornate di Studio, Gela 8–9 dicembre, 1990, 99–114; 265–279; 329–334.

- Carratori 1994 L. Carratori, "Vicopisano, Buti e Calcinaia", in: R. Mazzanti (ed.), *La pianura di Pisa e i rilievi contermini*, Pisa 1994, 251–283.
- Ceccarelli 1994 M. L. Ceccarelli, "Il Valdiserchio", in: R. Mazzanti (ed.), *La pianura di Pisa e i rilievi contermini*, Pisa 1994, 228–240.
- Ceccarelli, in press M. L. Ceccarelli, "Le grandi abbazie della Tuscia nel Trecento", in: *Benedictina*, Convegno Monte Oliveto Maggiore, in press.
- Ciampoltrini 1995 G. Ciampoltrini, "Ville, pievi, castelli: due schede archeologiche per l'organizzazione del territorio nella Toscana nord-occidentale fra tarda antichità e alto medioevo", in: *Archeologia Medievale* 22, 1995, 557–568.
- Coturri 1998 E. Coturri, *Pistoia, Lucca e la Valdinievole nel Medioevo. Raccolta di saggi* (= Biblioteca Storica Pistoiese 3), Pistoia 1998.
- Del Chiaro/Renzoni/Trombi 2000 A. Del Chiaro/S. Renzoni/F. Trombi, *Vicopisano, Il patrimonio culturale* (a cura di M. G. Burresi), Pisa 2000.
- Dizionario *Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione*, diretto da G. Pelliccia/G. Rocca.
- Garzella 1994 G. Garzella, "Il pedemonte", in: R. Mazzanti (ed.), *La pianura di Pisa e i rilievi contermini. La natura e la storia*, Pisa 1994, 240–250.
- Gelichi 2000 S. Gelichi (a cura di), "Il monastero di San Michele alla Verruca sui Monti Pisani. Resoconto delle ricerche 1996–1999", in: G. P. Brogiolo (ed.), *Il Congresso di Archeologia Medievale*, Brescia 28 settembre – 1 ottobre 2000, Firenze 2000, 336–356.
- Kehr 1908 P. F. Kehr, *Italia Pontificia 3, Etruria*, Berlin 1908.
- Kurze 1989a W. Kurze, *Monasteri e nobiltà nel senese e nella Toscana Medievale. Studi diplomatici, archeologici, genealogici, giuridici e sociali*, Siena 1989.
- Kurze 1989b W. Kurze, "Monasteri e nobiltà nella Tuscia altomedievale", in: Kurze 1989a, 295–318.
- Kurze 1989c W. Kurze, "Sulla storia di Camaldoli all'epoca delle riforme", in: Kurze 1989a, 275–294.
- Kurze 1991 W. Kurze, "Die Gründung des Salvatorkloster Sesto am Lago di Bientina und die Klostergeschichte des fra Benigno von 1578. Späte Überlieferung als methodisches Problem", in: *Studi Medievali* 32/2, 3° ser., 1991, 685–718.
- Lucchetti 1966–1967 G. Lucchetti, *I monasteri pisani dal 1077 alla fine del XII secolo*, Tesi di Laurea, Università degli Studi di Pisa, a. a. 1966–1967.
- Macalli F. Macalli, *Architettura dell'abbazia*, in: Dizionario, coll. 28–48.
- Nobili 1985 M. Nobili, "Le terre Obertenghe nelle contee di Pisa, Lucca e Volterra", in: *Studi di storia medievale e moderna su Vicopisano e il suo territorio*, Atti del Convegno della Società Storica Pisana: Vicopisano 27 giugno 1982, Pisa 1985, 35–47.
- Onori 1984 A. M. Onori, *L'Abbazia di San Salvatore di Sesto e il lago di Bientina*, Firenze 1984.
- Redi 1990 F. Redi, "Ambiente naturale e intervento dell'uomo nel Medioevo", in: *S. Giuliano Terme. La storia, il territorio*, Pisa 1990, 187–300.

Address

Sauro Gelichi, Antonio Alberti
Ca' Foscari University of Venice
Dipartimento di Scienze dell'Antichità
IT-30125 Venezia
gelichi@unive.it