

POLITECNICO DI TORINO  
SECOND SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE  
Master of Science in Architecture  
*Honors theses*

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**The cloister of the former St. Peter's Benedictine Monastery in Savigliano:  
knowledge and preservation**

by Chiara Ravera

Tutor: Maria Grazia Vinardi

Co-tutor: Cesare Romeo

My degree thesis aims at bringing out, through a restoration project, the value of the cloister of the former St. Peter's Benedictine Monastery in Savigliano, one of the most interesting and harmonious buildings of the town.



View of the cloister and its pictorial details

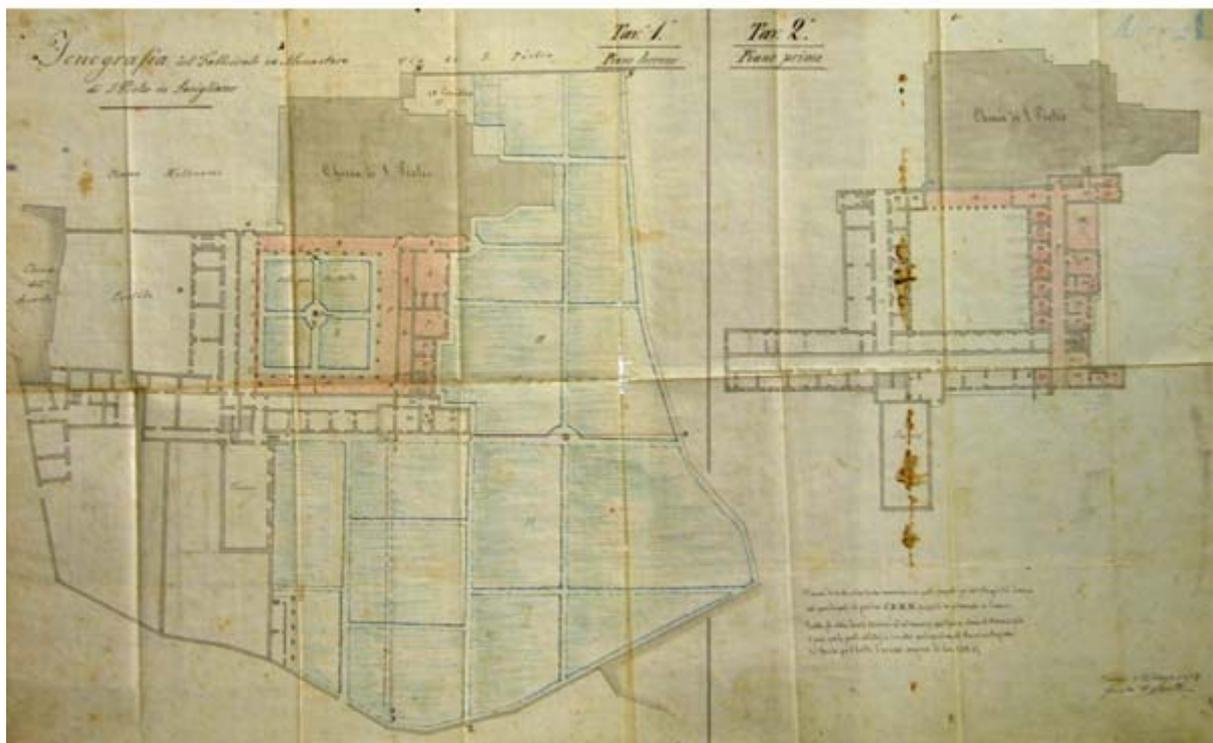
From the Roman age to the diffusion of Christianity, from the founding of the monastery, generally attributed to St. Fausto (585), up to the donations of Abellonio and Amaltruda, Lords of Sarmatorio (1028), to whom the historical documentation regarding the abbey dates back, the monastery went on growing in importance.

The value of the monastery, jealous of its independence and gifted with a great power of recovery throughout its history, is emphasized by donations from its congregation, gifts from pontiffs, designs on it by the other abbeys in the surroundings area and the choice of the monastery as seat of the University between 1434 and 1436. In 1459 the monastery joins the Benedictine congregation of St. Giustina of Padova, transformed in 1504 into the Cassinese congregation, to which it remains attached until 1859 when, on account of the second abolition of religious orders, it is abandoned by the monks.

From then on the abbey becomes from time to time prison, subprefecture, Royal boarding school, and presently parish rooms, vicar's residence, secondary school and technical high school, the laboratories of which occupy two thirds of the former monastery garden.

In this work I chose to analyse in detail the different levels of knowledge, in order to realise a "good restoration work" taking into account the characteristics and the history of the building.

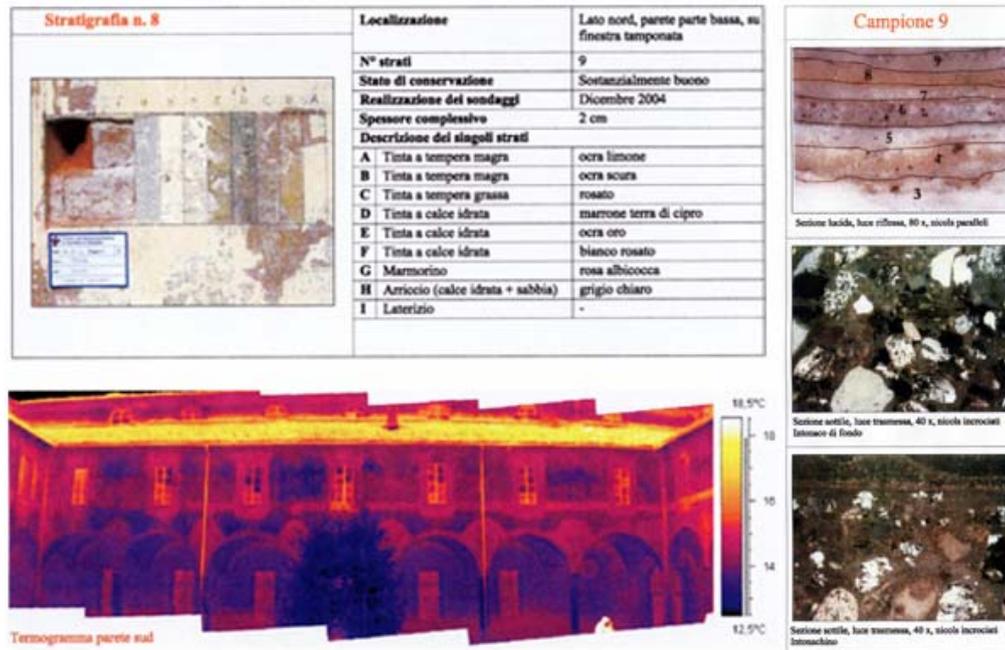
A first reconstruction of the building evolution has been possible thanks to documents found in the archives, to historical cartography and iconography and to notes by many authors, collected in books on local history and art.



Plan of the monastery by surveyor Ricotti (1872)

When the documents were inadequate in providing the necessary information, the building stages have been hypothesized through a close observation of the site throughout the investigation and the survey. Such information raised a number of questions about the possible development of the building that led me to look for more concrete answers with the help of diagnostic analysis.

I considered the following diagnostic techniques: polished and thin sections, Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy, thermogravimetric analysis, analysis of soluble salts, granulometric analysis (carried out by the firm Rankover), stratigraphic samples (performed by Dr. Gubbioni), granted by the Town Council of Savigliano, and lastly the thermography carried out by myself.



Examples of diagnostic techniques: stratigraphic samples (above), thermography (below) and polished and thin sections (right)

This work allowed me to study in depth diagnostic techniques, usually dealt with, while studying, only through a theoretic approach, and to put them into practise in order to verify their restoration validity. With the results of the investigation, I've been able to know the composition of different materials and their chromatic and chemio-physic transformations, the degree of conservation and deterioration, the techniques adopted, the stratifications, and to find out the best compatible techniques and materials for use in restoration. Particular attention has been paid to the wall paintings, in order to make the most of the two pictorial stages, the sixth-century monochrome one and the seventh-century polychrome one.

The thesis ends hypothesizing a realistic and specialistic project of conservation, aiming at ensuring the temporal continuance of the cloister and its efficiency, at eliminating wherever possible the causes of deterioration and finally at revealing those formal, historic and artistic values that make the cloister a "unicum" in the landscape of Piedmont.

For further information, e-mail:

Chiara Ravera: [ravera.chiara@libero.it](mailto:ravera.chiara@libero.it)