

# The Discovery of a Templar Border Castle of the Kingdom of Naples and the Urgency of Conservation

FLAVIA FESTUCCIA  
Dsdra - Sapienza - University Rome Sapienza  
Via Gramsci 53, Rome, ITALY  
flavia.festuccia@uniroma1.it

**Abstract:** - The study of the monument of St. Mary della Porta, fortified church and even before the Chamber of Arms of the castle of S. Angelo, and of the walled village (Castel S. Angelo) located in the former Abruzzo further (now in the extreme offshoot of the region Lazio, affected by the telluric movements of 2016) It aims to document and promote the knowledge of the place, an essential premise for a correct future conservation, which does not ruin the site, handed down in its still medieval aspect.

Through a historical survey of the site is described in this article an example of conservation, that of the visitation inside the fortified church, which should be an example for the conservation of the whole village.

In fact, referring to the theory of restoration in particular to the school of Prof. Giovanni Carbonara, the conservation of the fresco must be carried out respecting the principles of restoration: Recognizability, reversibility, compatibility, minimum intervention, interdisciplinary.

The fresco is restored following this logic. The purpose of the restoration carried out by private individuals in collaboration with the State is on the one hand the knowledge, on the other the correct intervention.

In fact, the fifteenth century fresco was first consolidated, then cleaned and retouched taking into account the fragments of color and colors still existing and integrating the gaps with watercolor painting at *rigatino*. Where there were no traces of colour, as in the mantle of Our Lady, the neutral colour was left.

The example of the restoration is useful both from an organizational point of view (privates that finance in collaboration with the ministry) both from an operational point of view (observance of the Five principles of the restoration, integration of the gaps etc.). But another important fresco is deteriorating: it is a chapter of a statute of 1566 whose hard copy has been lost and of which the restoration project is published.

Other important writings appear near the fresco, outside, near the entrance door to the city walls. Who will help save this? Archeoclub will have the necessary funding to save a medieval Templar castle? We have the professionalism, the way to intervene for conservation, the project, the relief of all the walls and documentation but it seems that there is no interest in saving part of the story that covered Florence, L'Aquila, the Kingdom of Naples, France, Spain, Hungary, and, last but not least, the phenomenon of Templarismo, which is, therefore, the past of Europe.

**Key-Words:** - Church Fortified, Abruzzo, Castrum Sancti Angeli, Benedectine, Templar, Conservation

## 1. Introduction

Monument rich in iconographic references is the fortified building of S. Maria della Porta. Hall of the Knights, of the Castrum Sancti Angeli in Kingdom of Naples, it consists of a multi-level building consisting of a church fortified by two towers and equipped with loopholes and plungers for the grazing and plumbing defense. The fortified side develops along the city walls with archibugiere loopholes alternating with the piombatoi and archers' slits and cannon on the bell tower. The facade presents Stories from the Old Testament, in particular a few frames are still visible that tells of

the temptation of Adam and of repentance. A beautiful floral frame of acanthus leaves alternating with fruit frames the graffiti. The graffiti are preceded, on the left side of the entrance door, by a chapter of a statute presumably dispersed in its paper version, and relative to the sale of meat. The statute is dated 1566. The church that takes place on the second level and accessible with a side entrance has three naves but previously had to have only two aisles. It is covered by a barrel vault in the central nave and cross vaults in the lower side aisles. The altar was originally turned to the west; the apse is flat with a room on the back now walled and accessible by a stone-framed door with a sculpted face of Jesus. The back wall of the ancient altar

shows the fresco of the Visitation, datable to the fifteenth century, which is particular for the presence of John crowned and kneeling on Elizabeth's belly before the Holy Spirit. The inversion of the altar probably occurred after the fifteenth century has provided a crypt on the first level, also identifiable through the small rise of the presbytery. Next to the crypt, a small closed room is documented in the 19th century as Monte Frumentario. A trapdoor in front of the Nativity altar made the wheat pour into the mountain below. A small container for stone Ostie placed in the current altar wall further documents the displacement of the altar to the East. We know that it was in Benedictine customs to place the altars in the East. Also the typology of the building with rectangular pillars partly still plastered although of travertine and V-shaped cornices leads back to the Benedictine churches of the twelfth century in the territory of Aquila. At the third level is the church of the confraternity, probably of the Holy Sacrament. We have seen how the east-facing position of the altar, the rectangular-section pillars, the flat apse and the two-aisled church betray a possible Benedictine past of the church, which finds comparisons in Abruzzo with S. Pietro to Oratorium, for example. The fresco of the back wall, in addition to representing the Visitation, is preceded in temporal order by an Ecce Homo with Romanic arches and surmounted by an enormous figure, perhaps God in the upper part. This enormous figure must have been the conclusive one of a theory of saints or of apostles that were frescoed above and sideways to the arches of the right aisle, the oldest one. A baptismal font of particular beauty with angels and dolphins, from the 16th century, is placed near the current entrance. The current entrance was moved in the eighteenth century to give place to an altar with a small canvas of the Madonna della Misericordia. The church with two naves is added only later to the bell tower, witness is the shoe of the tower located inside the church itself. This was because it was placed against the second wall that enclosed the town near the bell tower.

## 2. The bell tower and other chapels

One would therefore think of a pre-existence of the second wall of the church which in any case can not be later than the 13th century, in comparison with the contemporary churches of Abruzzo. The bell tower currently communicates through a small door with the church but it is interesting the pointed

arch that looks like an arch of the walled city wall with an interesting exit outside the walls. The building is documented in the nineteenth century as a seat of different religious activities, from the cult to the frumentary mountains, home to three Confraternities then became Congregations (Anime Sante, SS.Concezione and Rosario, SS.Sacramento and S.Michele). It consisted of two churches, a lower and an upper one located above the left aisle called "La Confraternita". S. Maria della Porta assumed the title of Arcipretura and this title is remembered until the twentieth century, gathering around itself other parishes, churches and chapels; in some of these you can still find some iconographic references of a certain particularity, we refer to the church of S. Rocco with the chapel of S. Maria della Misericordia, to the chapel of S. Andrea in Mozza and the collegiate church of S. Maria da Canetra (16th century portal), rebuilt at the end of the 19th century, the only title with that of S. Maria della Porta as an extra moenia church of the Castrum Sancti Angeli.



Fig.1 Santa Maria della Misericordia, Fresco of Madonna in throne school of Antoniazio Romano, on the left, benedictine monk.

## 3. The Chapel of S. Maria della Porta

In S. Andrea a fresco narrates the connection of the chapel to the Sala dei Cavalieri of S. Maria della Porta, which is depicted in its still fifteenth century version as a fortified building of Nordic taste.

The "Chapel of S. Maria della Porta" is mentioned in an ad limina report of 1590: in "Castro Sancti Angeli" there are the following churches: the parish church of S. Angelo, the chapel of S. Maria, S. Martino and San Pietro and the "collegiate of S. Maria de Canetra" de (dependent on) Castro Sancti Angeli ".



Fig.2 Santa Maria della Porta- Visitation

#### 4. The fortified ecclesiastical buildings

The fortified ecclesiastical building finds its stylistic references in France, in the fortified church of St. Marie de la Mere. The church has in fact some similar characteristics both in the typology and in the architectural and sculptural details, as for example in the ancient baptismal sources. The probable presence of a frescoed knight on the entrance door below the sacristy, above the city gate, meant that the building of S. Maria della Porta maintained its ancient name of "Sala of the Knights." But it is above all the typological setting of the building that has undergone great transformations over time to lead us back to already known examples also located in Spain and France. The castle of Miravet is placed on a spur overlooking the Ebro's bed, from which the ford and river traffic between Tortosa, on the coast and the interior up to Zaragoza were controlled. The castle presents three salient belts tracing, according to Cadei the layout of an ancient Muslim albàcar. The high castle is set up as a rectangular quadrilateral structure, with quadrangular towers at the corners. It is an application of the type of "a castrum" plant whose revival in Europe and the Holy Land between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries is the subject of hypotheses and conflicting theories in relation priorities, both to possible precedents and models. " Surprising is the typological resemblance of the building: "... The north wing structure, made up of two parallel and distinct buildings, even if covered by a single crenellated terrace and equipped with loopholes, is very unusual. The outermost has a low ground documentally identified as a granary,

surmounted by the chapel, high rectangular room with a single hall with a semicircular apse, connected with the corner tower that guarded the entrance, but also functioned as a treasure chamber and archive.



Fig.3 The fortified church

On a similar ground floor, the building that adheres to it is a loggia with arches open onto the courtyard that acts as an atrium to the chapel; above it, to compensate for the difference in height compared to the chapel, a third floor takes place, consisting of a long and low compartment covered by a barrel vault, which late documentation indicates as the residence of the Commendatore ... ". Miravet's description is strictly coinciding with the constituted nucleus of S. Maria della Porta; the granary (Monte frumentario) below the church and covered with a barrel vault is still existing and documented as working in the nineteenth century; another barrel vaulted room flanked it, above the chapel with a fortified wall with piombatoi and loopholes and laterally a residence, described by Verani and unfortunately today demolished, consisting of a ground floor and a second level with arches opening onto the entrance lateral to the church. Cadei highlights how "this grouping of buildings, which identified the area of greatest prestige, the most sacred and from every point of view the most important, was also the most exposed in the defensive economy of Miravet, constituting a sort of block that directly presided the main entrance of the castle and served as a pivot and junction for the paths that connected the lower terraces of the eastern wing and the towers of the high castle".

#### 5. The complex of S. Maria della Porta and other templar buildings

The complex of S. Maria della Porta is also a sort of block that directly guarded the main entrance to

the castle, acting as a "pivot and junction" for the two main streets, the Guelphs and the Ghibellines. Miravet was given to the Templars by Raimondo Berengario IV of Barcelona on August 24th 1153 with five other castles in the region that had just been taken from the Muslims. Also in Monzòn, ceded to the Templars by Raimondo Berengario under the agreement of Gerona in 1143 (about the testament of Alfonso I of Aragon) A. Cadei identifies common characteristics with Miravet as the typology of the two main buildings: the large hall of representation, or the refectory and the chapel, a single apsidal barrel-like room, like that of Miravet and inserted into a key point for defense, a fortified entrance with a tower and the battlements above the chapel. The fortified entrance of Monzòn with a tower, together with the large representative room above the chapel, in our case covered by a cross, leads us directly to S. Maria della Porta. Also in Catalonia in the castle of Gardeny the main complex is formed by the chapel with a large residential building formed by the overlap of two long barrel vaulted rooms. At Tortosa in Syria, on the other hand, the rectangular chapel of four cross-bays with the residential building in separate and autonomous buildings is built. At Safita the single-chamber chapel and the community hall form the two superimposed floors of the large quadrangular keep. From the analysis of the wall stratigraphy the first evidence of Castel S. Angelo can be ascribed to the eleventh century but at present a documentary gap from its origins until the sixteenth century does not allow us to document with archival documents but only through the observation of orthoptics and the stratigraphic analysis of the masonry as well as the stylistic features of the phases that the development of the castle crosses.



Fig.4 The Knight's hall

## 6. The Farnesian archive and Margaret of Austria

It was later, in the 16th century, that in a document from the Farnesian archive we read about a knight named Sgamariutte, who "was injured at night with a curl in his thigh, a certain livio de Simone Sgamariutte of the said castle, in a house where there was a dance school .. ". This misdeed depended on the fact that the administrator Antonelli of Margaret of Austria had absent from the place. What we learn from the Farnesian documents is already related to an era, that of the government of Margaret of Austria, in which the castle had lost its autonomy, even fiscal, and had been included in the district of Cittaducale, a new city adjacent to its territory and founded in 1308 by the Angiò. Only later, in 1658, Castel Sant'Angelo, after a long period of discontent that will result also in a very long lawsuit for the payment of taxes "in greater sum of the debt", concluded in 1710, that Castel S. Angelo will ask the separation from Cittaducale. The pillars of the right aisle of the church of S. Maria della Porta, datable around the twelfth century, show a fake wall unit that is superimposed on the travertine blocks. The theme of the false masonry is used for example in the chapel of Resson. Emerges the presence in the fresco of the back wall that was to constitute the main altar, of S. Giovanni, still in the womb, kneeling before the S (Holy Spirit) placed in the lap of the Madonna in a beautiful 15th century Visitation. For example, the theme of the visit is in Lugaut, in the eastern wall. The chapel of Laugat belongs to a historical phase that presents similarities with the orders of the warrior monks, that of the Hospitallers and in particular of the Giovannites. According to recent historiography, a study on the pictorial characteristics of the Templars can not do without what was done in the hospital. According to Curci, the Hospitallers add to the common intention of adopting parietal and sign motifs with references to Jerusalem and the struggle against the infidels, a recurrent celebration of the patron saint and a greater welcome to figures outside the Order, to whom in some cases we must establish the welfare structures.



Fig.5 Castel S. Angelo

The baptismal font, rich in iconographic references, of angels and dolphins, is particularly beautiful. A marble group was placed on the baptismal font; it is said that it was a beautiful workmanship and depicted the baptism of St. John. Unfortunately, no documentation remains.



Fig.6 Bell tower

## 7. The Fresco and other paintings in the church of St. Maria della Porta

The reference to S. Giovanni in the fresco on the back wall and in the marble complex of the baptismal font is certainly not accidental, but above all the importance of the marble group can be traced back to that of the marble group of S. Giovanni in Laterano in Rome. The cult of the Virgin is instead part of the recurrent themes in Templar art, widely practiced and attested both by the dedication of buildings and by the presence of themes such as the Assumption, the Crowning of the Enthroned Madonna all used for propaganda purposes by the Templars. The paintings of the Assumption (in reality it was perhaps the representation of the Eucharist) in the high altar, of the Rosary, of the Conception, of St. Joseph but above all the presentation of the Lord to the Temple do not constitute a casual iconography. In the allegory of the Eucharist there was a chalice with two figures;

in the Madonna of the Rosary a Madonna brought in triumph from the population where a white-capped brother is seen, a Bishop and a noblewoman together with St. Catherine. The painting is surrounded by episodes from the Life of the Madonna; the presentation of the Lord to the Temple refers to the Temple which in this case is the church of S. Maria della Porta, in fact in the painting we recognize the ancient altar now demolished. The client in the foreground (looks like a member of the Vallocchia family) and the bishop of Our Lady of the Rosary welcomes Jesus. Tradition has it that this Bishop is Biagio, but we do not have elements to prove this. The Bishop in the Templar allegory represents the power of the church, being that of the Templars a power parallel to the temporal power of the church. But it is above all the presence of figures, perhaps attributable to the apostles or to one hagiographic cycle in the right wall, as well as in the back wall (on the upper level) which adds another iconographic element of importance. The theme of the Holy Spirit present in the fifteenth and fifteenth century altar as well as the starry vaults in the right aisle, repainted in epochs later, they also lead back to themes dear to the Knights of the Temple. Another important element is the secondary devotions that concern saints linked to local cults; Curci in his discussion observes how hagiographic cycles or votive panels remain that indicate the adoption of local protectors such as Bevignate in Perugia, Elisabetta in Marburg, Redegonda and perhaps Ilario in Poitou.

## 8. The city of Aquila and a “chapter”

So at Castel S. Angelo Biagio, the only still visible Saint of a probable cycle hagiographic in the wall of the right aisle. A niche in the wall contains the many still existing relics, on the other hand the Templars played an important role in the importation of relics from the East, especially after the fourth crusade. The heritage of the relics imported from the Templars was a great wealth, see for example the chapel of Montbellel where consecration crosses are placed in the right hand of apostles and realized as refined goldsmith work. We publish the bubbles attesting the authenticity of some relics. The skilful reuse of the fifteenth-century building and its transformation into a sixteenth-century church is due to the legacy of workers who know the techniques of war but who do not miss a specific theme that uses symbologies, icons and graphemes. The thirteenth-century tower, equipped with an external shoe, together with the chapel with portico, is perhaps included in a new building in the

fourteenth century, fortified by *piombatoi* and loopholes and is also the apse of the original chapel. The loopholes also refer to a precise symbology: the cross, while the *piombatoi* bear both the cross and the seeds of the French cards. The fifteenth-century building is frescoed with graffiti on plaster depicting stories from the Old Testament; a writing refers to Rome. A fifteenth-century chapter dated 1566, shows the regime to which the meat was subjected in the "Castello S.Aglo", in the territory of Aquila. This is the only castle where meat can be sold. The city of Aquila is mentioned in the Chapter.

## 9. The 17 Road

The recent studies linking the city of Aquila to the heavenly Jerusalem and the presence of the Templars along the road connecting Anrodoco to L'Aquila and L'Aquila to Popoli are well known. Chapter Symbology The symbol of the cross The symbol of the cross of St. Benedict is sculpted in two very important small postposts with probably the guild of a sign<sup>5</sup>. Both refer to trades. The first to that of the blacksmiths, the second to that of the tailors. In all probability they are signs of the guild seats of arts and crafts on the site.

## 10. The templars and corporations

There is a precise connection between Templars and corporations: in fact, where the Templars were present, the economy was autonomous, so the urban centers were organized into corporations. As for the seals, even for the Templar crosses there is no uniqueness, because over the years they have been adopted of different types and forms, and often not even in a univocal manner. The simple Greek cross was the first model of the distinctive cross of the order. The other models are all more or less inspired by that of the cross patent (or *croix pattée*), or the cross with equal arms that widen in the outer part. The symbol of the cross of St. Benedict is sculpted in two very important little postposts with probably the guild of corporations<sup>1</sup>. Both refer to trades. The first to that of the blacksmiths, the second to that of the tailors. In all probability they are signs of the guild seats of arts and crafts on the site. There is a precise connection between Templars and corporations: in fact, where the Templars were present, the economy was autonomous, so the urban centers were organized into corporations. As for the seals, even for the Templar crosses there is no uniqueness, because over the years they have been adopted of different types and forms, and often not

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## 11. The Templar symbols in Castel S.Angelo

The symbol of the cross is carved under the entrance arch in two points, in a window in Via degli Amici, in the church of S. Maria della Porta (plunger) and in some houses. The Cistercian origins and the 6-petal symbol Frequent is the symbol with 6 petals, in particular we remember the one placed on the step of the access door to the underground level of the church of S. Maria della Porta. This symbol was also used by the Cistercians. The wheel is located in several places, in the fifteenth-century façade of S. Maria della Porta on the entrance step to the basement level and in some houses. Particularly a fireplace with the representation of an Islamic ceramic in the center, on the sides a cornflower on the left and a flower of particular beauty on the right, in which the cross is present in the center. A small portal that refers to Eugene IV and bears the inscription 1434 bears instead two lilies and a central flower. The triple belt The triple wall is present in the fortified village as a real construction. At present, no three-symbol symbologies have been found. But even more interesting seems to be the fact that the triple wall existed in concrete as a construction wall to protect the town. This is the case of Miravet that we have already examined; the castle presents three salient belts tracing, according to Cadei the layout of an ancient Muslim *albàcar*; the reference to Islamic art is interesting above all in reference to the fact that the entrance arch to the city walls included in the complex of S. Maria della Porta is a third point arch, typical of the Islamic tradition. Architecture; the Islamic arch in third point. The knowledge of constructive ways related to Islamic architecture can be traced back to the crusades. The saints linked to the Templar culture, the pesky angel. The reference to the weighing angel is interesting; the seventeenth-century coat of arms of Castel S. depicts St. Michele pesanime, the Archangel that protects the castle and to which the church is dedicated to protect the second enclosure. The presence of the Anjou after Frederick II The Anjou, contrary to the orders given in France by Philip the Fair, stood to protect the warrior monks. This attitude was opposed to that of Frederick II who opposed the order, favoring the Teutonic instead. It is not excluded that the Abbot referred to by the Sthamer could be an abbot linked to the

Templars. In this regard it seems interesting to us a quote from the Bindi about a castle called *Castrum Sancti Angeli* that Frederick II ordered to destroy.

## 12. The castle on the border of the Kingdom

This castle was on the border of the Kingdom of Naples with the Papal State and was, in our opinion, incorrectly referred to *Città di Castello*. The chapter concerning slaughter The warrior monks, as well as the Hospitallers who succeeded him, led a very orderly and hygienically correct life. They had statutes. A chapter completely detached from local politics is engraved under the entrance of *Castel S. Angelo*, in the façade of *S. Maria della Porta*; it is interesting how, even if we are already in 1566, mention is made of *Cittaducale* only in *Aquila*; this means that the castle was still equipped with autonomy from the nearby new city. The hospital of *S. Spirito* The presence of the Hospital of *S. Spirito* is documented; it had to be placed just outside the walls, perhaps near the farmhouse *Il Moro* and the church dedicated to *S. Rocco*. In fact, near the farmhouse, some burials have been identified. The Templar order continued with the Hospital orders, probably the presence of the Hospital of *S. Spirito* on the site refers to a membership of the hospital. The presence of charitable structures dedicated to assistance is evidenced by the *Monti Frumentarii*, still documented in the 19th century, by the presence of *Confraternities* and charitable structures, such as the *Proietti wheel* in *S. Rocco*.

## 13. The History of Castel S. Angelo

The history of *Castel S. Angelo* is supported by very rare historical sources, almost non-existent in the period of its maximum splendor. Its origins often lie in uncertainty<sup>1</sup>. Some facts have led the writer to the deepening of the archive research extended to historical sources concerning the territory; the absence in certain historical periods of the mention of the castle of *Castel Sant'Angelo* from the sources concerning the territory, in particular in the periods between the XII and XV century, is not attributable to a possible change of the toponym if not marginally. In fact, according to these initial conclusions the absence of the quotation of the name from historical sources could derive from different reasons, as also the absence of the mention of the *castrum*, as it turns out, from the tax books during the *Federician* period and later, during the *Angevin Kingdom*<sup>3</sup>. *Sthaner's* statement seems to us to be particularly important: "An important role in the control of the Kingdom road towards *Rieti*

carried out *Antrodoco*, which fell into the hands of the Emperor in July 1233 after a long siege. It seems, however, that at *Antrodoco* there were still fortifications left in the possession of an abbot (we do not know precisely which fortification and which abbot it was .. that Frederick still did not consider it safe enough, in case of defense this point, strategically important. For this reason, in the aforementioned writing of 12/12/1239 (*Carcani*, pag.283 Sgg. *Huillard-Brahalles v.558.RI n.2619*) in which measures are taken for the defense of the Kingdom against the papal troops, he ordered *Andrea Cicala* to seize and destroy these fortifications, possibly without attracting attention, or through the summons and imprisonment of the abbot or through a secret attack ". This was the politics of Frederick II, so much so that *Sthaner* cites the case of the castle of *Cerro* in *Terra del Lavoro*, which was in the hands of *Deoteguarde*, was later annexed to the Empire. In fact after the papal coronation, when in 1220 Frederick II set foot in the Kingdom of Sicily he found an extreme disorder because, as a result of the disagreements between *Henry VI* and *Tancredi*, the struggle had led to forms of autonomous power of leaders and barons, so Frederick II restored the order by trying to constitute a strong state property. After the coronation, he was given castles and cities and issued a law during the diet of *Capua* (1220): all the castles and other fortifications built after the death of *William II* on state lands had to be delivered to the crown to be destroyed or reported in the state of the time of *William II*; for the *demanio* the Emperor reserved to decide freely. The regulatory year was established 1189 (death of *William II*). Up to now no sources of taxation have been found until after the union with *Cittaducale*, in late times, following the intervention of *Margaret of Austria*. The hypothesis that *Castel S. Angelo* may appear in the documentation prior to the sixteenth century with a different name could also be taken into consideration because some documents concerning the history of the territory refer to castles that are not identifiable: the castle of *Ianule - Vaggio* for example . But if *Castel S. Angelo* was mentioned by the place's toponym, it would once again explain the desired anonymity of the *castrum*, anonymity confirmed by the *Marchesi* in his sixteenth-century treatise, where he refers to "*Castello*" while talking about the fifteenth-century wars. the author himself changes the name of the place with a certain certainty when he faces the sixteenth century by calling the same site "*Castel S. Angelo*". The site was however<sup>4</sup> from the beginning strongly characterized by the presence of the guardian angel

already carved from the fourteenth century in several points of the village. The uniqueness of the monument in the territory and the lack of reliable data in the time period that goes from the Middle Ages to the early Middle Ages means that the history of the monuments of the *Castrum Sancti Angeli* can be read dialectically from the architectural details, the styles, the coats of arms, from the frescoes and from every trace of the work of man in the place. It is after careful research conducted in the building that it can be said that in Castel S. Angelo there are the iconemes of the Templars and Cistercians, graphicized in different buildings, starting from the façade of the church, in the little doors, in the steps, in the fireplaces and in every place that time has allowed to pass on. Recall that the Templars in 1307, when Philip the Fair issued the arrest order, was still a prestigious institution with a network of 870 foundations in the British Isles, Hungary, Scandinavia and in Italy formed by different types: castles, commende, houses and mansions. In that period the monarchy chapels of the twelfth century had been replaced by larger buildings and had become administrative centers of vast seigniorial domains with jurisdictional and parish functions. The structural analysis and stylistic features of the monument confirm that the church of S. Maria della Porta 1 in the 12th century was a mononave chapel and became a parish and archpriest with jurisdiction over neighboring municipalities such as the Rocca di Fondi site. The wall decorations were affected by the status of the building that contained them. S. Maria della Porta is rich in decorations; we considered for example one of the great figures that overhang the aisles; S. Biagio, retouched in the seventeenth century; one can still see in the tunnel behind the sixteenth-century back wall the figure, no longer clearly legible but crowned and surmounted by two spirals, of an apostle or a saint. The other figures, which involved the right aisle, were covered by the painting done in the '30s in order to make the church less dark. Some symbologies of the Templar churches, like the starry vaults, have evidently reappeared over time and still affect three bays. It is also interesting that the façade was frescoed in the 15th century with a theme dear to order: the temptation of man and woman by the snake and the use of profane language (the figures of Adam and Eve they are naked) in the facade. A later altarpiece in *controfacciata*<sup>4</sup>, later, probably from the 16th century, brought back another theme typical of the churches of the Templars: the Eucharist with the representation of the Holy Spirit. On the back wall a

fifteenth-century fresco, the Visitation: St. Elizabeth visits the Madonna.



Fig.7 tower XIV century

We have already noted how St. John is drawn near an *Ecce homo* that overlooks a Romanesque sepulcher with arches. In the iconography the reference to St. John is not accidental; we have already mentioned how much of the possessions of the Templars passed to the Johannites: the baptism of St. John 5 dominated the sixteenth-century baptismal font at the entrance of S. Maria della Porta. The need to increase the resident military force, the efficiency of the structure and the favor with which the monarchy followed the formation of a contingent delegated by the baronial power and subjected to the control of the church had led to the success of the Order. In 1486 a war fought in Castel S. Angelo is documented with the intervention of nearby castles.

#### 14. The castel of the templars

The war is against the barons backed by Innocent VIII. Even this event, so to speak, anti-papal in fact suggests, but what leads to a reflection is that the war was won at Castel Sant'Angelo, the only valid fortification in the territory able to resist troops coming from the city of Aquila. An omnipresent network of commandos and houses took care of the pilgrims' journey along the main road routes, turning Europe into a "huge hinterland in front". The castles of the Templars were built in points that could strategically constitute defense points. Castel S. Angelo had to be part of this hinterland, built in the central Apennines, close to the Terminillo, on the slope overlooking Mount Nuria to the east and the Gran Sasso massif; along the SS4 that then continues from Antrodoco in the SS17 to L'Aquila<sup>7</sup>. From the Mastio it is possible to have control of the whole Velino valley, from Cesoni to Antrodoco, ie

it is possible to observe all the territory bordering the Kingdom of Naples with the Papal State in a considerable portion of territory subjected during the XIII century to the dominion of the dukes and then of the barons. It is also located along the Via dei Fiorentini, a route for the wool trade. A separate bracket concerns the trade in textile fibers. In fact, still in the sixteenth century the textile industry was flourishing, as documented by the Farnese sources . In reality, this itinerary we are dealing with is a path that has been crossed even before the merchants from the crusades. In reality, this itinerary we are dealing with is a path that has been crossed even before the merchants from the crusades. Despite the differences and specificities linked to the context, among the many orders that arose in the East and in the West between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, a unitary trait can be found, consisting of the frequent adoption of an Templar imprinting model and an often privileged relationship with the Cistercian world. The end of Latin domination in the East in 1291 inflicted a mortal blow on the public image of the military order. The hospitals emphasized this aspect of their activity until 1306 with the landing of Rhodes and the foundation of the Theocratic State. In 1312 the bubble *Vox excelso* sanctioned the suppression of the Temple; then the search becomes complex also in the case, as it probably happened to Castel S. Angelo, in which the Giovanniti had already completed or renewed the acquired buildings during the '300s. The bubble *Ad providam* pronounced by Clement V in 1312 had the assets transferred to the Giovannites. Gregory XI in 1373 ordered an investigation into the hospital's assets. It remains a privileged relationship with France where the great masters come from. The Italian reality is characterized by the complex political and institutional articulation within a scenario in which military orders reacted in a non-univocal way to the Ghibelline partisan of Florentine Templars which is opposed by the filiguelfo line-up of the confreres of the Perugian commenda. Curci stresses that no funds or cards from the Templar settlements are known in Italy and that almost all the information comes from procedural documents; if we exclude the case of Bevignate in Perugia, the Italian panorama is rather uncertain. The Templars graphemes remain at present and in our specific case the only testimonial source for identifying the Templar presence; they constitute the alphabet of a language for learned scholars; the beginning of a long journey leading initially to anagrams and symbols and techniques close to middle-Europe has slowly addressed the sign language used by the warrior monks. The

demonstration of the correspondence between the bas-relief and the plan of the city , as well as the existence of a route indicated by the anagram symbols, then suggested distant and certainly not local cultures. This beginning, which can not be placed precisely in a precise cultural direction, today appears as the greatest testimony of a culture that it did not want but, at the same time, could not leave written sources<sup>4</sup>. The scarcity of historical information from the Middle Ages to the sixteenth century can be traced back to the intention of making this reality not very visible, just as the symbols it bears can be understood by a few scholars. The importance of the widespread elements in travertines that frame doors and windows, in the steps and even in the plasters, place the need for a tout-court protection that sees as evidence all that is still visible but also what is not so evident to a first optical observation.

Compare with France In order to go back to the meaning of the iconems, it is therefore essential to compare it with France; in Cressac (Charente), near the village of Blanzac, in the chapel that remains of the monumental emergence of the Dognon commandery, presumably founded in the third quarter of the twelfth century, we find a blessing bishop perhaps Ilario di Poitiers, also mentioned by the Rule and a St. Michael weighing the souls, all intercalated with fake wall units, lilies and geometric decorations; St. Michael depicts the militant commitment with the final salvation; the bishop is the function of the church.

## 15. The counter-façade

At Castel S. Angelo is the Archangel to whom the castle is named, a fact that is remembered in a distico painted in the Bishopric of Cittaducale when the Diocese of the New Town was formed; in S. Michele the parish church located in the second circle is entitled. Frequent is the reference to a Bishop in sixteenth-century paintings as in the Presentation of the Lord at the Temple and in the Madonna del Rosario, as well as in the right aisle of S. Maria della Porta. In the commend of Montsaunès (Haute-Garonne), in the counter-façade of the chapel appears a decorative motif made up of cornflowers (representing the nativity) and of eight-petalled flowers (representing Christ). Crosses, circles and flowers are a sign language. Along the southern wall there are variations on the theme "with a more insistent attendance of the fantastic zoology. In the fourth bay the usual squares are inhabited by a gallery of animals ... a unicorn, a deer and a griffin ". The crosses, the stars, the rosettes,

the lilies and the cornflowers are found both in Montsaunès and Courval in France as well as in Castel S. Angelo. In the following decades appear monstrous little devils and anthropomorphic figures isolated in a bestiary that goes beyond the fourteenth century as in the tower of Rampillon. At Castel S. Angelo in S. Michele we highlight an anthropomorphic isolated facet, as well as in the bell tower of S. Maria della Porta; in the little portal of Via dei Calzolari two bats that look like little devils, a Wolf with sheep on the rump faced by a dog, a coat of arms with a and a viper in a house. In the signic vocabulary the iconems of the wolf correspond to the metaphor of evil, the archetype of the danger of overseas the Lion, the rosettes constitute the decorative party of French commend. Phytomorphic elements they are found in S. Bevignate as well as in the church of S. Maria della Porta, in particular in the civic tower, inside the church and in the façade, in the towers' shelves. In Auzon and Coulommiers there is the fake tessitura masonry, as also in S. Maria della Porta in several points of the church. Other recurring themes already mentioned in Castel S. Angelo are Adam and Eve tempted by the snake, the roof sometimes pervaded by a starry carpet that reproduces the celestial one, the brick designed in the counter-façade of Cressac and S. Bevignate. Recall that the frescoes use black, brown and ocher. In the back wall (tunnel behind) a figure due to a saint bears these colors. Another important theme is that of the 12 monumental apostles with red crosses. The passage of the commend of Courval to the Hospitallers is visualized by a monumental panel with St. John the Baptist and by the superimposition of the sign of the order. The chapel of Coulommiers is a single-aisle chapel with four spans covered by cross vaults. The recurring themes are St. George on horseback, the Annunciation, St. Michael bearing the steelyard. In the hagiographic cycle are: Giacomo, Marco, Pietro, S. Giovanni Battista, Valeria and Marziale or Biagio. A hagiographic cycle could be that placed above the left aisle to S. Maria della Porta, where currently only Biagio is visible. In the castle of Montreal de Sos (Ariego) probably presided over by the Order there is a triptych with Annunciation and visitation. But the order was characterized by the cult of the Virgin, to which the rule gave wide prominence. In the chapel of Cressac appears the triumph over paganism in the counter-façade and the crusade defeated by evil in the façade. In S. Maria della Porta the triumph of evil (snake) on the façade and the Eucharist on the counter-façade. From a broader point of view, the massive architectural testimony of Cistercian matrix in the territory of

L'Aquila from the same matrix also leads to the possibility of the presence of the monastic warrior order. The connection between Templars and Cistercians has been demonstrated: St. Bernard, one of the historical founders of the Cistercian Order, was also the proponent of the birth of the monastic-chivalric Order of the Knights of Christ. Recall that in the same territory come also the Masters Comacini, present in a massive way along the Via dei Fiorentini, even in the immediate vicinity (S. Maria extra moenia to Antrodoco); see in this regard the architectural evidence attributed to them by Gavini in *History of Architecture in Abruzzo*. It was also demonstrated how the monks in exporting their work program were able to adapt to local and traditional construction systems. This would explain the use of local stone and architectural assonance.

## 16. Cistercian abbeys in Abruzzo

Between the end of the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth, in the abruzzo sabino as in that vestino, the cistercian abbeys had spread like the abbey of S. Spirito d'Ocre in the territory of Forcon, which is part of a vast movement of diffusion which starts from the foundation of S. Maria di Casanova in 1191 and covers a large part of the Abruzzo and Pugliese territory. In 1303 (from an exemption sentence issued by the Bishop of L'Aquila, Nicola Castrocello) we find the list in the diocese of the Cistercian monasteries: S. Spirito d'Ocre, S. Maria del Monte and S. Benedetto prope Aquilam. While the monasteries of Farfa S. Vincenzo al Volturno and Casauria had extended their estates to the Amiternine and Perigese lands, adapting themselves to the feudal system present there without any changes, the Cistercians taught the pastors and peasants of Amiterno and Forcona a new type of economic integration. intertwined with literary influences. We pass with the Cistercians from a fragmented feudal reality to a real state-owned organization. We pass with the Cistercians from a fragmented feudal reality to a real state-owned organization. The bastide towns present in Abruzzo were taken from the Cistercian convent model with a central cloister (Cittaducale, Antrodoco, Leonessa, Amatrice, in part Aquila) as the acquisition of uncultivated lands to reclaim and rationalize them in the foundation of L'Aquila. Throughout the territory the substantial characteristics of the Cistercian constructions can be seen, which can be seen in the simplicity of the parts, in their logical distribution, in the perfection of the execution, in the use of selected materials and in the austerity of the decoration. Recall that the

purpose of Saint Bernard was to realize a Celestial Jerusalem, a measured city, where the Christian soul is considered the Temple and the house of God. The Cistercians seem to have followed a divine order to create their monastic complex: they channeled the stagnant waters so that the earth dried; they leveled it by fixing the dimensions of the monastic complex with the rope, and oriented the church and the other buildings with the light of dawn. They planted meadows, planted fruit trees, vegetables and flowers, abandoning the contempt for manual and agricultural work that was valued on a par with prayer<sup>1</sup>.



Fig.8 Tower Palombara

## 17. The restoration of the “Chapter”

Starting from the assumption that restoration is the dialectical result between the historical and the aesthetic, we are faced with a case in which the historical instance is predominant because Castel S. Angelo is a document itself. The testimonies received by us, from the plasters to the carved travertines, from the architraves to the jambs, from the stones worked to the frescoes, are leafed through like an archival book constituting the pages of that missing manuscript and of those documents missing from the historians and scholars. It is as if, in anticipation of a total or almost total loss of documentation, skilled hands had impressed the story on the building. Castel Sant'Angelo is a piece still missing from the history of medieval architecture, so those who work in the restoration of their heritage are faced with a dilemma, which is the preservation of everything that has come to us not only for a transmission to the future but also to allow future readability to those who, with adequate means and tools, will be able to intervene. This is the reason why it is not currently appropriate to use traditional urban planning tools such as "recovery" plans which, based on obsolete legislation that derives from the 1970, preclude restoration in its current form by giving priority to that they should not even appear. How to pay attention to the consolidation or restoration methods so that they are not destructive of the surfaces and traces still to be found on the plasters. Important in this regard is the accurate survey and historical reconstruction of the 800 restorations, which are being published. In this short text it is considered necessary to publish an example of restoration concerning a text, a text painted under the entrance door and relating to a mural chapter dated 1566.

The restoration proposal is essentially divided into three points: a) Photographic and graphic documentation of the surface with highlighting of the most interesting details in order to identify the most suitable method of intervention. b) Consolidation of the crumbled surface with ethyl silicate. c) Mechanical removal of inorganic deposits such as cement grouting, nails, and removal of scales and solvents of red paint in the case of glazes. . d) Cleaning of the organic deposit by cellulose pulp packs with ammonium carbonate. e) Reintegration of the most evident gaps in the surface with a lime and sand mortar applied with a slight undercut of the original surface. f) Reintegration of the incomplete words of the text with the repetition of analogous corresponding letters executed in watercolor with a lighter tone than the original. g) Protection of the entire affected area with 2% Paraloid diluted with chlorotene.

## 18. Conclusion

At present, through the involvement of private individuals, it has been possible to save the fresco of the Visitation, inside Santa Maria della Porta. The intervention, financed by a private individual, was conducted by the local Archeoclub headquarters and is part of the voluntary project. The graffiti facade of the 15th century has not yet been restored, as unfortunately the frescoed chapter of 1566. In the case of the Chapter an act of vandalism or incompetence has caused a further deterioration of the surface, which however was detected in the past, so we can propose a reconstruction based on the survey and the photographs taken. If you do not intervene in the restoration action resulting in the

protection that is being carried out, you may lose one of the rare testimonies of templarism known to us.

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