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The Museum of the “New” Faculty of Letters and Philosophy of the University of Catania: the Relationship with a Degraded Social and Economic Reality.

The initiative taken by the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy of the University of Catania to open the doors of its own museum to the city, and in particular to the socially and economically degraded neighbourhood in which it is based, is an innovation with a scope that can be understood if we consider that Sicily is certainly rich in cultural patrimony, but it is also one of the poorest regions in Italy. To understand then what is happening today in the Faculty of Letters we have to look far back in time, with the aim of showing how the role of this university institution has changed over the years.

The University of Catania is the oldest in Sicily, receiving the *placet* for its institution in 1434 from Alphonse of Aragon and, following the Papal Bull of Pope Henry IV in 1444, for centuries it was the only Sicilian university. Indeed, the Catanese *Studium generale* – apart from the period running from the end of the sixteenth to the second half of the seventeenth centuries – represented the only Sicilian institution, up to the first decades of the nineteenth century, which granted degrees.¹ Initially there were three faculties (law, arts and medicine, theology), those useful in exercising power for the social classes who had greatest influence over university policies: the clergy and the nobility.²

Catania's geographical position, at the foot of Etna, an active volcano, has always influenced the life of the city in all its aspects: volcanic eruptions and earthquakes have in part destroyed the city over the centuries, and the city was reconstructed with a new physiognomy several times. The volcanic phenomena have meant both the presence in the academic field of a strong interest in volcanology –research on the volcano (carried out in cultural circles through the study of collections of volcanic elements present in university or private collections)–, and visits to Catania made at various historical moments by eminent scholars of volcanic phenomena. Such visits certainly contributed to strengthening links between Catanese scholars and foreign scholars, which proved important for the socio-cultural growth of the Etnean city.³ The composition of the

¹ The Sicilians, prior to the institution of the university in Catania, went to the universities of Bologna, Ferrara, Padua, Pisa, Siena, Roma, but not to nearby Naples because there, before the arrival of King Alphonse of Aragon, the islanders were not welcome. In Palermo, Trapani and Messina there were already some subjects taught at a higher level, but they could not grant degrees because they did not the *jus doctorandi*. In 1548 the city of Messina obtained a *Studium* through a bull issued by Paul III, and in 1591 came the *jus doctorandi*; the *Studium* functioned from 1597 and was split into two branches: literary, theological and philosophical subjects, and mathematics. The University of Messina was effectively operative only up to the second half of the seventeenth century, because it had to pay for the results of the revolution against the Spanish dominators (1674–1678). The University of Messina was definitively instituted in 1838. Palermo was instituted only in 1805. See Catalano M., “L’università di Catania nel rinascimento”, in Catalano M.- Gaudio M.- Paladino G.- Libertini G. - Curcio G.- Naselli C., *Storia dell’università di Catania. Dalle origini ai giorni nostri*, Tipografia Zuccarello, Catania 1934, pp. 5-7.

² For an essential bibliography of Catania's university, see Catalano M.- Gaudio M.- Paladino G.- Libertini G. - Curcio G.- Naselli C., *cit.* ; Giarrizzo G., *Siciliae Studium Generale. I suoi luoghi, la sua storia*, Giuseppe Maimone Editore, Palermo 1991; Nicolosi G., Longhitano A., *Catania e la sua Università nei secoli XV-XVII. Il codice «Studiorum constitutiones ac privilegia» del capitolo cattedrale*, Rome 1995; Dollo C., *Cultura del Quattrocento in Sicilia. Alle origini del Siculorum Gymnasium*, in “Rinascimento”, vol. XXXIX, 1999, pp. 227-292; Coco A. (ed.), *La Facoltà di Medicina e l'Università di Catania*, Giunti, Firenze 2000.

³ For example the Jesuit Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680) met Giovanni Alfonso Borelli (1608–1688), the scientist known for his study of the Etnean eruption in 1669, or the naturalist Deodat de Dolomieu (1750–1801) who had relations both with Prince Ignazio Paternò Castello di Biscari (1719–1786), founder of the Biscari museum, famous throughout Europe, and Cavaliere Giuseppe Gioeni (1747–1822), creator of the Gioenia collection that later became

society out of which the collections of the Catanese university came involved the presence of the clergy,⁴ the aristocracy and the middle classes; these last, from the beginning of the 1840s became more present in the political and scientific life of the city⁵ and it is to the middle classes that we can ascribe the formation of the majority of the university's collections.

The collections present today in the University of Catania's various museums are of multiple types of objects: rare and ancient books, manuscripts and souvenirs relating to the history of the university, ancient coins and archaeological finds, animals, plants, paleontological finds, petrographical–mineralogical–volcanological specimens, eighteenth-century etchings, town plans. Some of these collections are housed in university museums in historical buildings in the city that are themselves of great historical–artistic and archaeological interest and which are headquarters in their turns, central or decentralized, of single faculties or departments to which the university teachers in charge of the museums belong.⁶[XXX1]

The Catanese university's collections are for the most part the fruit of acquisitions made by the university of private collections or collections originated through the initiative of one or more university teachers. The collections existing today were formed over a long period of time, from the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries, during which culture was seen above all else as an element belonging exclusively to an elite environment, and not – as happens today – something accessible to the public at large.

These collections have not as yet been studied systematically, but thanks to the Catania–Lecce project, many of them are currently being catalogued definitively and are being arranged in the various university museums in Catania.⁷ The Catania–Lecce project certainly represents the

property of the University of Catania. Regarding Athanasius Kircher's journeys to Sicily, see Morelli N., "Nel corpo della terra. Il geocosmo di Athanasius Kircher", in E. Lo Sardo (ed.), *Athanasius Kircher ed il museo del mondo*, Edizioni de Luca, Roma 2001, pp. 179, 186; regarding the relation between Prince Ignazio Paternò Castello di Biscari and Deodat de Dolomieu, see S. Pafumi, *Museum Biscarianum. Materiali per lo studio delle collezioni di Ignazio Paternò Castello di Biscari (1719-1786)*, Alma Editore, Catania 2006, pp. 50-51, 129, 131.

⁴ The clergy always had considerable impact on the life of the city: the post of chancellor of the university was filled by the bishop of Catania until 1819; work on reconstructing the city in the 1700s following the 1669 lavafLOW and the 1693 earthquake, were commissioned by the *curia* of the Etnean city.

⁵ See Giarrizzo G., "L'Accademia Gioenia: i caratteri originari (1824-1845)", in Alberghina M. (ed.), *L'Accademia Gioenia: 180 anni di cultura scientifica (1824-2004)*, Giuseppe Maimone Editore, Catania 2005, p. 19.

⁶ The only site chosen to house a museum that is not in Catania, is a section of the zoological museum located on a small island of volcanic origin that is part of a marine reservation; monitoring this area is one of the tasks of the Department of Zoology of the University of Catania. The island carries the name Lachea and it used to belong to the marquis Luigi Gravina, who granted it to the university in 1896 for scientific research. See: <http://www.dipbot.unict.it/ctnatura/lachea/lachea3.htm> (22-6-2007).

⁷ The coordinated Catania–Lecce project (financed by the European Community and the Italian Interministerial Committee for Economic Planning with the aim of setting up museums and research centres in the context of cultural heritage both with regard to Lecce's and Catania's universities), has been for the Etnean university a useful instrument in creating or renovating museum structures, laboratories, libraries, archives, with the aim of expanding knowledge of the university's heritage. This project is organized with two financial tranches, the first of which was concluded in December 2001, while the second is still in course. In total fifteen structures have been created thanks to the Catania–Lecce project: Biblioteca del Seminario Giuridico [Library of the Juridical Seminar], Archivio Storico dell'Università di Catania [University of Catania Historical Archive], Museo dello Studio [Museum of Study], Archivio Ceramografico [Ceramographic Archive], Museo Archeologico [Archaeological Museum], Museo della Fabbrica del Monastero dei Benedettini [Museum of the Benedictine Monastery Complex], Museo di Zoologia [Zoology Museum], Orto Botanico ed Herbarium [Botanic Garden and Herbarium], Musei di Scienze [Museum of Sciences], Città della Scienza [City of Science], Laboratorio e Museo della Rappresentazione [Laboratory and Museum of Architecture], Laboratorio di Tecniche Non Distruttive [Laboratory of Non-destructive Techniques], Servizio per l'Acquisizione e l'Elaborazione Elettronica dell'Informazione [Service for Electronic Information Gathering and Processing], Laboratorio Multimediale e di Simulazione [Multimedia and Simulation Laboratory], Infrastrutture di Fruizione e Servizio [Infrastructures of Use and Service]. Regarding the Catania–Lecce project, see Carchiolo R. (ed.), *Riqualificazione e valorizzazione del patrimonio storico-culturale e scientifico-naturalistico dell'ateneo catanese. Progetto coordinato Catania-Lecce*, Tipografia Coniglione, Catania 1999; Finocchiario P. – Alberghina M. (eds), *Idee, cultura e storia per la Città della Scienza*, Maimone editore, Catania 2007; http://www.unict.it/Pagina/Portale/Ateneo/Progetti_d_Ateneo/Progetto_coordinato_Catania_Lecce.aspx (22-6-2007).

change of tack in university cultural policy, which follows mutation in society generally⁸ and therefore the context in which universities “live”. As well as safeguarding and valorizing the university’s heritage, creating databases,⁹ training in new competences and professions linked to cultural heritage,¹⁰ another of the Catania–Lecce project’s aims is indeed the use of the university’s heritage not only by the “specialists”, but also by the public through innovative services for museum teaching. And it is in the field of use of heritage by the public that some of the university’s museums are taking the first steps towards an as-yet-unknown horizon compared with what was originally foreseen at the origins of the Catania–Lecce project: direct meeting and exchange with the public.

At the end of the eighteenth century the museum, the library, the theatre, the archive, the garden were considered places of “[...] participative property of the democratic citizen [...]”,¹¹ the young were taken to the museum to become citizens. This “privileged” relationship which had been set up between the museum and the citizen seems over the course of time to have been forgotten, the museum has developed inwards and has become less of a teaching body, less open to the public than it was considered to be in the eighteenth century. The “new course” set up by the dean of the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy of the University of Catania, Prof. Enrico Iachello, puts strong emphasis on the fact that the faculty museum belongs to the civil community and he considers it – as is indicated in the Italian museum qualitative standards – in relationship to its “territory” and as being “obliged” to provide services to the public;¹² the university museum can no longer play the role of inaccessible ivory tower of culture.

The museum of the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, called the Museo della Fabbrica del Monastero dei Benedettini [Museum of the Benedictine Monastery Building], is located in Catania (fig. 1-2) within the monumental Benedictine monastery complex, founded in the sixteenth century,¹³ where the faculty is housed today and it is one of the Catanese museums that falls within

⁸ The European Museum Forum’s conference entitled *The European Diaspora*, held in Prato (23–25 October 2003), emphasized how much and just how European society is changing thanks not only to ICT support, but also due to the huge presence of ethnic communities coming above all else from the East; furthermore the conference brought to light the important role played by museums in the processes of communication through which Europe on the one hand introduces itself to the new inhabitants from non-European countries and on the other ought to preserve the culture of the new residents on the European continent. These themes appear in the document of the parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe in the context of the Sub-Committee on Cultural Heritage and have also been discussed at the 2nd Annual Ename International Colloquium (22–25 March 2006) with the title, *Who Owns The Past? Heritage Rights and Responsibilities in a Multicultural World*; on this topic see: <http://www.europeanmuseumforum.org/prato%202003.pdf> (3-7-07), http://www.heritage.lt/nauijenos/2006/Who_owns_the_Past.pdf (22-6-2007).

⁹ A single archive has been created which brings together data from the various archives related to the different collections present in the museums; the structure of the archive has taken into account the norms issued by national and regional bodies with regard to cataloguing.

¹⁰ Parallel with the Catania–Lecce project, in the year 2000 an annual high-level training course was set up for “experts in museum mediation and communication”, subsidized by the Italian Ministry for Universities and Scientific Research (MIUR). Students on the course were graduates resident in southern Italy, notorious for being the poorest part of Italy. The course, set up by the University of Catania with MIUR’s approval to train specialized personnel useful for the Catania–Lecce structures, bore in mind that in Sicily the concentration on cultural heritage to be valorized is particularly high, as is the rate of unemployment among graduates.

¹¹ “[...] proprietà partecipata del cittadino democratico [...]”. Emiliani A., *Il museo nella città italiana. Vicende storiche e problemi attuali. Un progetto per Terni*, Federico Motta Editore, Milan 2004, p. 123.

¹² Among the public services envisaged in the Italian museum qualitative standards we must cite, as well as the usual access to exhibiting space, the consultation of documentation existing in the museum, access to the scientific and cultural work of the museum, information for better use of the services. On the Italian museum qualitative standards as per the ministerial decree of 10 May 2001, see Jallà D., *Il museo contemporaneo. Introduzione al nuovo sistema museale italiano*, UTET Libreria, Turin 2003, pp. 376-377.

¹³ The monastery had been founded in 1558, was partly destroyed by the 1669 eruption, and then the 1693 earthquake. From the beginning of the 1700s building work began once again, making it even more imposing and rich than it was initially, to the point where it became a monumental complex true and proper. The Benedictine monk Vito Amico (1697–1762), who taught Civil History at the University of Catania, was the creator of both the library connected to the university and the Benedictine Museum (collections of archaeological finds, statues, paintings, natural history items; in 1868 the collections were acquired by the Municipality of Catania and were subsequently taken to the Castello Ursino

the Catania–Lecce project. The museum consists of a part of the monastery that has a surface area of some 1,500 square metres (of which some 500 linear metres constitute the visitor's route through the museum) and it carries evident traces of the intricate and stratified architectural development of the building from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, which includes the lavaflow of 1669 (fig. 4) as an integral part (fig. 8). The museum is organized on two levels, one of which, the largest, is underground (fig. 5-7); it is therefore a “mysterious” and fascinating space, which shows the evolution of the history and the restorations of the monastery, its artistic and architectural features. Evocative effects have been created through the use of the waters of the river Amenano, a most effective instrument for museum teaching which calls attention to the physics experiments carried out here,¹⁴ because from 1891 to 1919 the university geophysics laboratory under the direction of Professor Annibale Riccò was housed in these spaces.¹⁵

In the museum animal bones and refuse from the furnaces used as fill for the vaults have been exhibited, together with instruments from the geophysics laboratory,¹⁶ from the Meteorological Office,¹⁷ and from the physics laboratory of the Regio Istituto Tecnico.¹⁸ The exhibition of other finds from the excavations of the underground part of the museum is planned,

Civic Museum) together with the Benedictine abbot, Placido Maria Scammacca (intermediary in the context of the antiquities market in Rome, between the 1740s and '50s, for the Benedictine museum and the much better known museum of Prince Ignazio Paternò Castello di Biscari). Emiliano Guttadauro (1759–1836), another monk from the monastery, created a botanical garden that was to be a model for the Etnean city in the first decades of the 1800s. With the acquisition by the state of religious properties in 1866, the monastery was looted and devastated and subsequently housed school institutions (the Regio Istituto Tecnico, later Gemmellaro Institute) and a military barracks. In 1977 the monastery was ceded by the Municipality of Catania to the University of Catania (apart from the parts of the S. Nicolò l'Arena church, the annexed rectory and the rooms housing the Ursino Recupero library). The plans for restoration and conversion were given to Architetto Giancarlo De Carlo and his practice (fig. 3), who set about transforming the building into a university faculty and a museum (the old kitchens and the underground rooms on the northern side of the monumental complex). Architetto De Carlo restored the building through the use of flexible solutions that do not upset the identity of the monumental complex in its new purpose. He even planned a garden open to the surrounding neighbourhood, managed by the Municipality of Catania, which has become a point of contact and communication between the university institution and the city, spaces in which students and teachers mingle with people from the neighbourhood. Regarding the library of the Benedictine fathers see Paladino G., “L'Università di Catania nel XVIII secolo”, in Catalano M.- Gaudio M.- Paladino G.- Libertini G. - Curcio G.- Naselli C., *cit.*, pp. 248-249. Regarding the museum of the Benedictine fathers, see Giarrizzo G. (ed.), *Catania e il suo monastero. S. Nicolò l'Arena 1846*, Giuseppe Maimone Editore, Catania 2001, pp. 24-40. Regarding Placido Maria Scammacca see Salmeri, M. “Scammacca Placido Maria”, in *Enciclopedia di Catania*, II, Catania 1980, p. 261; Pafumi S., *Museum Biscarianum. Materiali per lo studio delle collezioni di Ignazio Paternò Castello di Biscari (1719-1786)*, Alma Editore, Catania 2006, p. 57. On Giancarlo De Carlo's plans for the Benedictine Monastery see Brancolino D. (ed.), *Giancarlo De Carlo. Un progetto per Catania: il recupero del Monastero di San Nicolò l'Arena per l'Università*, Sagep Editrice, Genoa 1988; De Carlo G., “Au-dessous du volcan ... università de Catane, Sicile”, in *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui*, pp. 90-91; Romano A., *Giancarlo De Carlo*, Testo e Immagine, Turin 2001, pp. 22, 68-73.

¹⁴ The level of the waters of this underground river were observed to measure the effects of rain and seismic shocks (which could have affected the flow). Even today the visitor can see the well in which the waters of the river flow at the bottom.

¹⁵ Professor Annibale Riccò also directed the Astrophysics Observatory, and the Meteorological Observatory, which were also located at the Benedettini, thanks to a grant and modification of spaces (the area of the kitchens and a heightening of the drum of the ante-refectory) that in 1885 Professor Pietro Tacchini (whose bust is present in the museum) had managed to obtain from the Municipality of Catania. See Leonardi A., *La cucina e il suo ventre. Guida al Museo della fabbrica del Monastero dei Benedettini di Catania*, Giuseppe Maimone Editore, Catania 2005, p. 31.

¹⁶ These are the instruments from the laboratory: a lava stone mass used as a pendulum for the seismograph (fig. 9); the base of the seismograph. The plaster from the vaults of the laboratory has also been preserved and the existing lighting system has been recreated.

¹⁷ These are the instruments from the office: sunshine recorder, marine chronographic chronometer, Fortin barometer, thermohygrograph, swinging pluviograph, anemograph, evaporigraph. The Astronomic Observatory and the Institute of Astronomy from the 1890s up to the mid-1960s were in the area of the monastery's kitchens and connected rooms. See Leonardi A., *cit.*, pp. 8, 30.

¹⁸ The instruments of the laboratory of the school are represented by: a Caillet machine, Atwood machine, vacuum pump, Ramsden electric machine. The school was housed from 1875 in the kitchen and refectory areas, having been transformed respectively into a drawing room and a laboratory for experiments on building materials. See *ivi.*, pp. 8, 13.

and this will constitute the historical–teaching section of the museum structure. One part of the museum will be used for temporary exhibitions.

The museum, as mentioned above, is an integral part of the monastery, which in its entirety represents a piece of cultural heritage of enormous historical–architectural importance (as a monastery it is only smaller in size than the Maфра complex in Portugal), and archaeological importance, given that the site on which it is built is the oldest part of Catania; the area has been inhabited continuously since prehistoric times right up to the present day and signs of this fact are often to be found in the stratigraphy and in the archaeological finds that are present in the monumental complex (fig. 10).

The neighbourhood in which the faculty is located, the Antico Corso, is rich in “historical memory”, but it is degraded socially and economically.¹⁹ With the arrival of the university institution (1977) the prices of housing have gradually increased enormously and this has made the life of original inhabitants of the area very difficult from the economic point of view. They indeed have organized into a neighbourhood association (Comitato Antico Corso)²⁰, which is very active and from the very beginning has worked against the presence of the university in the area. The faculty’s work therefore has not been easy – the teaching and non-teaching staff have been affected strongly by this climate of almost “urban warfare”, but from 2004–2005 the faculty’s management has decided on a new way of operating, moving from an attitude of “defence” to one of opening and communication with the world outside: hosting in the monastery events that are moments of social gathering and opportunities for meeting others. This orientation has been favoured by the Antico Corso committee’s interest in maintaining *in situ* the archaeological areas of the zone, external to the monastery and managed by the Municipality of Catania. At the same time the faculty has made contact with the leaders of the Comitato Antico Corso to discuss problems relating to the neighbourhood.

From that moment onwards the use of the former monastery (and its museum) has changed radically. In 2004–2005 agreements were made with the schools in the area so that they could participate in the section *Cartoons per l’Antico Corso* of the programme organized by the faculty with the title, *Fuori dall’aula, dentro la città* [Out of the teaching room and into the city] and with the idea that university teachers should move out – metaphorically – from the university’s teaching rooms to propose to the “world outside” topics related to the theme of classical culture (generally only dealt with in the academic context), but this time rendered more attractive and understandable thanks to the consultation of experts from the world of communication. These last helped the teachers – who, unpaid, agreed to hold “lecture–shows” on classical culture.

The faculty’s relationship with the schools was thus begun and immediately became a priority, given that education on cultural heritage during school years is felt to be fundamental.²¹ In the case of the *Cartoons per l’Antico Corso* section the pupils of the neighbourhood’s schools were invited to come to the Benedettini monastery to see animated cartoons of a classical subject: Hercules and Ulysses. On this occasion the pupils naturally visited both the faculty and the museum; the pupils’ contact with these spaces – up till then unknown to them, despite the fact that

¹⁹ The area has extremely low pro capita income and literacy levels, as well as a high rate of crime committed by local organized groups.

²⁰ See: www.anticocorso.too.it (3-3-07). The Comitato Antico Corso is studied today by a group of sociologists who work on participative planning, see: Lanza O. - Piazza G. - Vacante C., *Politiche e partecipazione. Sindaci, gruppi, cittadini nel nuovo governo locale*, Bonanno Editore, Catania 2004, pp.12, 23-26.

²¹ As can be seen in the essay by Bourdieu and Darbel, taken from a scientific analysis carried out in French museums, those who love art and willingly visit museums are prevalently those who in their school years had already begun to visit them thanks to their schooling. See: Bourdieu P.- Darbel A., *L’amore dell’arte. Le leggi della diffusione culturale: i musei d’arte europei e il loro pubblico*, Rimini 1972 (first edition 1969). On school teaching that begins with cultural heritage and art, and which takes into account what is happening in this context in the rest of Europe, see: Costantino M. (ed.), *Mnemosyne a scuola. Per una didattica dai beni culturali*, Franco Angeli, Milan 2001; Branchesi L. - Crispolti E. - Dalai Emiliani M. (eds), *ArteInformazione. L’identità italiana per l’Europa*, Donzelli, Rome 2001. On the need and the advantages of receiving an aesthetic education, see: Quintana Cabanas J. M., *Per una storia dell’educazione estetica*, Società Editrice Internazionale, Turin 1996 (first edition 1993), pp. 101-107.

they are very close to their schools as the crow flies – was so evocative that it influenced the drawings they made,²² and with which the present author organized an exhibition in the former monastery building, open to anyone who visited the monumental complex. The decision was made to produce a catalogue of this exhibition (fig. 11) that was printed with faculty funds with one of the oldest and best known of Italian publishing houses (Giunti),²³ and it was subsequently widely distributed both at the local and national level. This step forward taken by the faculty towards the schools is explained not just as an attempt to bring the academic world (and its cultural heritage) to a highly degraded – socially and economically – environment, but also as an original idea for bridging the gap between school and university that is often complained of in the south of Italy.

This initiative of 2004–2005 is therefore the first thanks to which the inhabitants of the Antico Corso entered the Benedictine Monastery for the first time. This cultural policy has received an enthusiastic reception from the residents in the neighbourhood, and their frequentation of the monastery – a piece of cultural heritage of great importance, known to them previously as an “unknown and enemy” place – has begun. In 2005–2006 the faculty decided once again to invest its energies above all in the relationship with the new generations present not just in the neighbourhood but also in other areas of the city, and so has initiated programmes aimed at getting to know the “other” or the “different”.²⁴ This theme, represented by the *Radici, identità* [Roots, identity] programme, has been proposed to an adult public in the excellent context which is the Benedictine Monastery, through cultural events of great significance held in the evenings, naturally all free for those who come: guided tours by volunteer students of the building, exhibitions, films, concerts, conference-shows open to all the city’s inhabitants on topical themes of great interest, which emphasize the multiethnic aspect of Catanese society and therefore of Mediterranean society.²⁵ Some of these meetings have been financed with funds offered by private bodies that enjoy a return in terms of image from this investment in culture.

The Benedictine Monastery, thanks to the Faculty of Letters’ work, has therefore been transformed from being a bastion of elite, exclusive culture – respecting an image that goes back to the 1700s²⁶ – into a meeting place where academics invite the city to come into contact with a culture that is easy to understand and is accessible for everyone, proposing topics of common interest. The Museum of the Benedictine Monastery Complex is increasingly becoming the instrument through which a voice is given to this story, this history of the monastery and of the city of Catania.

²² The idea of making drawings following the visit to the museum comes out of the desire to promote knowledge of cultural heritage through the use of different communicative techniques, stimulating curiosity, creativity and developing the pupils’ critical sense. The Sicilian Regional Government, the Superintendency of Cultural and Environmental Heritage and Public Education in fact ran several editions of the competition *Conosci il tuo museo* [Get to know your museum], an initiative that aims, through the creation of graphic work by the pupils, at educational promotion of Sicilian cultural heritage. See <http://gurs.pa.cnr.it/gurs/Gazzette/g07-10/g07-10-p16.html> (6-6-07).

²³ See Santagati F. M. C. (ed.), *I miti dell’Antico Corso. Disegni dei bambini del quartiere alla Facoltà di Lettere*, Giunti, Florence 2006.

²⁴ The “other” and the “unknown” because it comes from a far off country, but it is also something that has always been near us, but which has never been “known”. The choice of this theme, as well as providing an incentive in this key for getting to know the monastery, is also justified because of the new multiethnic composition of the neighbourhood. Indeed, some of the inhabitants, as in many cities, come from countries beyond the European Union, as is also demonstrated by the pupils present in the schools in the Antico Corso neighbourhood. The importance of this choice has already been noted, see note 8 above.

²⁵ To consult the archive of the proposals formulated by the faculty and aimed at the city, see:

<http://www.flett.unict.it/pagine/Eventi/Eventi2005-2006/Default.aspx> (26-6-07)

http://www.flett.unict.it/pagine/Eventi/Eventi2006-2007/eventi_2006_07.aspx (26-6-07).

²⁶ I refer to the cultural policy adopted in the monastery by the Benedictines and which many years later (1846) the publication of Francesco Bertucci’s guide to the monastery sought to change, to modify the relationship between the monastic community and the scientific community, between the monastery and the city of Catania, to create “[...] the ‘new’ role of the Monastery and its community”. Giarrizzo G. (ed.), *Catania e il suo monastero. ...*, cit., p. 97.

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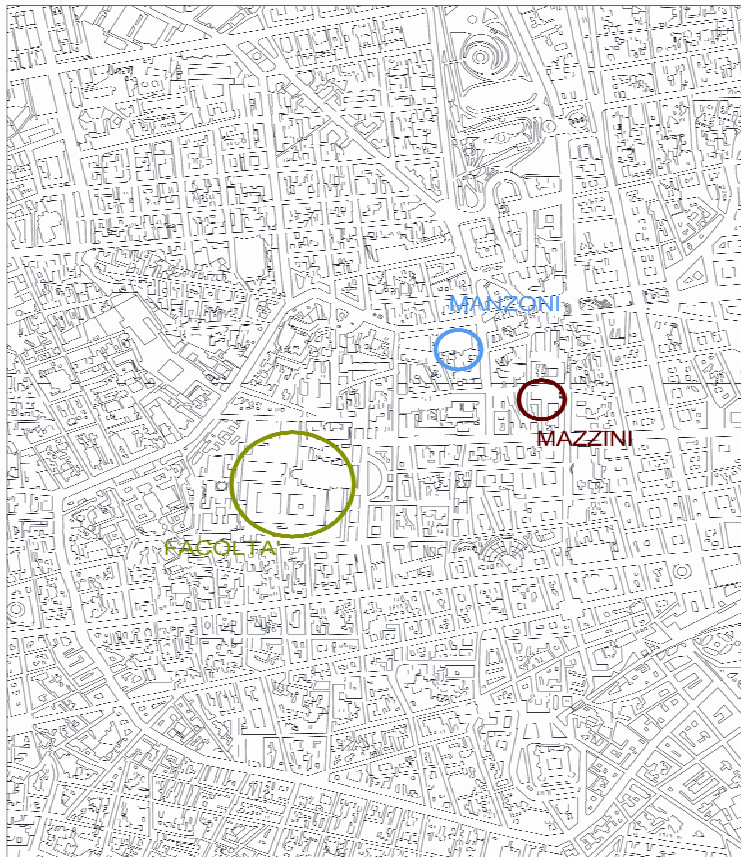
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Pictures

Fig.1



Plan of the neighbourhood *Antico Corso*,
Benedictine Monastery highlighted in
green.

Fig. 2



Aerial view of the Monastery.

Fig. 3



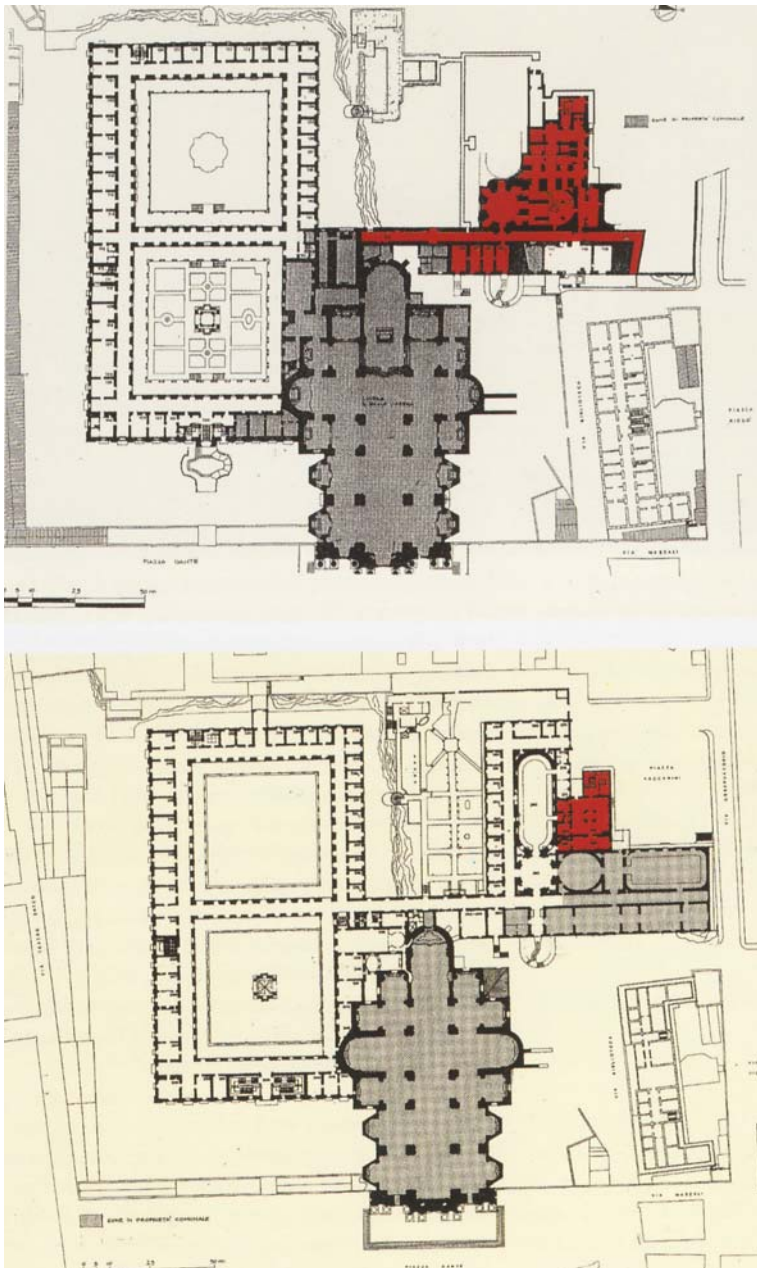
The plans for restoration and conversion of the all monastery were given to architect Giancarlo De Carlo and his practice.

Fig. 4



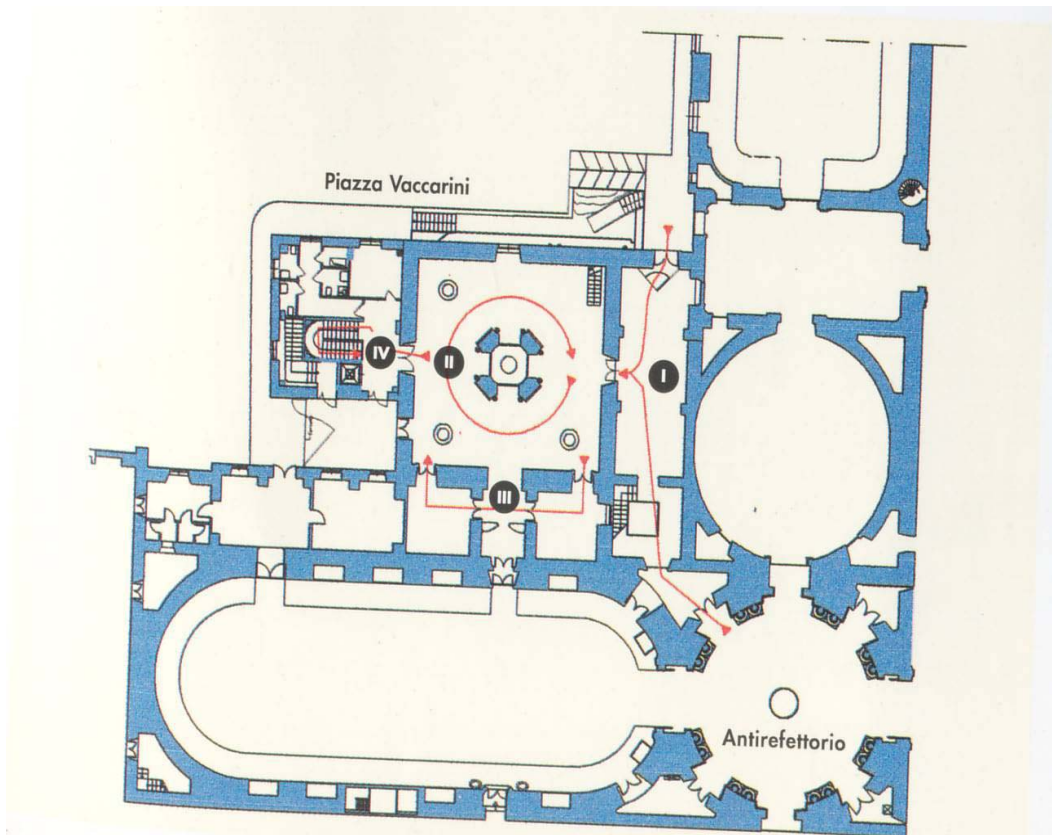
View of Catania during the 1669 eruption.

Fig. 5



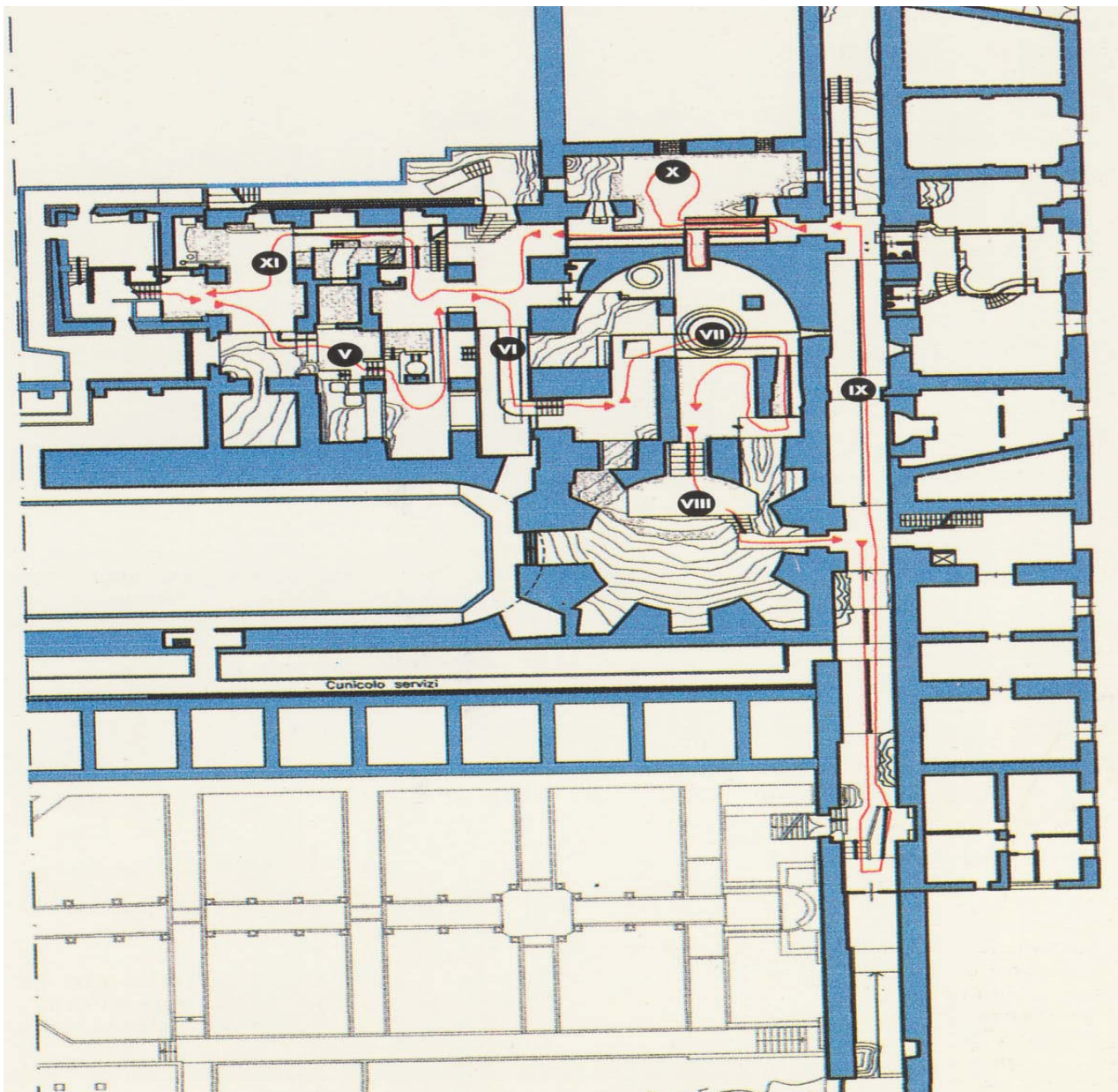
Location of the Museum of the Monastery Complex. Above, plan of the lower floor; below, plan of the upper floor.

Fig. 6



Route through the upper floor of the museum.

Fig. 7



Route through the lower floor of the museum.

Fig. 8



Rooms on the lower floor previously used by the Geodynamics Laboratory, in the foreground the 1669 lavaflow.

Fig. 9



The pendulum (circa 300 kg) of the great seismograph found during the excavation work in preparing the area dedicated to the museum. The waters of the Amenano river in the background.

Fig. 10



Roman mosaics at the Benedictine monastery.

Fig. 11



Cover of the catalogue of the exhibition of the schools *I miti dell'Antico Corso*.