Medieval art studies in the Republic of Letters: Mabillon and Montfaucon’s Italian connections between travel and learned collaborations

Francesco Russo

Figure 1 J. Mabillon, *Iter Italicum*, (Paris, 1687), title-page.

Introduction

Between 1685 and 1701 the Italian establishment was shaken by visits to the Peninsula of two leading figures in medieval studies: Jean Mabillon and Bernard de Montfaucon. Although Italian scholars were not new to the principles of historical research established by their French colleagues, the *voyages littéraires* made by the two famous Benedictines of the Congregation of St. Maur set in motion a process of actions and reactions that effected a substantial improvement in the study of pre-

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1 I would sincerely like to thank the editor for giving me the opportunity to publish this article. I would express my gratitude to the referees who read the paper and offered essential suggestions and mainly to Mark Weir (University of Naples L'Orientale) for his invaluable help in proofreading the text.

2 Mabillon in 1685-1686; Montfaucon in 1698-1701.
Renaissance art and antiquities in Italy. This process took place in the context of the more advanced exploration of the Middle Ages which, with its methodological rigour, marked the transition of historiography between seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Making reference to studies of the post-classical heritage, this article illustrates the Maurists’ Italian experience by focussing on Mabillon’s journey,
which has so far attracted less art-historical attention than that of Montfaucon.\(^5\) Rather than considering the full scope of his art-historical observations on medieval art, for which we refer to other studies, we focus mainly on his collaborations with local scholars who were actively involved in inspecting and gathering information about monuments from the Middle Ages. Secondly, our purpose is to place Mabillon and Montfaucon's antiquarian investigations in Italy in the context of contemporary publications, correspondence and learned friendships, noting traces of mutual influences between the French and Italian traditions of scholarship.

**Mabillon in Italy: collective inspections and tours**

Mabillon's Italian journey (1684-1685) had a significant impact on both the Republic of Letters and his own life. With a continued sense of discovery he entered new realms of charters and manuscripts, finding and publishing crucial patristic, Benedictine and liturgical writings according to the new philological criteria that Mabillon had recently established in his *De re diplomatica* (Paris, 1681).\(^6\) From Piedmont to Campania he established an itinerary based on libraries and archives that would become a model for future scholar-travellers.\(^7\) At the same time he was constantly interacting with prominent figures of local erudition, and this proved the real turning-point in his career and the driving force for his increasing interest in art history.

Mabillon's voyage in Italy was more penetrating and enduring than Montfaucon’s following stay (1698-1701). The latter, in terms of its importance, followed a geographical and scholarly trail already traced by his predecessor and, in terms of interaction with scholars, was clearly less open to collaboration, although sparkling with meetings and collective surveys. Montfaucon focused mostly on his own ambitions; by contrast, Mabillon frequently relied on his learned friends' guide and cooperation. Mabillon's austere temperament, earnestly devoted to the principles of the early-modern Benedictine Reform that inspired the birth and doings of the St. Maur congregation, did not stop him from opening out his historical/philological research to the help of other scholars, if this would benefit his erudite aims.\(^8\) The eldest Maurist was preoccupied by a thirst for historical and

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\(^6\) See above.

\(^7\) This sense of discovery was also accompanied by the perception of a substantial decadence of the current Italian historical science, which was viewed by the Maurists as largely unable to enhance its own heritage of medieval documents (Franco Venturi, 'L’Italia fuori d’Italia', in *Storia d’Italia*, III, *Dal primo Settecento all’Unità*, Torino, 1973, 983-990).

religious truth, which he constantly pursued through work in libraries and archives, and secondarily through the visits to monuments.

In comparison with the rest of his travels, Mabillon’s Italian experience was undoubtedly the longest and the most demanding and variegated. Prior to 1684 his research activity had mainly been carried out in the seclusion of monastic libraries, albeit in Flanders, France, Switzerland and Germany, where he had copied charters for historico-philological purposes. We have little evidence that he had any real interest in the works of art and monuments he encountered along the way. The accounts of his journeys in Bourgogne (1682) and Germany (1683) contain only passing references to copying gravestones and seals. During the preparation of De re Diplomatica (Paris, 1681), empirical observation of the material features of documents and the comparison of forms and styles of ancient writings, made in itinere as he visited a number of French abbeys (mainly in Paris and Lorraine), undoubtedly paved the way for his interest in art history. But this interest really took hold in Italy, and gained a lot from meetings and carrying out inspections with Italian scholars, in his mission to purchase and copy medieval manuscripts for the Maurists’ library in Saint-Germain-des-Prés and for the library of Louis XIV. His almost exclusive attention to the Middle Ages, seen in his pursuit of documents, also concerned works of art and buildings. In fact the contents of his travel diary (the Iter Italicum) show the Classical past to have been very much a marginal interest.

Mabillon’s studies in Italy were conducted in full adherence to a rationalist attitude based on a connection between critique and logic that he will theorize in his Traité des études monastique (Paris, 1691). It was an approach that was fully shared with the scholars he met along the way. In Brescia, in May 1685, Mabillon and his fellow-traveller Michel Germain were taken through the town’s monuments by Giulio Antonio Averoldo, connoisseur and expert numismatist, who in 1700 was to

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11 On the official aims of Mabillon’s Italian mission see Henri Omont, ‘Mabillon et la Bibliothèque du Roi à la fin du XVIIe siècle’, in Mélanges et documents publiés à l’occasion du 2e centenaire de la mort de Mabillon, Ligugé-Paris, 1908, 105-112.

12 ‘It is necessary to criticise in order to advance in science’ (‘Il faut critiquer pour avancer dans les sciences’): Jean Mabillon, Traité des études monastiques, Paris, 1691, 295.
edit the baroque-flavoured *Le scelte piture di Brescia additate al forestiere*.13 Averoldo guided the French monks in the company of Fortunato Vinacesio, merchant and polyglot bibliophile, and Ermete Lontana, librarian of Brescia’s bishop, on their visit to the cathedral and Count Martinengo’s cabinet of curiosities and paintings.14 On passing through Vicenza in the company of another count, Carlo Emilio Gonzaga, the French travellers were shown the remains of the Roman Theatre and the Duomo, where they were captivated by its late-Gothic design and ‘elegantissimum’ choir assorted with Palladio’s renovations.15 Inspections of private collections were usually a consequence of the exploration of libraries (in these cases private libraries), which were the basic aim of Mabillon’s journey. Moreover, they testify to direct contact with the collections’ owners. In Verona, for instance, the travellers were guided by Francesco Moscardo through his family museum, where Mabillon was attracted by a sixth-century Byzantine stoup from Santi Marco e Andrea in Murano, duly described and reproduced in a full-page engraving in the *Iter Italicum* (Paris, 1687) (fig. 3).16

![Figure 3 Copy from a sixth-century Byzantine stoup of Francesco Moscardo's Museum, engraving. From J. Mabillon, *Iter Italicum* (Paris, 1687).](image)

The most intense visits were undoubtedly those in Rome. During two long stays in the city (summer 1685; winter-spring 1686) the encounter with Giovan Pietro Bellori, at that time court antiquarian and librarian at the Christine of Sweden’s residence, must surely have been of great significance. Bellori guided Mabillon through Christine’s library and museum at Palazzo Riario alla Lungara during his first Roman stay, when he could appreciate the well-known collection of medals, paintings and sculptures. Their meetings became more informal and intimate after Mabillon’s return to Rome, when the antiquarian joined him and Germain at the Maurist congregation’s residence and for some itinerant surveys. Bellori also opened up his own collection, providing Mabillon with copies of the inscriptions from unpublished copper tablets coming from the Roman province of Hispania. These encounters, denoting a friendship that led to later correspondence, undoubtedly reflected Bellori’s Francophilia and alliance with the French party in Rome. It is plausible that they played a role in alerting Mabillon, who was familiar with Bellori’s *Le pitture del Sepolcro dei Nasoni* (Rome, 1680) engraved by Pietro Santi Bartoli’s, to the whole sphere of antique objects and art-works and their early-modern reproductions (fig. 4). In this regard we can recall the visit that Mabillon and Germain made to Bartoli’s residence in the company of Bellori and Monsieur de la Thuillière, the director of the Académie de France in Rome, where they appear to have appreciated the water-coloured copies of the wall-paintings from the Nasoni mausoleum, presumably the ones commanded by the cardinal Camillo Massimo for his project of the *Gran Libro delle antiche pitture*, and the original engravings published in 1680. Mabillon’s mention of Bartoli’s collection of fragments of Roman frescoes, due to be engraved, is also interesting.

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20 ‘Petrum de Sanctis [Pietro Santi Bartoli, *nda*], arte pingendi et cælandi insignem, adivimus cum domino Thuillerio, Academiæ Regiae prefecto, ubi quicquid veterum picturarum in antiquis delubris et monumentis reperiri potuit pictum aut cælatum vidimus: quale est Ovidi mausoleum, æri ab eodem Petro incisum in variis tabulis notisque et observationibus illustratum a Petro Bellorio, quicum tunc eramus’: Mabillon, *Iter*, p. 58. For Bartoli’s polychrome drawings after Nasoni’s mausoleum, that are
Mabillon’s main cicerones in Rome, however, were Giovanni Giustino Ciampini and Raffaello Fabretti, two scholars of great importance for their constant pioneering archaeological searches in the Roman countryside and suburban areas, and for their antiquarian publications. At least ten intensive searches are documented in Mabillon’s *Iter Italicum* and some manuscripts of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, involving visits to antique and medieval monuments. Many were one-day tours devoted entirely to churches, catacombs, aqueducts and Roman sites, but interestingly without taking in any libraries, although the diary shows that these were visited on an almost daily basis. Showing perhaps for the first time a full preserved at the Glasgow University Library, see G. Fusconi, ‘Un taccuino di disegni di Raymond Lafage e il palazzo delle Quattro Fontane di Roma’, in Marco Buonocore, ed, *Camillo Massimo collezionista di antichità. Fonti e materiali*, Rome, 1996, 61, and Massimo Pomponi, ‘Schedatura dei disegni del taccuino’, in *Camillo Massimo collezionista*, 73 and ff.; and so Gaetano Messineo, *La Tomba dei Nasoni*, Rome, 2000, 14-15.


23 Mabillon, *Iter*, 65, 87. I am currently working on these manuscripts.
interest in art-historical and archaeological practices, our French traveller allowed himself to be led out of his habitual archival pursuits by Ciampini and Fabretti, occasionally joined by Emmanuel Schelstrate and Lorenzo Zaccagni, respectively the librarian and the custodian of the Vatican Library. A visit to San Lorenzo fuori le Mura on 10th August 1685 was particularly full of discoveries. The group lingered over the mosaics of the triumphal arch, especially the seventh-century portrait of Pelagius II, on the eleventh-century mosaic cycle with the Life of the eponymous saint in the atrium (now lost); and on various architectural details. It is easy to imagine how Ciampini would have given his eminent guests the benefit of his deep knowledge of mosaics, knowledge which shortly afterwards was to find expression in his masterpiece *Vetera Monimenta* (Rome 1690, 1699), where the mosaic of the San Lorenzo triumphal arch was reproduced (fig. 5). The learned group explored the Catacombs of Pontianus, where, as testified both by the travel report and in a letter


25 Giovanni Giustino Ciampini, *Vetera monimenta*, Rome, 1699, pl. XXVIII.
written by Michel Germain, Mabillon was struck by the ‘picturæ antiquissimæ’ of martyrs and an image of Christ’s Baptism, all representations which were discussed *in loco*. He was also directly involved in archaeological activity which led to the discovery of a fragment of an Egyptian carved idol, several Christian inscriptions and coins, while in the cemetery of Castulo, which Fabretti himself had found, Mabillon collected a number of glass cruets for the martyrs’ blood.

One of the most interesting episodes of this learned friendship took place at Ciampini’s home, where on 7 July 1685 the French monk was able to consult the manuscript of the *Vetera Monimenta*, an extremely important treatise entirely dedicated to the medieval era, with a rich graphical apparatus featuring mosaics, bas-reliefs, architecture, liturgical furnishings and gold artefacts, that was nearing completion in the summer of that year (fig. 6). Mabillon consulted the manuscript ‘*cum magna voluptate*’, taking a lively interest in this kind of *repertorium* based on the central function of the visual documentation, in which he evidently found a great affinity with his historical methodology established on cataloguing and the objective study of data.

![Figure 6](image_url)

**Figure 6** G. C. Ciampini, *Vetera Monimenta*, tome I (Rome 1690), title-page.

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In January 1686, thanks to Ciampini and Fabretti and following the recommendations of Melchisedec Thèvenot before starting on his journey, Mabillon met Carlo Antonio dal Pozzo, who gave him the rare opportunity to examine the *Musæum Chartaceum* of his elder brother Cassiano.²⁹ The archaeological section of this illustrious collection of drawings and engravings, now for the most part in the Royal Library in Windsor Castle, filled Mabillon with wonder. He was particularly impressed by the watercolours reproducing the miniatures of the *Virgil* and the *Terence* codices of the Vatican Library in their entirety (‘elegantissimis picturis expressi’).³⁰ Mabillon was so astonished by this collection of images that he published in his *Iter* the copperplates from the drawings of two early-Christian sarcophagi from Tortona belonging to the Settala collection in Milan (fig. 7), and the apse mosaic of San-Teodoro-al-Palatino in Rome.³¹

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A similar welcome was offered to Mabillon and his companion Germain, in Naples, where Giuseppe Valletta monopolized the Maurists’ stay. Thanks to Valletta, with whom he pursued an epistolary friendship, Mabillon found himself gratified by the attentions of the most exclusive Neapolitan intellectual milieu, especially in his library/symposium, enabling him to discover libraries, collections and archaeological sites. He explored the Catacombs of San Gennaro, visited that autumn by Gilbert Burnet, who also benefited from Valletta’s hospitality. As their guide to the meanders and decorations of the Catacombs Mabillon and Germain had the canon Carlo Celano, a leading light of local antiquities and habitué of Valletta’s circle. They made a greater impression than the Roman subterranean cemeteries, and the two men even claimed that they had introduced a taste for such sites to Naples, as attested in a letter dated 6th November from Germain to Placide Porcheron:

A good canon of the Cathedral [Carlo Celano], who works on the History of Naples, guided us through the Catacombs, which are, undoubtedly, much more beautiful than those in Rome. They are very spacious too and, which is a pleasant sign of the flabby laziness of the Neapolitans, almost none of the well-educated men of this town had ever heard of these catacombs. We will make people want to visit them, to show that we take on a responsibility in such discovery. In Naples there is also an amphitheater, a circus, arenas, etc., which tell us that Naples had all the marks of Roman greatness.

The references in Iter Italicum to the catacombs deserve to be better known, alongside the contemporary and more extensive description given by Burnet, who shared the French monks’ opinion on the supposed inadequacy of previous studies.

32 Mabillon, Iter., 104-119.
33 On the visit of Burnet to Naples see Fausto Nicolini, Aspetti della vita italo-spagnuola nel Cinque e Seicento, Naples, 1934, 246-250.
34 Mabillon, Iter, 114-115.
35 ‘Un bon chanoine de la Cathédrale [Carlo Celano], qui fait l’histoire de Naples, nous a menés dans les catacombes, qui sont sans aucune difficulté beaucoup plus belles que celles de Rome. Elles sont aussi très spacieuses et, ce qui est une plaisante marque de la molle paresse des napolitains, presque aucun même des habiles de cette ville n’avait jamais entendu parler de ces catacombes. Nous en ferons venir le goût aux gens, qui témoignent nous avoir obligation de cette découverte. Il y a aussi un amphithéâtre, un cirque, des arènes, etc., qui nous apprennent que Naples avait toutes les marques de la grandeur romaine.’: Michel Germain to Placide Porcheron, Copenhagen, Royal Library, Bøll. Brevs. U. 344 (Gigas, Lettres, 128). In fact the attention of Neapolitan scholars to the Catacombs of San Gennaro dates back to the late sixteenth century; see Francesco Russo, La fortuna dei primitivi nella letteratura erudita campana. Napoli e Capua tra la fine del Cinquecento e la metà del Seicento, Doctoral thesis, University of Naples ‘Federico II’, Naples, 2007, 122-157. On the early modern rediscovery of Neapolitan catacombs an article is currently in preparation.
on the Neapolitan early-Christian cemeteries. In any case Valletta, and the peculiar antiquarian interests of his learned circle, must have played their part in alerting his foreign guests to these sites, calling for better investigation.

Naples’ medieval monuments remained at the centre of Mabillon’s stay, apparently more than the ancient remains (with the remarkable exception of an extensive journey in the Phlegrean Fields). With regard to the inspections of other medieval monuments, the *Iter* records his visits with Valletta to the Angevin churches, observed and recalled with obvious Gallic interest. Thus we have the rare mention of the fourteenth-century paintings of stories from the life of Saint Louis of Toulouse (now lost, but seen by Mabillon), in the primitive Angevin *sacrarium* in the Cathedral of Naples, built by Charles II of Anjou, although in this case the French scholar got some of his facts wrong. Moreover, shortly before their departure from Campania, Mabillon and Germain were accompanied by Valletta and his son Didaco on an inspection of the Norman monastery of San Lorenzo in Aversa and, above all, the castle at Casaluce, where the group lingered over the Byzantine icon of the Virgin and two first-century AD hydriae.

Finally, it is important to recall the survey made with two of Mabillon’s closest friends, Benedetto Bacchini and Erasmo Gattola. The former, Ludovico Antonio Muratori’s mentor, accompanied the Frenchman through the region of Emilia with his abbot’s carriage, visiting towns and studying together the imperial charters from the ninth and tenth centuries and their seals at San Sisto abbey in Piacenza. In late November 1685 Gattola, who was soon to become a particularly close collaborator of the Maurists, welcomed Mabillon to the Abbey of Monte Cassino, the cradle of the Benedictine order, taking care of his French guest for some ten days, during which time he showed him not only the archives but all the surviving artistic memories of the abbey’s glorious past and above all the illuminated treasures in the abbey’s library.

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36 Gilbert Burnet, *Some letters, containing an account of what seemed most remarkable in Switzerland, Italy &c.*, Rotterdam, 1686, 201-211.
37 Mabillon, *Iter*, 106. On this occasion there was a clear misunderstanding about the chapel’s dedication, indicated by Mabillon as entitled to Saint Louis King of France instead of Saint Louis of Toulouse; due to the mistaken attribution of the building of the cathedral to Charles I of Anjou, brother of king Louis, rather than Charles II, father of Saint Louis of Toulouse: for this double tradition within the medieval and early-modern historiography see Francesco Russo, *La fondazione del Duomo di Napoli attraverso le fonti (dal XIII al XVII secolo)*, Tesi di Laurea, Università di Napoli Federico II, Naples, 2003; for the Chapel of St. Louis of Toulouse of the Cathedral of Naples see Vinni Lucherini, ‘La Cappella di San Ludovico nella Cattedrale di Napoli, le sepolture dei sovrani angioini, le due statue dei re e gli errori della tradizione storiografica moderna’, in *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 70, 2007 (1), 1-22.
Learned interest in medieval art as seen in the correspondence between Saint-Germain-des-Prés and Italy

The network of correspondence that criss-crossed early modern Europe, complementing the practice of learned travel, made a concrete contribution to the progress of studies of local medieval heritage. Thanks not least to their epistolary relationships, the Maurists received substantial help from their Italian colleagues in completing their scholarly missions on behalf of the Congregation and, at the same time, of the French Crown. Furthermore, Italian referents supported Mabillon and Montfaucon’s itineraries in several ways: by providing indispensable letters of recommendation to gain access to archives; guiding them through library treasures; illustrating the artistic beauties and rarities of cities and abbeys; and also sending historical and graphical documents to the Maurist headquarters in Paris after the return of the monk-travellers. We can see the outlines of a system of historical and philological research which, in renewing fifteenth-century humanist modalities, was grounded in travel and international collaboration between scholars.

Relations between Saint-Germain-des-Prés and Italy are a case study for the circulation of art-historical data between Italy and France, involving above all bibliographical news, general information on monuments and also graphic documents. The interchange of bibliographical news involved, for instance, the publication of Ciampini’s first volume of the *Vetera monimenta* in 1690, which was announced as ‘de antiquis musivis imaginibus’ to Mabillon in the April of that year by the poet Ludovico Sergardi, at the time secretary to Alexander VIII:

> Only Ciampini (who is one of our correspondents) goes ahead with getting into print a completely worthy work. Recently he published a book on the images from ancient mosaics, which is full of erudition and many proficiently drawn illustrations.\(^41\)

> In his reply Mabillon expressed true excitement with, once again, a heartfelt recollection of his days spent in Rome with his friends:

> I am glad that the illustrious Ciampini published his work on the mosaics, which cannot be more fruitful than this for the republic of letters. No one, for worthiness and honour, can testify that better than me, who was accustomed to the same author’s kindliness, while I was in Rome, as also illustrious

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\(^41\) ‘Solus fere Ciampinus (quem optime nostri) typis mandare aliquid luce dignum prosequitur. Novissime publici juris fecit opus de antiquis musivis imaginibus multa eruditione referturn variisque iconibus affabre delineatis curiosum ’: Ludovico Sergardi to Mabillon, April 1690, in Ludovico Sergardi, *Orationes, dissertationes, prolusiones, epistolœ*, Lucca, 1783, 309.
Fabretti’s, whose memory is guarded inside my mind.\textsuperscript{42}

Mabillon’s letters, in particular to Gattola, are fascinating because they provide us with information on the progress of his \textit{Museum Italicum} and his \textit{Annales ordinis sancti Benedicti}, while his interlocutor wrote to both Mabillon and Montfaucon concerning the slow progress of his history of the abbey of Monte Cassino, finally published in a richly illustrated edition in 1733.\textsuperscript{43} With regard to the exchange of graphical documentation, we can mention the lost copy of a portrait of Ambrogio Traversari, taken from unidentified mid-fifteenth century wall-paintings, possibly at the Camaldoli hermitage or Santa Maria degli Angeli, that Antonio Magliabechi attached to one of his early letters to Mabillon dated 5 July 1681,\textsuperscript{44} responding to a request at once monastic and humanistic, in the true spirit of the Benedictine Reform:

Here enclosed, I send you the portrait of Prior General Ambrose, great for sanctity of life, his doctrine, dignity of offices, his graciousness. It must be included inside the \textit{Hodeœporicon} which I will send you without hesitation. It certainly bears a very good likeness, for being obtained from three paintings made from nature in Ambrose’s day.\textsuperscript{45}

Montfaucon was certainly more eager than Mabillon to receive art-historical and antiquarian material. He could count on a more extensive and ever increasing network of European correspondents, and what is more, he nurtured more

\textsuperscript{42} ‘Gaudeo quod illustrissimius Ciampinus opus suum \textit{De musicis} publici juris fecerit, quod reipublicae littarrisce non potest non esse magnopere fructuosum. Nemo est, qui dignitatem et honorem pluris faciat, quam ego, qui continua ipsius benevolentia usus sum, dum Romæ versarer, uti et illustrissimi Fabretti, cujus memoria semper animo meo observatur’ : Mabillon to Sergardi, April 1690, Sergardi, \textit{Orationes}, 320.


\textsuperscript{44} Ambrogio Traversari, a monk and classicist, specialist in the Fathers of the Church, was responsible for the fifteenth-century Camaldolese reform, so that Mabillon’s request for information from Italy about him and his works clearly reflects the same monastic tradition: Charles L. Stinger, \textit{Humanism and the Church Fathers. Ambrogio Traversari (1386-1439) and Christian Antiquity in the Italian Renaissance}, New York, 1977.

ambitious publishing projects, even though they did not always come to fruition.
We can recall that he was responsible for creating a cabinet of antiquities in Saint-
Germain-des-Prés, featuring objects from his travels or sent to him by scholars, and
this experience must have enhanced attention to the objects’ aesthetic and material
aspects that was evidently lacking in Mabillon. As confirmed by the inventory of the
cabinet preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, together with his
*L’Antiquité expliquée en figure* (1719-1724) and a number of letters, his interests
actually lay more with antiquity; nevertheless his collections and interests were not
restricted to the classical domain: his passing remarks on the medieval heritage of
Italy and the research for his *Monumens de la monarchie française* are there to prove
it.46

Montfaucon received antiquarian material from Italy that was not only from
the classical era. A note in his diary dated September 1698 mentions that he received
from Colombano Bosio the draft of a bas-relief with the Christ monogram sculpted
on a capital in Sant’Agnese in Ravenna.47 From Gattola he received some late-
antique coins of the *gens Æmilia* together with a letter.48 Furthermore, in a letter from
Montfaucon to Antonio Magliabechi in 1700,49 he informed his friend about the
illustrations, taken from Vatican manuscripts, for his forthcoming St. Athanasius re-
edition; and in 1703 he announced the appearance of Felibien’s *Histoire de l’abbaye de
Saint-Denis*, taking the opportunity to describe the ancient church’s furnishings and
Treasure.50

We can also mention the requests that Mabillon and Montfaucon sent to
Benedictine scholars and the rest of the learned world for material for their last great
publishing enterprises, respectively the *Annales* of the Benedictine Order (1703-1707)
and the *Monumens de la monarchie française* (1725).51 These requests conformed to a
custom among the Maurists established since the early days of the Congregation. In
Italy Gattola was the most active in replying to his French friends, sending to Paris
not only copies of medieval records from Southern Italian archives (Naples,
Montecassino, Gaeta), with reproductions of the original characters with Lombard

Moyen Âge.
49 Pasquin Valery, *Correspondance inédite*, III, 85-86.
Antonio Magliabechi, Leopoldo de’ Medici, Bellori e Montfaucon’, in Francesco Caglioti, Miriam Fileti
51 To date only prospect sent by Montfaucon to the scholars about the *Monumens* (Paris, BnF, ms. 11915)
has been partially studied, André Rostand, ‘La documentation iconographique des *Monumens de la
Monarchie française* de Bernard de Montfaucon’, *Bulletin de la Société de l’Histoire de l’Art Français*, 1: 1932,
104-109).
and Norman seals, but also graphical documents pertaining to medieval artworks. He sent Mabillon two prospects of the abbey at Monte Cassino realized after 1693 by the Neapolitan architect Arcangelo Guglielmelli, taking advantage of the latter’s presence in the Abbey for restoration work. These drawings were published in Volume II of Mabillon’s *Annales* (Paris, 1704). In one the architect highlighted the medieval parts of the abbey, i.e. the body of the Desiderian church and the main cloister, which could still be readily distinguished from the modern components, and in the other he gave the whole *veduta* of Monte Cassino entailing the ruins of the castle of San Germano (figs 8 & 9). A passage in Gattola’s manuscript diary is illuminating:

I ordered an engraving of the prospect of this monastery. I got this drawing done at my expense together with the prospect of the mountain, the village of San Germano and the antiquities which are in the city of Cassino [...], and in addition the plan of the same monastery; and I sent it to the father don Giovanni Mabillon, who ordered the engraving to insert inside the second tome of his *Annali Benedettini*.

Moreover, Gattola kept his correspondent informed about the repairs and modernization of the Order’s cradle being carried out by Guglielmelli. He also had copies made from illuminated books in the abbey, including two wonderful water-coloured copies of eleventh-century exemplars of St-Benedict’s Rule (codd. Casin. 73 and 442), that we have recently found at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

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53 ‘Ho fatto intagliare il prospetto di questo monastero. Questo disegno lo feci fare a mie spese assieme al prospetto della montagna della città di San Germano, e dell’antichità che sono nella città di Casino [...], e di più la pianta di detto monastero, e lo mandai donare al quondam padre don Giovanni Mabillon, dal quale fu fatto intagliare e posto nel secondo suo tomo degli *Annali Benedettini*’ : Monte Cassino, Archive, Giornali del Gattola, 1712, f. 6v. The text written in 1712 refers to the early period of Guglielmelli’s presence in Monte Cassino
54 Sola, ‘Dai Carteggi’, 176-177.
55 See Russo, *Itinera literaria et antiquités du Moyen Âge*. About the interest of Mabillon on Medieval miniatures, concerning in particular his analysis of Charles the Bald’s portrait inside the Bible of San Paolo Fuori le Mura, which was made with his usual comparative method, see Bickendorf, ‘Des mauristes à l’école de Berlin’, p. 154 and Bickendorf, ‘Dans l’ombre de Winckelmann’, 8.
Figure 6 A. Guglielmelli, Abbey of Montecassino, bird’s eye view, engraving. From J. Mabillon, *Annales ordinis sancti Benedicti*, tome II (Paris, 1704).

Figure 7 A. Guglielmelli, veduta of Montecassino, engraving. From J. Mabillon, *Annales ordinis sancti Benedicti*, tome II (Paris, 1704).
Some observations on influences and collaborations between Maurists and Italian scholars concerning medieval antiquities

Diplomatic and palaeography are the auxiliary sciences of history which were the subjects respectively of Mabillon’s *De re Diplomatica libri sex* (Paris, 1681) and Montfaucon’s *Paleographia graeca* (Paris, 1708). Both disciplines, as heirs of fifteenth-century philology, soon became the main instruments in an analytical approach to the study of the Middle Ages, based on the verification of the authenticity of sources. Unlike humanistic methods, an empirical component tended to predominate in the Maurists’ research, as is shown by the comparative analysis of letter forms in the charters. In fact the missions to monastic archives and libraries throughout Europe became essential for this new historiographical horizon. Erudite travels resulted in enquiries into Medieval art and antiquities, which started to be investigated with the same attitude used for the study of official records and manuscripts, albeit more sporadically.

In Italy, where the study of the Medieval past and monuments was still largely conditioned by the kind of Counter-Reformation purposes and methods that characterise Baronio’s *Annales ecclesiastici*, which since the end of 16th century, through a militant use of the sources, imposed a global reconstruction of the Middle Ages as a controversial instrument to Protestant historiography, there was a real need for a systematic, critical and rigorous exploration of Italian post-Classical history. This is why Maurist research methodology proved so fruitful, helped by the sense of belonging to one trans-national scholarly community, the ‘Republic of Letters’, supported by a deep admiration for current French scholarship.56 Mabillon and Montfaucon’s surveys of the Italian heritage, which featured unexplored libraries, private collections and medieval places of worship (mainly related to the Benedictine order) involved contacts with high-profile personalities who showed a great affinity with Maurist methodology and who treasured these experiences in their own subsequent activities. At the same time, these surveys throughout Italy led to a rigorous contextualisation of Italian art historiography, reinforced by the distribution of the French monks’ travel diaries and their key publications (i.e. Mabillon’s *Iter* and *Museum Italicum* and *Annales ordinis sancti Benedicti*; Montfaucon’s *Diarium Italicum, Palaeographia graeca* and *L’Antiquité expliquée*). In these works engravings and artistic information performed a noteworthy function, albeit in a supporting role to the history associated with diplomatic and palaeography. The itinerary established by the contribution of Mabillon and Montfaucon’s Italian expeditions and the Maurist publishing ventures would

shortly come to full maturity in the seminal works by Ludovico Antonio Muratori and Scipione Maffei on written and archaeological sources.\textsuperscript{57}

The early reception of Maurist erudition in Italy and its influence on local studies of medieval monuments was not homogenous and widespread. It is evident that most of the Italian scholars who met the French travellers and received Maurist teaching tended to be critical of curial positions and the still strong scholasticist tradition and Baronius' model, although they were generally clerics themselves and, as such, respectful of the historical significance of the \textit{Annales ecclesiastici}. From a cultural standpoint they were independent intellectuals, only exceptionally protected by patrons such as Christine of Sweden or Cosimo III de' Medici. In any case these personalities were keen to be involved in the ferments of scholarly Europe, despite the hindrance of the Inquisition, and were more than willing to pursue correspondence with leading European scholars and keep abreast of current publications. This kind of sensibility towards European erudition also applied to the renewed universe of art-historical and archaeological research, endowed with a new taxonomy and analytical approach, although still governed by the Aristotelian system of knowledge. Thus anti-scholasticism, anti-Jesuitism and anti-Baroque attitudes, in addition to the rationalist application of rules and experience in historical studies, and particularly in religious history, were basic requisites in the Italian fascination for Maurist teaching and, therefore, the sources for the rediscovery of their own heritage.

Everyone who was involved in the ideology of the Benedictine Reform, which reunited all the above-mentioned critical elements, can thus be numbered among the closest adepts of Maurist erudition.\textsuperscript{58} The Cassinese congregation was undoubtedly in great concord with its counterpart of St. Maur, and it is hardly surprising that it derived from the reform of a previous Order, that of Santa Giustina in 1408. Both Bacchini and Gattola were among the first and most active interpreters of Mabillon's epistemology.

Bacchini’s crucial role in Italian medieval studies has seldom been analyzed with regard to his antiquarian interests, derived from the Maurist method. In fact his \textit{Giornale de’ Letterati}, in the wake of the \textit{Journal des Scavans},\textsuperscript{59} frequently finds

\textsuperscript{57} For Muratori and early studies on Middle Ages in Italy see Ezio Raimondi, \textit{I lumi dell’erudizione soggi sul Settecento italiano}, Milano, 1989, in particular, for the relationship between the Maurists and Muratori, see, in the same volume, \textit{I padri Maurini e l’opera del Muratori} (3-78). As regards art-historical studies by the Maurists, concerning medieval artworks of Italy and their Italian journeys, see Bickendorf, ‘Des mauristes à l’école de Berlin’, 152-154; and Russo, ‘Itinera literaria et antiquités du Moyen Âge’.


room for archaeological dissertations, denoting an ill-concealed fascination for French erudition and, above all, the adoption of the Maurist method, which Bacchini constantly promoted alongside that of the Bollandists. One of the most significant, and little known, examples of Bacchini’s interest in medieval art can be seen in the treatise on Massimiano’s chair in Ravenna, in the Liber pontificalis Agnelli Ravennatis (Modena, 1708), a text discovered by Bacchini himself in the mid-1690s (fig. 10). The scholar illustrated the text with four detailed copperplates of the chair, in a close parallel to typical Maurist procedure: the discovery of a liturgical text and its philological emendation followed by an iconographic comment. To emulate his Parisian friends, in 1696-97 he undertook a trip, funded by Gattola, through the monastic libraries of the Peninsula, which is documented in a manuscript diary written in a Mabillonian style and rich in accounts of visits, such as the examination of the fifteenth-century Popes’ portraits in the Cathedral of Siena, or his visit to Naples, where he transcribed many epigraphs.

As we have seen, the researches of the Cassinese Gattola had considerable importance for the achievement of Mabillon’s Annales and Montfaucon’s pursuits. Visits by the Maurists to Montecassino always received his full attention and care.

60 Benedetto Bacchini, Liber pontificalis Agnelli Ravennatis, Modena, 1708, between 138-139.
Gattola introduced his guests to the Abbey’s treasures, with special focus on the wonders of the medieval scriptorium. Modern knowledge of Monte Cassino’s miniatures owes much not only to the visits of Mabillon and Montfaucon, but above all to their collaboration with Gattola, thanks to his unconcealed pride in the artistic heritage of the Benedictine cradle. He complied with the French monks’ needs by searching out not only medieval records but also illuminated manuscripts to submit to their judgement. Even after the Maurists’ return to Paris, Gattola kept busy copying and sending them drafts of miniatures preserved in his abbey. Thanks to the direct influence of Mabillon and Montfaucon he increased the use of illustration as complementary evidence to historical dissertations in his Historia Abbatiae Casinensis, edited in Venice in 1733 (fig. 11). In transposing the Mabillonian principle from the faithful reproduction of official medieval writings to copying of art objects, Gattola produced fine engravings of the medieval relics in Montecassino, such as the bronze doors or the lost marble pavement of the main church, both commissioned by the Abbot Desiderius. He involved the architect Guglielmelli in elaborating the prospects, and himself made drafts and drawings to be engraved.

Figure 9 E. Gattola, Historia Abbatiae Casinensis (Venice, 1733), title-page.

Another scholar influenced by the Maurist travel practice was the Cassinese Angelo Maria Querini, who made surveys of the whereabouts of manuscripts in
Italy, Germany, Holland, England and France, where he spent a training period in Saint-Germain-des-Prés under Montfaucon’s supervision. After this experience he conceived an unfinished project of a history of the Cassinese congregation following the Maurist model and Montfaucon’s suggestions. Finally, Anselmo Banduri, who went to live in the Maurist’ Abbey until his death in order to collaborate with his friend and mentor Montfaucon on expanding Byzantine studies, made an important contribution to the knowledge of Byzantine art with an excellent edition of Paul the Silentiary’s Descriptio Sanctae Sophiae.

Among the secular erudites we can recall Carlo Cesare Malvasia, author of the Felsina pittrice (Bologna, 1678). Obliged to reside within the borders of the State of the Church, in Bologna, he was able to meet Mabillon on the latter’s passage through the city. The broad and problematic passage from the scheme of art biography to that of art history is exemplified by Malvasia in his Pitture di Bologna published in 1686, where the author’s meticulous quest for original documents and visual reconnaissance of paintings in Bologna all clearly owe much to the Maurist methodology.

Finally, Ciampini applied the rule of ‘oculari experimento’ to the study of medieval images and architectures. This method of description and interpretation is meticulously documented in his Monimenta, scrupulously determining the age of paintings and furnishing engravings ‘sub oculos lectori’ so as to demonstrate the Catholic ‘truth’ of the facts. These were all expressions of a clear Mabillonian matrix.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of Maurist influence can be seen as episodic but incisive. During the pre-Enlightenment era, Italy, thanks to its strong tradition, was not merely the recipient for European erudition, for all its current weakness. Mabillon and Montfaucon both travelled through Italy for long enough to strengthen their already innovative historical methodologies, to gain new perspectives and research incentives (in addition to bringing back to France the well-known stock of manuscripts, documents and impressions of the monuments). Their meetings with...

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64 Mabillon, Iter, 202.
influential scholars, in some cases developing into true and enduring friendships, were essential and the cause of mutual enrichment.

Mabillon’s sympathies for the rational approach together with the religious erudition displayed by his secular colleagues, Ciampini and Fabretti, had an important result in initiating the austere Benedictine into the realm of archaeology. Their attention to the technical side of archaeology, often studied from an engineering standpoint, and their empirical approach to the study of iconography were elements that combined well with the taxonomical science of Mabillon. From this and from the catacombs exploration with his Roman friends, for example, the Benedictine gained inspiration for the important *Dissertation sur le culte des saints inconnus* (Paris, 1698). On the other hand, with Montfaucon the centrality of illustration in art-historical treatises kept its best definition before the Enlightenment, but it is necessary to reassert the evident Italian roots, going back to early-seventeenth century Roman publications (i.e. Torrigio, Costaguti, Alemannni, de Angelis, Bosio), which he acquired particularly during his Italian journey and thanks to his learned acquaintances. Otherwise, Italy had a more ancient and solid tradition of illustrated historiography and copies from works of art, so it is highly likely that Mabillon and Montfaucon felt the effects of this. Both came to Italy with a dense knowledge of this kind of literary production. We can remember how Mabillon’s fascination in consulting Cassiano dal Pozzo’s *Musæum Chartaceum*, while the meeting with Fabretti and Bellori, two key-figures of the new generation of the illustrated historiography, had a further impulse in pushing the Maurists in that direction.

The whole issue of influences and collaborations between France and Italy at the eve of the Enlightenment that we have sketched here emerges as an osmotic process that, following its delineation by Françoise Waquet, merits further investigation in terms of art historiography.

**Francesco Russo** was born in Naples, Italy, in 1978. In 1996 he got a Classical Lycaeum Diploma and in 2003 he graduated in Liberal Arts (Lettere Moderne) at the University of Naples ‘Federico II’ with a thesis in History of Art Criticism on *The Angevin Foundation of the Cathedral of Naples: an Historiographical Matter, centuries 12th - 17th*. In 2003 he obtained a Doctoral Fellowship and in 2007 he accomplished his PhD at the University of Naples Federico II in the area of History of Art Criticism with a thesis on *Medieval Art and Antiquities in early modern Neapolitan scholarship (1580 - 1650)* under the supervision of the Professors Francesco Aceto, Rosanna De Gennaro and Francesco Caglioti. In 2007 he won the postdoctoral San Paolo Fellowship at the Institut National d’Histoire de l’Art (INHA) of Paris for a project on Mabillon and Montfaucon’s studies on the Italian Medieval heritage. In 2009 he

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*Waquet, Le modèle français et l’Italie savante.*
achieved the Specialization School in History of Art at the University of Naples 2. At present, he is a qualified teacher of History of Art at the Italian Lyceum.

francesco.russo5@gmail.com