

Cistercian Landscapes in Medieval Sardinia. Dynamic Heritage between Permanence, Transformation, and Territorial Rewriting

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This paper investigates Cistercian settlements in medieval Sardinia as agents of territorial fitting within extra-urban and low-density environments. Rather than considering monasteries as isolated architectural complexes, the research interprets them as nodes within wider networks linking water control, agricultural organization, granges, sacred sites, and small settlements. Through a crossreading of landscape history and architectural history, the paper explores how Cistercian presence rearticulated pre-existing spatial structures, adapting to inherited environmental and cultural conditions rather than merely imposing a uniform model.

A central assumption of the paper is that the history of landscape architecture offers a crucial interpretative framework for perceiving, understanding, and studying changing landscapes and dynamic heritage. It allows buildings, infrastructures, sacred continuities, and environmental modifications to be read not as separate elements, but as parts of a single historical and spatial process. From this perspective, Cistercian foundations are examined as interventions within already stratified territorial systems, engaging with older sacred geographies, pre-existing settlement patterns, and inherited environmental structures. In the Sardinian case, this means approaching the monastic landscape not as an isolated medieval creation, but as a field shaped by long-term transformations, where protohistoric persistences, later religious resemanticizations, and rural infrastructures intersect.

Particular attention is given to plains, hydraulic practices, and resource management, understood as devices for mediating between local ecologies and monastic organization. The paper therefore addresses Cistercian landscapes not only as historical evidence of monastic settlement, but also as dynamic heritage systems in which permanence and transformation coexist. In dialogue with current debates on inner areas, territorial imbalance, and the interpretation of changing heritage, the Sardinian case is proposed as a historical laboratory for rethinking extra-urban space not as marginal residue, but as a structured field of relations, memory, and productive infrastructures, beyond the scale of the individual monument. In this perspective, water management emerges as a key form of mediation between monastic organization, inherited ecologies, and long-term territorial adaptation.