THE ST. PETER IN CHAINS HEADQUARTERS

HISTORY AND MODERNITY MEET IN THE FACULTY OF CIVIL AND INDUSTRIAL ENGINEERING OF SAPIENZA UNIVERSITY OF ROME

The Beginnings

In the Archaic Period the Oppian Hill area, just outside the Servian Wall, was a Necropolis; during the Imperial Age through the first public intervention made in this area the Porticus of Livia (located below the Clivus Suburanus, near to where the canteen of the Engineering Faculty is today) and the Mecenate gardens in the northeast, were built.
Following the fire of 64 AD vast areas were expropriated and incorporated into the perimeter of the Domus Aurea, the residence of Emperor Nero, which remained in use until the year 104 AD, when it suffered a considerable damage in a fire.
After the Damnatio Memoriae, the Baths of Tito were built on the embankments of the Domus Aurea.
In the year 109 AD the Baths of Trajan (the first large Roman thermal facility) were also built.
Today the names of the streets recall the ancient buildings:

- Via delle Sette Sale recalls the Cisterna delle Sette Sale, which was a monumental cistern composed of nine different sections and built to provide water for the Trajan Baths. The water arrived to the tank, which contained more than 8 million litres of water, through a specific aqueduct from the Esquiline.
- Via delle Terme di Tito recalls the name of the Baths wanted by emperor Tito, which were expanded by Diocletian. A large stairway connected the Colosseum to the Baths of Emperor Tito.
- Via delle Terme di Traiano recalls the location of the great thermal facility wanted by Emperor Traiano, which was designed by Apollodorus of Damascus. The ancient ruins of these Baths can be found in the garden of the Oppian Hill and beside the Faculty.

The Cloister – well and fountain

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During the Early Christianity, important families established themselves on the Oppian Hill (Equizi, Frangipane, Capocci, Annibaldi, Borgia). The Hall with a triple window and a balcony that rests on the arch of St. Peter in Chains and the Towers that can be found on the square and next to the Church of San Martino ai Monti belong to the Borgia family and can still be found today.
During this period important churches such as the St. Peter in Chains church or the Basilica Eudossiana (442 AD), which was founded by Licinia Eudossia, the daughter of Theodosius and the young wife of Valentinian III, were built.

From the early Christianity to the Modern Age

During the Middle Ages, the Oppian Hill area was covered by gardens and orchards. In 16th Century the area was organized in landscaped sites and the Roman ruins towered over the lands.

In 1781 the Canons Regular of the Lateran of St. Peter in Chains donated some of their premises to the Apostolic Camera to build a Powder magazine ("Salnitriera Camerale o Polveriera"), a factory and a deposit of saltpetre used for the production of gunpowder.
The Pontifical plant was then reused and probably expanded and modernized during occupation of Rome by Napoleon (1809-1814), becoming the "Etablissement Imperial de poudres et de salpètres", as indicated on the plaque which can be found on the entrance door of the powder magazine, which was installed in the southwest corner of the Trajan Baths, in the exedra and its basements.

School of Engineering birth

In 1873 the School of Engineering established itself in the rooms of the convent of Canons Regular of the Lateran, which was attached to the St. Peter in Chains church.
The reconstruction of this space, if not the actual construction, is the work of Della Rovere, and was undertaken between 1510 and 1520, according to canons that stylistically recall the fifteenth century.
According to Vasari, the portico of the cloister and the well are the work of Giuliano and Antonio da Sangallo. On the other hand, according to Giovannoni, they are the work of Giuliano Leni, the assistant of Bramante.
In 1895, a building on the side of Via delle Sette Sale designed by Mansueti and dedicated to the Institute of Chemistry was added to the convent buildings. In 1908 another building was added too, which could be accessed directly from Via delle Sette Sale and which was devoted to the Electrical Engineering Institute.
Around 1915, new premises were built in the convent building that were added to the existing ones in Via Eudossiana. To do so, some of the structures were raised (such as the one in the right aisle of the St. Peter in Chains church). Even the portico of the cloister was also used by glazing it.
In 1918 Prof. G.B. Milani designed the new building complex of the School of Engineering, in which he adopted the block typology with four internal courtyards. One of the courtyards was built from the pre-existing Cloister of St. Peter in Chains.
A new facade and a new main entrance for the Faculty was created on Via Eudossiana. The narrowest part of the convent was extended towards the south and articulated in three floors. In the southeast a new body was built which was perpendicular to the one built before. A wide stairway was also built, which had both an external part and another part which was inserted into a triple nave hallway followed by a staircase that lead to the Main Hall on the upper floor.
Other extensions (such as the one built for the Institute of Hydraulics towards Via della Polveriera, and the one for the School of Aeronautical Engineering, etc.) were undertaken until 1935.
A further substantial extension of the building took place after 1950, thanks to an extensive development programme drafted by Prof. G. Nicolosi.
Through this project the Presidency was reorganized and the cloister was partially reopened. New large classrooms were built over the eastern part of the Milani building; a pavilion was built for the Hydraulic Construction Institute and for the Geodesy and Topography Institutes.
A building with six floors was built longitudinally, between the old convent and the Institute of Applied Chemistry, to host the new Institutes of Electronics, Automation, Geophysics and Mining. A new iron and glass structure was also placed inside the eastern body of the building, which was designed primarily to host drawing rooms.
In order to this, the Presidency was resettled and the cloister partially reopened; then new large classrooms were built over the eastern body of the Milani building; a pavilion was built for the Hydraulic Construction Institutes and

Main entrance

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for Geodesy and Topography; a six-storey, longitudinally disposed building was interposed between the old convent and the Institute of Applied Chemistry, to house the new Institutes of Electronics, Automation, Geophysics, and Mining Art; a new iron and glass structure was also placed inside the eastern building, mainly designed to host drawing rooms.
At the beginning of the Seventies, the strong requests for other usable spaces determined the necessity of undertaking further changes to use as much as possible the existing spaces for the Faculty's educational and scientific activities.
Thus various spaces were renovated, a mezzanine level was created in the Boaga Library, and the first floor level of the Milani building was subdivided horizontally by means of floors supported by a metal framework to create classroom spaces. (designed by Professors E. Mandolesi and S.I. Colombini).

Today

In the 1980s, with the establishment of the Faculty's Building Committee, a programme was set up to develop and raise the last floor of the Milani building wing to create new spaces for the Structural and Geotechnical Engineering Departments, for the Transportation area and for new classrooms.
At the same time, thanks to the participation of the cultural heritage superintendency, the entire cloister of the former convent of St. Peter in Chains was completely reopened thanks to the removal of the windows. The Faculty also re-appropriated itself of the former dining hall and of the hall with frescoes that used to be used by the departments. Today they are used as halls for events, conventions and conferences.