

Religious Atmosphere and Spirit of Place at the Santa Maria Scala Coeli Monastery: Community Transition and the Continuity of Contemplative Space in Évora, Portugal

Maria Joao Castro^{1*}

¹ Universidade NOVA Lisboa, Portugal; email: mariajoacastro@fcs.unl.pt

Received: 2025-09-05; Approved: 2026-03-18; Published: 2026-03-30

Abstract: This study examines how the contemplative atmosphere of the Santa Maria Scala Coeli Monastery in Évora, Portugal, has been sustained despite the transition of its resident religious community from the male Carthusian Order to a female contemplative community of the *Servidoras do Senhor e da Virgem de Matará*. The research aims to analyze how spatial enclosure, temporal discipline, and embedded religious memory contribute to the continuity of spirit of place within a monastic site undergoing institutional change. This study employs a qualitative approach using spatial phenomenology and a narrative-oriented design. Data were collected through field observation of the monastery's spatial configuration, visual documentation of architectural and landscape elements, and documentary analysis of historical, architectural, and institutional sources. The findings show that the contemplative atmosphere of Scala Coeli is produced through three interrelated dimensions: the layered architecture of enclosure that regulates access and withdrawal, the repetitive temporal order of bells, liturgy, silence, and ascetic routine, and the persistence of spiritual memory within the built environment during and after community transition. The study also finds that the departure of the Carthusian monks in 2019 and the installation of a female religious community in 2022 did not automatically dissolve the contemplative character of the monastery. Instead, the atmosphere continues through the relative stability of its architectural structure, the sedimentation of religious practices in space, and the renewed operation of clausura. The implications of this study lie in its contribution to the study of religious architecture, sacred atmosphere, and lived religion, particularly in showing that the continuity of contemplative space may persist across institutional and gendered transitions. The originality of this research lies in its integration of architectural analysis, temporal discipline, and community transformation within a single narrative-phenomenological framework for interpreting the continuity of spirit of place in a monastic environment.

Keywords: Contemplative space; monastic architecture; religious atmosphere; Scala Coeli Monastery; spirit of place.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana atmosfer kontemplatif di Biara Santa Maria Scala Coeli di Évora, Portugal, tetap bertahan meskipun terjadi transisi komunitas religius penghuninya dari Ordo Kartusian laki-laki ke komunitas religius perempuan kontemplatif *Servidoras do Senhor e da Virgem de Matará*. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana enclosure spasial, disiplin temporal, dan memori religius yang tertanam berkontribusi terhadap keberlanjutan *spirit of place* dalam sebuah situs monastik yang mengalami perubahan institusional. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan fenomenologi ruang dan desain berorientasi naratif. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi lapangan terhadap konfigurasi spasial biara, dokumentasi visual unsur-unsur arsitektural dan lanskap, serta analisis dokumen terhadap sumber-sumber historis, arsitektural, dan institusional. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa atmosfer kontemplatif Scala Coeli dibentuk melalui tiga dimensi yang saling berkaitan: arsitektur enclosure berlapis yang mengatur akses dan penarikan diri, tatanan temporal yang repetitif melalui lonceng, liturgi, keheningan, dan rutinitas asketik, serta keberlanjutan memori spiritual dalam lingkungan binaan selama dan sesudah transisi komunitas. Penelitian ini juga menunjukkan bahwa keluarnya para biarawan Kartusian pada tahun 2019 dan masuknya komunitas religius perempuan pada tahun 2022 tidak secara otomatis

menghapus karakter kontemplatif biara. Sebaliknya, atmosfer tersebut tetap berlanjut melalui stabilitas relatif struktur arsitekturalnya, sedimentasi praktik-praktik religius di dalam ruang, dan kembalinya pelaksanaan *clausura*. Implikasi penelitian ini terletak pada kontribusinya bagi kajian arsitektur religius, atmosfer sakral, dan *lived religion*, khususnya dalam menunjukkan bahwa keberlanjutan ruang kontemplatif dapat bertahan melintasi transisi institusional dan gender. Kebaruan penelitian ini terletak pada integrasi analisis arsitektural, disiplin temporal, dan transformasi komunitas dalam satu kerangka naratif-fenomenologis untuk menafsirkan keberlanjutan *spirit of place* dalam lingkungan monastik.

Kata kunci: Ruang kontemplatif; arsitektur monastik; atmosfer religius; Biara Scala Coeli; *spirit of place*.

1. Introduction

Over the past several decades, Europe has experienced significant transformations in the function of religious spaces, particularly monasteries and contemplative monastic communities. Studies on Catholic vocations in Portugal indicate a substantial decline in the number of priests and religious since the mid-twentieth century. While thousands of members of religious orders remained active in the 1960s, the following decades witnessed a continuous decrease associated with broader processes of secularization and demographic change (Berman, Iannaccone, & Ragusa, 2012; Mourao, 2006). This phenomenon of vocational crisis has directly affected the sustainability of historical monasteries that for centuries functioned as centers of spiritual life, education, and culture. Many monastic complexes have closed, been converted into museums or hotels, or been transferred to other religious communities with different spiritual orientations.

Within this context, the Santa Maria Scala Coeli Monastery in Évora, Portugal presents a highly significant case for study. Archbishop of Évora D. Teotónio de Bragança founded the monastery in 1587, and the institution officially opened in 1598 with the arrival of Carthusian monks from Tarragona. For centuries, it remained the only male contemplative Carthusian monastery in Portugal (Abreu & Pardal, 2011; Escudero, 2011). As part of the Carthusian tradition, which emphasizes strict ascetic life, profound silence, and monastic isolation, Scala Coeli functioned not only as a religious residence but also as a spiritual environment that shaped distinctive contemplative practices (Devaux, 1998). After the state abolished religious orders in 1834, the monastery experienced secularization and temporarily served as a social and agricultural institution before restoration efforts led by the Eugénio de Almeida family reestablished it as a Carthusian monastery in 1960 (Pereira, 2002; Sousa, 2005). However, in 2019 the four remaining monks, who had reached advanced age, left the monastery because of the vocational crisis and the limited number of monastic members. The recent transfer of the monastery to a female religious community from the Order of the Incarnate Word marks a significant institutional transformation. For the first time, a contemplative space historically shaped by a male monastic community now houses a female religious community, while the architectural configuration and the tradition of silence characteristic of the Carthusians remain intact.

This phenomenon raises a crucial question regarding how religious space maintains its *spirit of place* amid institutional and gender transformations within its resident community. From a social and cultural perspective, this issue remains highly relevant because it concerns the relationship between sacred architecture, ascetic practice, and the sustainability of religious communities within modern societies that increasingly experience secularization and transformations in religious practice (Casanova, 2014; McGuire, 2008). Therefore, the study of Scala Coeli extends beyond a purely historical inquiry and becomes theoretically significant for reinterpreting the meaning of contemplative space in the contemporary era.

To understand the persistence of meaning in religious space, this study employs several conceptual frameworks derived from architectural studies and the sociology of religion. The concept of *spirit of place* refers to the idea that architectural space does not merely function as a physical structure but also contains existential identity and experiences of meaning formed through relationships among

humans, environment, and cultural symbols (Norberg-Schulz, 1980). Similarly, the theory of atmosphere developed by Böhme (2017) emphasizes that the emotional quality of space does not depend solely on material form but also on the way individuals experience space affectively through light, silence, rhythm, and everyday practices occurring within it. In religious contexts, scholars can also interpret spatial experience through the concept of lived religion, which refers to religious practices enacted through daily routines, habits, and lived experiences rather than solely through formal doctrine (McGuire, 2008). Within this perspective, monastic space functions as a medium that connects architectural structure with living spiritual practices and thereby enables the continuity of sacred atmosphere even when the religious community occupying the space changes.

Research on monastic space and religious architecture has developed along several major tendencies that demonstrate the complex relationship among physical form, spiritual practice, and socio-cultural context. The first tendency emphasizes historical-architectural analysis that focuses on building morphology, spatial organization, and the development of architectural styles as elements that shape ecclesiastical identity. Reveyron (2014) demonstrates that the form of a monastery represents more than a technical configuration; it also constitutes a structure that constructs ecclesial identity through stable and repetitive spatial arrangements. Boisvert (1992) highlights the cloister as the central circulation space and as a symbol of enclosure that characterizes the Western monastic tradition. Pernas Alonso (2020) further shows how certain architectural elements, such as monumental staircases, embody hierarchy and rhythm in religious life. Wang (2021) conducted a comparative study between Han Buddhist monasteries and Cistercian monasteries and demonstrated that worship spaces occupy a central position as mediators among community, theology, and symbolic structures of power. Although this approach provides rich typological and historical insights, it often treats monasteries primarily as material artifacts and rarely explores the lived spiritual experiences occurring within them.

A second tendency focuses on ecological-spiritual and symbolic interpretations that highlight the integration of monastic space with nature and its theological meaning. Sawicki (2019) interprets Benedictine architecture as a bridge between spirituality and ecology in which landscape and natural rhythms become part of practical theology. Lupu (2014) demonstrates that monastery gardens function as symbolic transitional spaces between the sacred and the profane by integrating labor, contemplation, and the meaning of redemption. Markovic (2014) emphasizes the sustainability of sacred architecture as a reflection of spiritual values that persist across time. This approach enriches the understanding of spatial meaning and symbolism but often remains disconnected from institutional dynamics and the changing communities inhabiting these spaces.

A third tendency focuses on historical context, gender dynamics, and the adaptive reuse of monastic spaces. Esperdy (2005) shows how the Royal Abbey of Fontevrault produced gendered spatial constructions through female religious leadership and demonstrates that monastic space does not remain socially neutral. Dinçel (2025) analyzes sacred topography in Cappadocia as a space of hagiographic memory that shapes collective devotion. Martins et al. (2019) examine the transformation of former Cistercian monasteries in Portugal into new functions as a result of modern secularization. These studies demonstrate that monastic spaces continuously adapt to social, political, and economic change. However, most of these studies focus on changes in material function or historical-gender perspectives and rarely examine how religious atmosphere continues as a form of lived religious practice.

These three research tendencies demonstrate that studies of monastic space remain fragmented among architectural analysis, ecological-spiritual symbolism, and historical adaptation of religious spaces. Although many studies discuss monastery morphology, symbolic landscapes, and functional transformations of monastic complexes due to secularization, few studies specifically analyze how changes in religious communities particularly shifts from male monastic communities to female religious communities affect the continuity of contemplative atmosphere within spaces shaped by particular ascetic traditions. In addition, scholars rarely apply phenomenological designs that interpret spatial atmosphere as part of lived religious practice in studies of religious architecture. Within this context, the case of the Santa Maria Scala Coeli Monastery in Évora becomes particularly important

because it presents a significant transformation of the resident religious community without radical changes in the contemplative architectural configuration. This study seeks to fill this gap by integrating historical, spatial, and phenomenological analysis in order to understand how monastic space preserves the continuity of *spirit of place* amid institutional and demographic changes in religious communities.

This study aims to analyze the transformation of contemplative space at the Santa Maria Scala Coeli Monastery following the transition of its religious community by examining how architecture, ascetic rituals, and experiences of silence shape and sustain the continuity of *spirit of place*. More specifically, this research addresses a gap in the literature by integrating historical, sociological, and phenomenological perspectives within a single analytical framework that treats space as a lived religious experience.

This study argues that although the religious community and institutional context at the Santa Maria Scala Coeli Monastery have changed, the spatial configuration of the monastery and the ascetic rhythms inherited from the Carthusian tradition continue to sustain the continuity of contemplative atmosphere. The architectural structure of enclosure through systems of gates, cloisters, and monastic cells together with the temporal rhythm of liturgical life, including the ringing of bells, prayer schedules, and practices of silence, produces spatial experiences that support contemplative life. Therefore, the sacred atmosphere within monastic space does not depend solely on the identity of the religious community inhabiting it but also on the architectural configuration and the memory of spiritual practices embedded in that space. Within this context, monastic architecture functions as a medium that preserves contemplative experience even when transformations occur in religious communities and gender composition. Consequently, this study enriches the study of religious space by emphasizing the importance of atmospheric continuity as a key element in sustaining spiritual experience within monastic environments.

2. Method

The unit of analysis in this study is the contemplative monastic space within the Santa Maria Scala Coeli Monastery complex (*Cartuxa de Évora*) in Portugal. The study focuses on spatial arrangements including the gate, church, library, small cloister, sacristy/choir chapel, *Grande Claustro*, monks' cells, garden, and burial area as well as daily practices that produce experiences of silence and isolation, such as *clausura*, bell rhythms, liturgy, bodily circulation, and communication rules. The study does not examine specific individuals as psychological subjects. Instead, it investigates institutional mechanisms and spatial atmosphere that emerge from the relationship among architecture, monastic regulations, and sensory-religious experiences.

This study employs a qualitative approach with a spatial phenomenology and narrative-poetic design. The researcher selected this approach to understand the meaning and experience of contemplative space, particularly the dichotomies of religious space–time, enclosure–isolation, and “atmosphere” as expressions of *spirit of place* (Böhme, 2017; Norberg-Schulz, 1980). A phenomenological design enables the researcher to interpret space as a lived experience that individuals perceive through sensory and existential engagement with their environment (Relph, 1976). Meanwhile, the narrative-poetic design captures dimensions of spatial experience that technical descriptions alone cannot fully explain, such as silence, rhythm, transitions of light, and sensations of enclosure. These aspects often form part of sensory experience in spatial phenomenology and ethnography of place experience (Pink, 2015).

The study draws its data from both primary and secondary sources. First, primary data consist of field notes collected during direct visits to the Scala Coeli complex. The researcher conducted field observations in 2022, during a period when the monastery complex opened partially to public visits following the departure of the Carthusian community in 2019. These visits included detailed descriptions of spatial routes, architectural elements, regulatory markers (such as the “CLAUSURA” sign), liturgical devices (such as the *Liber Gradualis*), and spatial artifacts (keys, task boards, and bell ropes). The primary data also include visual documentation that accompanies the observations, such

as photographs and images referenced in the text. Second, secondary data consist of scholarly literature and historical-architectural sources concerning the Carthusian Order and Scala Coeli. These sources include academic articles, books, catalogues, and archival or institutional references related to church design, religious art, liturgy, and monastery history. To strengthen the academic context, the researcher collected literature on themes including monastic space, religious architecture, *spirit of place*, gendered space, and the adaptive reuse of monastic buildings. The researcher also incorporated earlier classical references such as local histories and nineteenth- and twentieth-century monographs — when necessary to provide historical context.

The researcher collected data through four techniques. First, the researcher conducted non-participant field observation by following spatial routes from the entrance gate to the church, cloisters, cells, garden, and cemetery in order to record circulation patterns, public–private spatial divisions, and devices that regulate silence, including bells, instruction boards, and corridor structures. Second, the researcher conducted visual documentation through photography or image recording of key elements representing the *clausura* regime and contemplative design, including gates, bell ropes, distinctive Carthusian keys, cloister configurations, and garden layouts. Third, the researcher carried out document and artifact analysis by reading texts and inscriptions on site, examining liturgical objects mentioned in the findings (such as the *Liber Gradualis*), and tracing relevant historical documents, including archival catalogues and collections associated with the monastery library and manuscript heritage. Fourth, the researcher conducted a systematic and targeted literature review that gathered studies related to (a) monastery spatial organization and cloister typology, (b) sacred space and sensory or atmospheric experience, (c) monasticism, ecology, and landscape, (d) gender and power in religious space, and (e) the adaptive reuse of monasteries after secularization.

The researcher analyzed the data through three stages. First, the researcher conducted thematic reduction and coding of field notes and visual documentation to identify key themes, including temporal rhythm (bells and liturgical schedules), mechanisms of silence (non-verbal communication and spatial separation), transitional structures (gate–corridor–cloister sequences), and the relationship between architecture and ascetic practice (the cell as an “individual desert” and the garden as a transitional sacred–profane space). Second, the researcher performed phenomenological-atmospheric analysis to interpret how spatial configuration, light, sounds of water and wind, and the austerity or openness of architectural form produce experiences of enclosure and isolation as everyday religious practices. Third, the researcher conducted narrative analysis by constructing a “spatial itinerary” that describes the movement through monastic space and then linking this narrative with key literature in order to assess whether the field findings support, revise, or expand the concepts of *spirit of place* and lived religion within a monastic context undergoing a post-2019 community transition from a male to a female religious community.

3. Results

Spatial Structure and the Clausura Regime: Architecture as a Framework of Enclosure

Field observation indicates that the spatial organization of the Santa Maria Scala Coeli Monastery is structured through a layered system of enclosure that progressively separates the external world from the inner contemplative domain. The complex is arranged through a sequence of bounded spaces in which walls, courtyards, cloistered passages, and residential units work together to regulate access and movement. This spatial order creates a gradual transition from publicly approachable areas to increasingly restricted monastic zones, thereby establishing the material framework for silence, separation, and contemplative life. As illustrated in Figure 1, the monastery appears as an integrated enclosed complex in which the church, cloistered spaces, and residential cells are organized within a clearly demarcated architectural boundary.

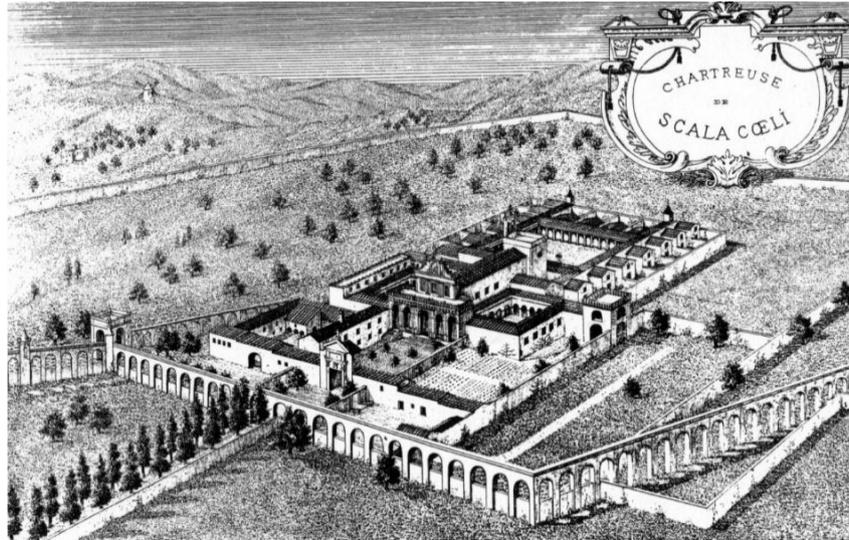


Figure 1 Charterhouse of Évora restored in 1960

Field observation further shows that access to the inner monastic domain is regulated through a sequence of thresholds, the most explicit of which is the second gate bearing the inscription “CLAUSURA.” As shown in Figure 2, this marker is mounted on a wrought-iron gate and functions as the clearest visual boundary between the area that remains accessible and the enclosed zone of the monastery. Within the spatial organization of Scala Coeli, the gate does not merely restrict entry; it also marks the transition from the outer approach to a contemplative environment governed by seclusion, silence, and controlled circulation. In this way, the second gate operates as a material and symbolic threshold that defines the beginning of the cloistered monastic space.



Figure 2 Second Gate with the “CLAUSURA” Marker

Beyond this threshold, the church emerges as the first major interior space within the monastery and functions as the liturgical center of the monastic complex. Architecturally, its façade presents a Renaissance composition articulated through three ascending levels of columns—Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian—with a staircase leading to an open narthex supported by fluted columns (Serrão, 1999). The interior combines relative austerity with selective ornamentation, most visibly at the main altar, where a gilded *talha dourada* retable associated with the patronage of King D. João V remains in place. The spatial organization of the church also suggests differentiated liturgical zones linked to distinct

monastic roles, including the separation between the monastic choir and the area used by the *irmãos conversos* (Devaux, 1998).

On the right side of the church, a doorway leads to the monastery library, a space historically associated with study and meditation in the Carthusian tradition. Documentary sources indicate that the Scala Coeli library once preserved important manuscript and cartographic materials, including *Leal Conselheiro* by King D. Duarte and atlases by Fernão Vaz Dourado, now held by the National Archive Torre do Tombo (Abreu & Pardal, 2011). In spatial terms, the church and library form part of the inner sequence of monastic spaces that mediate movement from the entrance zone toward the more enclosed communal and residential areas of the monastery.

After passing through the church and library sector, the spatial route continues toward the cloister system, which functions as the core of monastic circulation. Scala Coeli contains two cloisters with different roles: the small cloister and the *Grande Claustro*. The small cloister serves as a restricted communal space used for selected activities such as chapter meetings and short conversations permitted by monastic rules. Surrounding this cloister are several important rooms, including the chapter room, refectory, and a small chapel, indicating that this part of the complex supports limited forms of shared monastic life. From the small cloister, a corridor leads to the *Grande Claustro*, the most dominant spatial structure in the monastery. Each side of this cloister measures approximately 98 meters, making it one of the largest cloisters in Portugal. The structure consists of four arched galleries forming a covered corridor around a central garden, and field observation indicates that this cloister functions as the principal circulation spine of the monastery, linking the church, monks' cells, and other communal spaces while maintaining a strongly enclosed spatial order.

At the center of the *Grande Claustro* stands the fountain known as *Olho do Céu* ("Eye of Heaven"), composed of three marble basins surmounted by a statue of the Virgin Mary. Around it grow eight cypress trees, while four intersecting paths extend outward in a cross-shaped layout bordered by trimmed *buxo* shrubs. Field observation further revealed that the cloister environment is marked by the sound of water, the movement of wind, and the near absence of human voices. Sunlight entering from the open courtyard creates alternating zones of light and shadow along the covered corridor and garden paths, contributing to a spatial atmosphere of quietness and withdrawal (Ferro, 2019). As shown in Figure 3, the central fountain forms the visual focus of the *Grande Claustro* and reinforces the ordered, symmetrical composition of the cloister garden. The image also highlights the relationship between the fountain, the cypress-lined enclosure, and the surrounding arcade, showing how architectural form and landscape arrangement work together to sustain the contemplative character of the space.

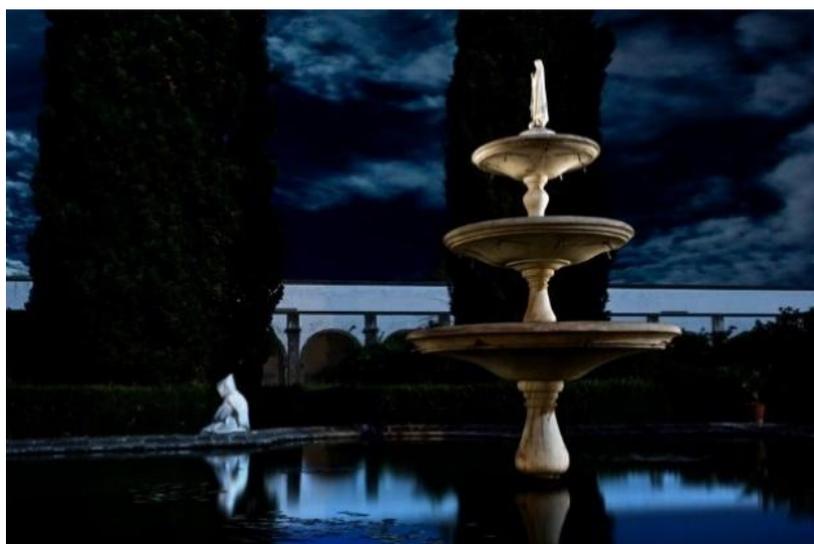


Figure 3 Fonte Central do Grande Claustro (Central Fountain of the Great Cloister)

One corner of the cloister garden contains the burial area known as *Casa da Eternidade* (“House of Eternity”), an enclosed space marked by a marble cross and several unnamed iron crosses. Beyond the cloister, the monks’ cells constitute the most important residential units in the complex. Scala Coeli contains approximately eighteen cells arranged along the sides of the great cloister. Each cell includes a vestibule, the *sala Ave Maria*, a bedroom, a study room, and a small oratory with a genuflectory for private prayer. At the rear of the cell is a small courtyard and private garden, enabling manual work within an enclosed individual setting.

Field observation shows that the design of the cells reinforces both separation and silence. The walls of one cell do not directly touch those of another because open corridors intervene between them, reducing sound transmission across the residential units. Each cell also contains a *ministra*, a small opening through which food can be delivered without exposing the interior of the living space. A distinctive Carthusian key was also documented as part of the access system for these doors. As shown in Figure 4, the key and lock mechanism of the cell door form part of the material system that regulates access to the enclosed residential units. The image highlights both the physical simplicity and the functional specificity of the door hardware, underscoring how even small architectural details participate in the broader regime of monastic separation. Overall, the spatial arrangement of gates, church, cloisters, burial ground, and cells demonstrates that Scala Coeli is organized through a layered architecture of enclosure in which circulation, access, and separation are materially structured to support contemplative life.



Figure 4 Chave das Portas das Cartuxas (Key of the Carthusian Cell Doors)

These observations show that the spatial structure of Scala Coeli is organized through a carefully graduated regime of enclosure in which thresholds, liturgical space, cloister circulation, and individual cells operate as interconnected components of contemplative life. The monastery does not rely on a single boundary, but on a layered arrangement of gates, corridors, courtyards, and residential units that progressively regulate entry, movement, and degrees of accessibility. In this configuration, architecture functions not merely as a physical container of monastic practice, but as a material framework that sustains silence, separation, and disciplined withdrawal from the outside world. The spatial order documented in the complex therefore demonstrates how enclosure at Scala Coeli is materially produced and maintained through the integrated relationship between built form, circulation, and restricted access.

Rhythms of Time and Ascetic Practice: The Production of an Atmosphere of Silence

Field observation indicates that the contemplative atmosphere at the Santa Maria Scala Coeli Monastery is shaped not only by architectural enclosure but also by the repetitive temporal rhythms that organize daily religious life. Within the monastery, sound, light, and bodily movement follow recurring patterns associated with liturgy, manual work, and repeated ascetic practices, giving

structure to the daily experience of monastic life (Devaux, 1998; Silva, 2000). These rhythms regulate when monks gather, withdraw, pray, work, and return to their cells, showing that silence at Scala Coeli is sustained not merely through spatial separation, but also through an ordered sequence of temporal practices.

In Carthusian monastic life, bells function as the primary mechanism for regulating time. At Scala Coeli, the sound of the church bell constituted the most regular interruption to the monastery's silence, marking transitions between communal worship, prayer, and periods of withdrawal. Observations along the monastery corridor reveal a bell rope hanging from the ceiling and directly connected to the bell system, providing material evidence of how temporal order was enacted within the monastic environment. As shown in Figure 5, the bell rope formed part of the practical mechanism through which liturgical time was communicated and coordinated in daily life, allowing the rhythm of monastic activities to be maintained through sound rather than speech (Silva, 2000).



Figure 5 Corda do Sino (Bell Rope in the Monastery Corridor)

Documentary sources and field-based reconstruction indicate that daily life at Scala Coeli followed a highly structured liturgical schedule organized around recurring cycles of prayer, withdrawal, and limited communal gathering. The monks began their day at midnight with Matins and Lauds, after which they returned to their cells before resuming the next sequence of activities in the morning (Silva, 2000). Later in the day, they gathered again for the Conventual Mass and, in the afternoon, for Vespers, while the intervals between these offices were spent in private prayer, reading, manual work, and rest. This sequence shows that monastic time at Scala Coeli was not arranged as a flexible routine, but as a disciplined temporal order structured through repeated liturgical observance and return to the cell as the primary locus of contemplation (Silva, 2000; Sousa, 2005). The reconstructed pattern of this daily rhythm is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Reconstructed Daily Rhythm of Carthusian Life at Scala Coeli

Time	Monastic Activity	Description
00:00	Matins and Lauds	Night office in the choir chapel
03:00	Rest	Monks return to their cells
07:00–08:00	Preparation for worship	Private prayer and meditation
±08:00	Conventual Mass	Main liturgy of the community
Morning–Afternoon	Private prayer and work	Reading, writing, gardening
±16:00	Vespers	Evening office

17:00–19:00	Personal contemplation	Prayer and meditation
±19:00	Night rest	Monks return to their cells

The schedule presented in Table 1 shows that daily life at Scala Coeli was organized through a repetitive liturgical cycle rather than a flexible sequence of activities. The recurring pattern of night office, return to the cell, morning worship, work, afternoon prayer, and evening withdrawal indicates a highly stable temporal structure that ordered the day in a regular and disciplined manner. Within this arrangement, communal gathering and individual seclusion alternated according to a fixed rhythm, allowing prayer, work, and rest to be integrated into a continuous cycle of monastic observance. In this sense, the daily schedule functioned as a practical framework through which order, repetition, and routine were maintained within the monastery.

In addition to bells, the monastic regulatory system at Scala Coeli also employed non-verbal means of communication to coordinate daily activities without disrupting silence. Field observation identified an instruction board placed along one of the monastery corridors, displaying brief terms such as *Passeio*, *Sermão*, and *Lavagem de lãs*. This board functioned as a practical medium for conveying information about tasks and routines while minimizing spoken interaction. Its presence indicates that monastic silence was not maintained simply through the absence of speech, but also through the use of material devices that allowed coordination to occur within a disciplined regime of limited verbal exchange.

Documentary and observational evidence indicates that liturgical practice at Scala Coeli contributed to the temporal production of silence through a highly regulated acoustic environment. One important artifact associated with this practice is the *Liber Gradualis*, a liturgical book containing collections of Gregorian chants used in Catholic worship (Castro, 2022; Silva, 2000). Within the monastic setting, liturgy introduced sound in a controlled and recurring form, so that vocal prayer became part of the ordered rhythm of daily religious life rather than a break from contemplative discipline.

At Scala Coeli, chant was performed without instrumental accompaniment, placing the human voice at the center of the liturgical soundscape. This minimal acoustic setting reinforced the restrained character of monastic worship, in which sound remained limited, purposeful, and tied to specific ritual moments. In this way, the liturgical cycle did not interrupt silence in an arbitrary manner, but structured it through recurring offices and chant performed within a narrowly regulated auditory environment (Castro, 2022; Silva, 2000).

Documentary sources further indicate that liturgical practice at Scala Coeli underwent a spatial adjustment in the later period of the community's life. While communal worship had previously been celebrated in the main church, the reduced number of monks after the Carthusian return in 1960 led the community to move the liturgy to a smaller space, the former sacristy, which then functioned as a choir chapel. In the final years before the closure of the community in 2019, only four monks remained to perform the liturgical offices, showing that the continuity of worship was maintained even under conditions of demographic decline (Castro, 2022; Silva, 2000).

Beyond liturgical rhythm and controlled sound, ascetic routine at Scala Coeli was also shaped by the monastery's relationship with its surrounding landscape in the Alentejo region. One of the most significant external elements is the *Aqueduto da Água de Prata*, the historic aqueduct that crosses the monastery's territory and historically supported the water supply needed for monastic life and agricultural work (Ferro, 2019; Mendes, 2003). As shown in Figure 6, the aqueduct forms part of the broader environmental setting within which contemplative life unfolded, linking built enclosure with the open landscape around the monastery.



Figure 6 Aqueduto da Água de Prata near the Scala Coeli Monastery

Documentary and contextual evidence further indicates that manual labor in gardens and cultivated land formed part of the daily ascetic routine. This work was not merely practical, but integrated into the disciplined pattern of monastic life alongside prayer and withdrawal. In addition to daily labor, the monks also observed a weekly walking practice every Monday around the monastery grounds. According to historical descriptions, this walk recalled the symbolic departure of Saint Bruno and the first Carthusians from the world in search of contemplative solitude (Papasogli, 1981; Silva, 2000);). During this walk, conversation was permitted only in a limited form, making it a rare moment of controlled interpersonal exchange within the otherwise restrained communicative order of the monastery.

Taken together, these observations show that silence at Scala Coeli is not merely the absence of sound, but the result of a disciplined temporal order structured through bells, liturgical repetition, restrained communication, and ascetic routine. The daily schedule, the regulated use of chant, the coordination of activities without speech, and the integration of manual work and weekly walking practice all indicate that monastic quietness was maintained through recurring forms of ordered practice. In this sense, the atmosphere of silence at Scala Coeli was sustained not only by architectural enclosure, but also by a repetitive pattern of time, sound, movement, and limited interaction that organized everyday monastic life.

Transition of Community and Continuity of Atmosphere: From Masculine to Feminine

The transformation of the religious community represents one of the most significant events in the contemporary history of the Santa Maria Scala Coeli Monastery. After more than four centuries as a site of male Carthusian monastic life, the monastery experienced an institutional transition due to the vocational crisis that has affected many religious communities across Europe. This transformation raises an important question concerning the sustainability of the contemplative atmosphere that centuries of ascetic practice, liturgical rhythm, and monastic spatial structure characteristic of Carthusian life have shaped (Devaux, 1998; Silva, 2000). In the Carthusian tradition, religious life develops not only through individual spiritual discipline but also through the configuration of monastic space designed to support silence, isolation, and intense prayer. Therefore, a change in the religious community occupying this space may raise questions about how far the historically formed spiritual atmosphere can persist when monastic life undergoes institutional transformation.

In 2019, the Carthusian community at Scala Coeli left the monastery after facing a prolonged vocational crisis. During the final years of the community's presence, only four monks remained in the monastery: Prior Antão López, Father Isidoro, and two other brothers responsible for domestic and internal services within the monastery (Escudero, 2011). This situation no longer met the minimum

requirement established in the Carthusian tradition, which requires at least seven monks to sustain a monastic community (Devaux, 1998).

These four monks had reached advanced age, most of them between eighty and ninety years old. Because of the limited number of members and their advanced age, the Carthusian community eventually decided to leave Scala Coeli and return to another Carthusian house in Spain, the Cartuja de Montalegre near Barcelona.

This event marked the end of the male Carthusian presence in Portugal. For centuries, Scala Coeli had been the only active Carthusian monastery in the country. The departure of this community not only reflected demographic changes in European religious life but also signaled the disappearance of one of the most rigorous contemplative monastic traditions in Portugal.

In his reflections on monastic life at Scala Coeli, the last prior, Antão López, described the monastery as an ascetic space that demanded great spiritual strength. Carthusian life requires an extremely high level of isolation, and only a small number of individuals can sustain such a life over time. This condition has become one of the factors contributing to the decline in the number of novices within Carthusian communities across Europe.

Despite the decline in monastic vocations across Europe, the Carthusian Order continues to endure as a global contemplative tradition. Founded by St. Bruno in 1084, the order has preserved its distinctive charism of silence, solitude, and ascetic withdrawal for more than nine centuries, with contemporary Carthusian communities still maintaining this way of life in various parts of the world (Beiting, 2012; Hujanen, 2025; Peeters, 2017; Stoppa, 2021). The Carthusian Order continues to endure as a global contemplative tradition despite the decline of monastic vocations in parts of Europe. According to L'Osservatore Romano (2024), the order currently comprises 21 monasteries worldwide, consisting of 16 monasteries for monks and 5 for nuns. The same source reports that, at the end of 2022, the order counted 288 monks and 63 nuns globally. These figures indicate that, although the Carthusian presence has diminished in some European contexts, the tradition of Saint Bruno remains institutionally and demographically sustained on a worldwide scale.

These data indicates that the Carthusian vocation still attracts and sustains adherents despite its exceptionally demanding commitment to silence, enclosure, and eremitic-contemplative life. This persistence also shows that the tradition of Saint Bruno remains viable not merely as a historical legacy or symbolic memory, but as an active religious form capable of institutional continuity across different geographical contexts. In this sense, the Carthusian Order may be understood as a small but durable transnational monastic community whose endurance reflects the continuing relevance of radical contemplative withdrawal within the modern religious landscape

The departure of the Carthusian community created a unique transitional situation at Scala Coeli. After more than sixty years as an enclosed space almost entirely inaccessible to the public, the monastery complex opened temporarily on a limited basis to visitors. This period created an interesting paradox because a space historically marked by the principle of *clausura* suddenly became accessible to the general public.

At the entrance of the monastery, a sign states: "A Cartuxa não se visita." This phrase literally means "The Cartuxa is not visited." The statement carries a symbolic meaning that the Carthusian monastery does not function as a conventional tourist destination but rather as a spiritual space that people can truly understand only through lived monastic experience.

Although the monastery complex opened temporarily to visitors, field observations show that the contemplative atmosphere of Scala Coeli remained strongly perceptible. The empty monastic spaces did not lose their spiritual character. On the contrary, the silence of the spaces created a unique experience for visitors, as if the presence of the monks still remained in the memory of the place.

During this transitional period, visitors could walk through various parts of the monastery, including the church, cloisters, and corridors of the cells. However, the silence that enveloped these spaces created an atmospheric sensation different from that of religious buildings that remain actively inhabited. The absence of communal activity actually intensified awareness of the contemplative function of the space.

Field observations show that sunlight reflecting on the white walls of the monastery created a powerful visual atmosphere within the empty spaces. Without occupants, the monastic spaces revealed their architectural character more clearly. Long corridors, cloister gardens, and monks' cells appeared to preserve traces of the monastic life that once existed within them.



Figure 8. Cloister Corridor in an Uninhabited Condition

Source: Phillip Capper, 2005.

In this situation, visitors experienced what can be described as a sense of “presence within absence.” Although the monks no longer lived in the monastery, the spatial structure and architectural rhythm continued to emit traces of the contemplative life that once existed there.

After the transitional period following the departure of the Carthusian monks, Scala Coeli entered a new phase of monastic life with the resumption of *clausura* on 4 September 2022 and the installation of the nuns of the *Servidoras do Senhor e da Virgem de Matará* (Fundação Eugénio de Almeida, 2024). This community belongs to the *Família Religiosa do Verbo Encarnado*, whose official institutional website identifies the *Servidoras do Senhor e da Virgem de Matará* as its female branch (Instituto del Verbo Encarnado, 2024). Public reports from 2019, cited by *Agência ECCLESIA* on the basis of a statement by the Archbishop of Évora, described the institute as having approximately 1,350 sisters worldwide, including a contemplative branch of about 186 nuns in 16 monasteries (Coelho, 2019).

This community transition also accompanies plans for relatively limited functional adaptations of the monastic space. One of the main planned changes involves the addition of monastic hospitality facilities, which will allow visitors to participate in spiritual retreats within the monastery environment for a certain period.

The practice of monastic hospitality does not usually appear in the Carthusian tradition, which emphasizes strict isolation from the outside world. However, this practice commonly appears in other monastic traditions such as the Benedictine and Cistercian orders, where monasteries often provide retreat spaces for pilgrims or visitors who wish to experience temporary spiritual life within a monastic environment (Sousa, 2005). Therefore, the development of hospitality facilities at Scala Coeli represents a relatively moderate form of institutional adaptation. Although the monastery will allow limited visitor presence, the fundamental structure of contemplative life and the architectural enclosure will remain preserved.

Despite these functional adaptations, the fundamental structure of the monastery remains unchanged. The configuration of the cloisters, monks' cells, and enclosure system has not undergone

significant alteration. The adjustments that planners have proposed remain functional rather than structural, ensuring that the contemplative character of the space continues.

Observations of this transition indicate that the architecture of Scala Coeli demonstrates a high level of spatial stability. The spatial structure originally designed for Carthusian life appears capable of accommodating another religious community without losing the essential character of its contemplative environment. Consequently, the transition from a male monastic community to a female religious community does not automatically eliminate the spiritual atmosphere formed over centuries. Instead, this atmosphere tends to persist through architectural configuration, spatial rhythm, and the memory of religious practices embedded within the structure of the monastery.

4. Discussion

This study has shown that the contemplative atmosphere of Scala Coeli is sustained through the interaction of spatial enclosure, temporal discipline, and continuity across community transition. First, the findings demonstrate that the monastery's spatial organization forms a layered architecture of enclosure in which thresholds, cloisters, cells, and controlled circulation create the material conditions for silence, separation, and contemplative withdrawal. Second, the study shows that this atmosphere is reinforced by a repetitive temporal order structured through bells, liturgical cycles, restrained communication, chant, manual labor, and other ascetic routines that regulate daily life. Third, the results indicate that the departure of the male Carthusian community and the subsequent arrival of a female religious community did not automatically dissolve the contemplative character of the site. Instead, the atmosphere of Scala Coeli appears to persist through the relative stability of its architectural framework, the memory of religious practices embedded in the space, and the continued operation of *clausura* within a renewed institutional context.

The findings of this study can be placed in dialogue with several major tendencies in the study of monastic space and religious architecture. First, this research relates to the historical-architectural tradition that emphasizes the relationship between building morphology and religious identity. Reveyron (2014) shows that monastery form functions as a structure that shapes ecclesiastical identity through stable spatial organization, while Boisvert (1992) highlights the cloister as both the center of circulation and a symbol of enclosure in Western monastic tradition. Pernas Alonso (2020) further demonstrates that architectural elements often reflect the rhythm of religious life within monastic communities. The findings of this study support these perspectives by showing that the spatial configuration of Scala Coeli particularly the system of cloisters, cells, and corridors creates an enclosure structure that sustains contemplative life. At the same time, this study extends the typological approach by emphasizing the experiential dimension of religious atmosphere produced through the interaction between architectural space and lived monastic practice.

Second, this research also relates to ecological-spiritual and socio-institutional perspectives on monastic space. Sawicki (2019) explains that monastic architecture often integrates spiritual life with the natural landscape, while Lupu (2014) interprets monastery gardens as symbolic spaces that connect sacred and profane realms, and Markovic (2014) highlights the sustainability of sacred architecture as an expression of enduring spiritual values. In addition, studies by Esperdy (2005), Erdil Dinçel (2025), and Martins, Cano, and Adell (2019) demonstrate that monastic spaces frequently undergo social transformation, including gendered leadership structures and adaptive reuse following secularization. The findings of this study contribute to these discussions by showing that the transition from a male Carthusian community to a female religious community at Scala Coeli does not necessarily alter the atmospheric structure of the space in a radical way. Instead, institutional transformation can occur within a relatively stable framework of spatial continuity.

This study provides several new contributions to the study of religious architecture and monastic space. First, the research integrates architectural, phenomenological, and historical analysis in order to understand how religious atmosphere is produced and maintained within monastic space. This approach moves beyond typological studies that tend to focus on the physical form of buildings without examining the religious experience that occurs within them. Second, the study demonstrates

that changes in religious communities do not necessarily alter the atmospheric character of monastic space in a significant way. The findings show that architectural structures and the memory of religious practices can maintain spiritual continuity even when institutional transformations occur. Third, the research introduces a narrative-phenomenological approach for interpreting the atmospheric experience of contemplative space. This approach allows researchers to capture dimensions of spiritual experience that often remain invisible in conventional architectural analysis that focuses solely on material form.

Historically, the Scala Coeli Monastery reflects the continuity of the Carthusian tradition that has persisted for nearly a millennium since Saint Bruno founded the Carthusian Order in 1084. This tradition emphasizes contemplative life centered on silence, solitude, and withdrawal from the world as a path to deepen the relationship with God (Beiting, 2012; Peeters, 2017). In Carthusian spirituality, monastic space functions not only as a residential environment but also as a spiritual medium that supports prayer, meditation, and theological reflection, particularly within the silence of the monastic cell (Stoppa, 2021). Through practices of silence and eremitic life, monks cultivate inner spiritual focus, so monasteries are often understood as symbolic “deserts” that facilitate the search for union with God through continuous contemplative prayer (Hujanen, 2025). In this context, monastic space operates not merely as a physical setting but as a spiritual framework that sustains contemplative practice across generations within the Carthusian tradition.

From a social perspective, this study demonstrates that monastic space functions as a mechanism for forming religious communities through structured spatial and temporal discipline. Strong enclosure structures not only separate monks from the external world but also shape collective identity based on silence, isolation, and repeated contemplative practice. In the study of religious architecture, scholars refer to this type of spatial organization as monastic spatial discipline, a deliberate spatial arrangement that organizes religious life and distinguishes sacred territory from worldly space (Destefanis, 2018; Quartier, 2017). Through elements such as enclosure walls, gates, cloisters, and monastic cells, monastic space functions as a social device that creates symbolic boundaries between religious communities and external society while supporting the continuity of communal spiritual practice (Immonen & Harjula, 2021; Smart, 2014).

From a theological perspective, this study shows that the concept of sacred space in the monastic tradition extends beyond formal liturgical functions to include spiritual experiences formed through the relationship among space, time, and ascetic practice. In religious geography and sacred architecture, scholars define sacred space as a space separated from the profane world and understood as a locus of encounter between human beings and transcendent reality (Liutikas, 2023; Wescoat & Ousterhout, 2012). Such spaces therefore support not only ritual performance but also contemplation and meditation through the interaction of architectural form, religious symbolism, and the rhythms of spiritual practice (Adelstein, 2018; Liutikas, 2025). In this sense, monastic architecture functions as a medium that articulates religious experience through spatial materiality, ritual structure, and the spiritual atmosphere shaped by the daily practices of religious communities.

To understand the persistence of meaning within religious space, this study employs several conceptual frameworks from architecture and the sociology of religion. The concept of *spirit of place* explains that architectural space embodies existential identity and meaning formed through the relationship between humans, environment, and cultural symbols (Norberg-Schulz, 1980). Likewise, Böhme’s (Böhme, 2017) theory of atmosphere emphasizes that the emotional quality of space emerges not only from material form but also from how individuals experience light, silence, rhythm, and everyday practices within it. In religious contexts, scholars also interpret spatial experience through the concept of *lived religion*, which refers to religious life expressed through daily routines and lived practices rather than solely through formal doctrine (McGuire, 2008). Through these perspectives, monastic space can be understood as a medium that connects architectural structure with living spiritual practice, so the continuity of sacred atmosphere at Scala Coeli depends not only on the presence of a particular community but also on the interaction among spatial configuration, the rhythm of religious life, and the memory of spiritual practices embedded within the space.

This study demonstrates that monastic spaces such as the Santa Maria Scala Coeli Monastery function as important media for shaping structured religious experience through the interaction among architecture, life rhythms, and communal spiritual practices. The enclosure structure, liturgical rhythm, and spatial organization of monastic cells create an environment that supports contemplative life and preserves the atmosphere of silence characteristic of the Carthusian tradition. However, the study also reveals potential challenges for the sustainability of monastic spaces in the contemporary era. The vocational crisis that reduces the number of monks shows that monastic communities may decline even when architectural structures remain intact. This trend reflects broader patterns of monastic decline associated with social change, modernization, and decreasing institutional support for traditional religious life (Kim, 2025; Palmisano, Jonveaux, & Jewdokimow, 2021). When the spiritual practices that sustain these spaces diminish, monasteries risk functional transformation—such as closure, adaptive reuse, or spatial modification—which can alter their religious meaning (Lankhorst, 2022; van Tongeren, 2016). In this context, balancing the preservation of contemplative atmosphere with the need for institutional adaptation becomes a key challenge for the sustainability of monastic spaces today.

Based on these findings, the preservation of monastic space should not focus solely on conserving architectural structures but must also consider the sustainability of the spiritual practices that animate these spaces. When vocational crises reduce the number of monastic communities, monasteries risk losing their religious function even if their physical structures remain intact. Therefore, preservation strategies should strengthen the spiritual dimension of monastic environments. One possible approach is the development of spiritual hospitality, which allows limited areas of monasteries to function as contemplative retreat spaces for individuals seeking spiritual experience in an atmosphere of monastic silence. In addition, managing monastic landscapes, documenting liturgical practices, and using spaces for non-commercial spiritual activities can help preserve the religious memory embedded within monastic structures. Such strategies protect not only the architectural heritage of monasteries but also the spiritual function that allows these spaces to remain meaningful within changing social contexts.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the contemplative atmosphere of the Santa Maria Scala Coeli Monastery is sustained through the interaction of spatial enclosure, temporal discipline, and continuity across community transition. The findings show that the monastery's architectural configuration forms a layered system of enclosure that materially supports silence, separation, and contemplative withdrawal. At the same time, this atmosphere is not produced by spatial structure alone. It is reinforced through repetitive temporal rhythms structured by bells, liturgical cycles, chant, restrained communication, manual labor, and weekly walking practices, all of which regulate the experience of monastic life. Most importantly, the study shows that the departure of the male Carthusian community in 2019 and the subsequent installation of a female religious community in 2022 did not automatically dissolve the contemplative character of Scala Coeli. Instead, the atmosphere of the monastery appears to persist through the relative stability of its architectural framework and the memory of religious practices embedded within the space.

From an academic perspective, this research contributes to the study of religious architecture and monastic space in several ways. First, it offers an integrated approach that connects architectural analysis, temporal discipline, and lived religious practice in understanding how contemplative atmosphere is produced and maintained. Second, it extends previous studies of monastic space by showing that continuity of religious atmosphere may endure even when institutional and gender transitions occur within a monastic site. Third, the study highlights the importance of reading monasteries not only as material heritage or typological forms, but as environments in which spiritual memory, embodied practice, and atmospheric experience remain intertwined across time. In this sense, the research contributes a narrative-phenomenological perspective that enriches discussions of spirit of place, lived religion, and sacred space in the study of religious environments.

This study, however, also has several limitations. It focuses on a single case study, so its findings cannot be generalized automatically to all monastic traditions or religious architectural settings. In

addition, much of the analysis of Carthusian daily rhythm and transitional change relies on a combination of field observation, documentary reconstruction, and institutional sources, rather than direct long-term observation of monastic practice before and after the transition. The research was also conducted during and after a period of institutional transformation, which means that the long-term development of contemplative life under the new female religious community has not yet been fully examined. Future research could therefore pursue comparative studies across different monastic traditions, investigate more deeply the lived practices of the new community at Scala Coeli, and explore how continuity and change in sacred atmosphere operate in other religious sites undergoing institutional transition.

References

- Abreu, L., & Pardal, R. (2011). *A memória histórica do convento da Cartuxa de Santa Maria Scala Coeli através da sua documentação*. Évora: Fundação Eugénio de Almeida.
- Adelstein, P. (2018). Sacred space. *Global Advances In Health and Medicine*, 7, 1–2. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2164957X17751903>
- Beiting, C. J. (2012). Carthusians. In *The Encyclopedia of Christian Civilization* (pp. 1–2). <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470670606.wbecc0242>
- Berman, E., Iannaccone, L. R., & Ragusa, G. (2012). From Empty Pews to Empty Cradles: Fertility Decline Among European Catholics. *NBER Working Paper No. W18350*.
- Böhme, G. (2017). *Atmospheric Architectures*. Bloomsbury Academic. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781474258111>
- Boisvert, M. (1992). A Comparison of the Early Forms of Buddhist and Christian Monastic Traditions. *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, 12, 123. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1389959>
- Casanova, J. (2014). *Public Religions in the Modern World*. University of Chicago Press.
- Castro, M. J. (2022). Viagem pictórica religiosa. *Biblos*, (8), 119–144. https://doi.org/10.14195/0870-4112_3-8_6
- Coelho, F. S. (2019). Évora: Vida contemplativa vai continuar na Cartuxa com uma comunidade feminina. Retrieved August 23, 2025, from Agência Ecclesia website: <https://agencia.ecclesia.pt/portal/evora-vida-contemplativa-vai-continuar-na-cartuxa-com-uma-comunidade-feminina/>
- Destefanis, E. (2018). Around the cloister: Spaces for monks and spaces for laymen in the early medieval monasteries. *Hortus Artium Mediaevalium*, 24, 396–416. <https://doi.org/10.1484/J.HAM.5.115967>
- Devaux, A. (1998). *L'Architecture dans l'Ordre des Chartreux*. Grenoble: La Grande Chartreuse.
- Erdil Dinçel, T. (2025). Inscribed Devotion: Hagiographic Memory, Monastic Space, and Sacred Topography in Cappadocia's Rock-Cut Churches. *Religions*, 16(10), 1233. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16101233>
- Escudero, J. M. (2011). *As cartuxas de Portugal através dos séculos: crónicas das cartuxas portuguesas*. Austria: Universität Salzburg. <https://doi.org/10.34632/lusitaniasacra.2012.6698>
- Esperdy, G. (2005). The Royal Abbey of Fontevrault: Religious Women & the Shaping of Gendered Space. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 6(2), 59–80.
- Ferro, L. (2019). *O Eremitério da Cartuxa de Évora: Arquitectura e vida monástica*. Lisboa: Canto Redondo.
- Fundação Eugénio de Almeida. (2024). Mosteiro de Santa Maria Scala Coeli. Retrieved August 12, 2025, from Fundação Eugénio de Almeida website: <https://www.fea.pt/patrimonio/mosteiro-de-santa-maria-scala-coeli>
- Hujanen, R. (2025). Silent Witnesses and Intercessors: Monastic Contribution in the Poetry of a Carthusian Monk. *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 90(3), 296–313. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00211400251342268>
- Immonen, V., & Harjula, J. (2021). Something distinct, or business as usual? Interpreting the plan of the late medieval bridgettine monastery in Naantali, Finland. *Religions*, 12(6). <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12060432>
- Instituto del Verbo Encarnado. (2024). A Família Religiosa do Verbo Encarnado. Retrieved August 23, 2025, from Instituto del Verbo Encarnado website: <https://ive.org/ssvm-por/>
- Kim, S.-E. T. (2025). What Was a Monk in Joseon Korea?: Competing Monastic Identities According to the State, a Monastic Biographer, and a Confucian Literatus. *Religions*, 16(3). <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16030343>
- L'Osservatore Romano. (2024). Five monasteries in the world, 63 nuns, when once they were just 49 and in silence, the Carthusians grow. Retrieved June 15, 2025, from L'Osservatore Romano website: <https://www.osservatoreromano.va/en/news/2024-06/dcm-006/and-in-silence-the-carthusians-grow.html>
- Lankhorst, O. S. (2022). Heritage Management in Monastery and Seminary Libraries in the Netherlands. In *Theological Libraries and Library Associations in Europe: A Festschrift on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of BETH* (pp. 203–227). https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004523197_010
- Liutikas, D. (2023). Sacred Space in Geography: Religious Buildings and Monuments. In *Springer Geography: Vol. Part F735* (pp. 77–112). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-32209-9_5

- Liutikas, D. (2025). Religious geography and sacred landscape: an introduction to the research area. In *Geographies of Religious Spaces and Sacred Landscapes* (pp. 1–20). <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035343829.00005>
- Lupu, O. P. (2014). Christian monastery gardens a symbolistic interpretation between piety and aesthetics. *European Journal of Science and Theology*, 10(3), 199–207.
- Markovic, G. (2014). SUSTAINABLE ARCHITECTURE OF THE HOLY PLACE. *14th International Multidisciplinary Scientific GeoConference SGEM 2014*, 645–650.
- Martins, A. M. T., Cano, M. T. P., & Adell, E. M. (2019). Monastic Buildings: A Review About New Uses on Former Monasteries. The Portuguese Cistercian Case. *IOP Conference Series: Materials Science and Engineering*, 471, 082037. <https://doi.org/10.1088/1757-899X/471/8/082037>
- McGuire, M. B. (2008). *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (first). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mendes, S. (2003). *Convento da Cartuxa*. Évora: FEA.
- Mourao, P. R. (2006). Why is the number of catholic priests diminishing in Portugal?. Analysis of the period 1960-2002. *Regional and Sectoral Economic Studies*, 6(2).
- Norberg-Schulz, C. (1980). *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*. New York: Rizzoli.
- Palmisano, S., Jonveaux, I., & Jewdokimow, M. (2021). The transformation of religious orders in central and eastern Europe: Sociological insights. In *The Transformation of Religious Orders in Central and Eastern Europe: Sociological Insights*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429340208>
- Papasogli, G. (1981). *Deus responde no deserto: Bruno, o Santo da Cartuxa*. Porto: Livraria Apostolado da Imprensa.
- Peeters, T. (2017). Love and silence: Jean-Baptiste Porion and carthusian theology. *Tijdschrift Voor Theologie*, 57(4), 361–373. <https://doi.org/10.2143/tvt.57.4.3262789>
- Pereira, S. (2002). O restauro da Cartuxa de Évora pelos condes de Vill’Alva (1942-1960). In *Eborensia - Revista do Instituto Superior de Teologia de Évora*,. Archeevo.
- Pernas Alonso, I. (2020). *The Grand Staircase in San Xoan de Poio Monastery*. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-47979-4_39
- Pink, S. (2015). *Doing Sensory Ethnography*. 1 Oliver’s Yard, 55 City Road London EC1Y 1SP: SAGE Publications Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473917057>
- Quartier, T. (2017). Monastic culture between structure and antistructure: Liturgical form-of-life in the perspective of monastic studies. *Questions Liturgiques*, 98(1–2), 18–40. <https://doi.org/10.2143/QL.98.1.3275140>
- Relph, E. (1976). *Place and Placelessness*. London: Pion.
- Reveyron, N. (2014). Forma monasterii . Essai sur l’organisation de l’espace monastique comme mise en forme de l’identité ecclésiologique. *Hortus Artium Medievalium*, 20(2), 439–447. <https://doi.org/10.1484/J.HAM.5.102661>
- Sawicki, B. (2019). Monastic architecture as a bridge between ecology and spirituality: A case study of a Benedictine monastery in Clerlande, Belgium. In *A Visual Approach to the Study of Religious Orders: Zooming in on Monasteries* (pp. 106–120). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429032103-6>
- Serrão, V. (1999). Um desenho de Fernão Gomes para o Mosteiro da Scala Coeli de Évora. *Monumentos: Revista Semestral de Edifícios e Monumentos*, (10), 30–37.
- Silva, E. (2000). *Solidão, silêncio e presença: aproximação teológico-espiritual a partir de S. Bruno*. Coimbra: Gráfica de Coimbra.
- Smart, A. (2014). Bede, wearmouth-jarrow and sacred space. *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 14(1), 22–40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1474225X.2014.883476>
- Sousa, B. (2005). *Ordens religiosas em Portugal*. Lisboa: Livros Horizonte.
- Stoppa, M. (2021). The Monastic Carthusian Space. In *Key Challenges in Geography: Vol. Part F2245* (pp. 261–276). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-74590-5_12
- van Tongeren, L. (2016). Visiting abbeys: Changing monastic identities and the attraction of abbeys. In *Monasticism in Modern Times* (pp. 79–98). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315595986>
- Wang, W. (2021). Comparative Review of Worship Spaces in Buddhist and Cistercian Monasteries: The Three Temples of Guoqing Si (China) and the Church of the Royal Abbey of Santa Maria de Poblet (Spain). *Religions*, 12(11), 972. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12110972>
- Wescoat, B. D., & Ousterhout, R. G. (2012). Architecture of the sacred: Space, ritual, and experience from classical Greece to byzantium. In *Architecture of the Sacred: Space, Ritual, and Experience from Classical Greece to Byzantium*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139017640>



Copyright © 2026 by the authors. This publication is subject to the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution ShareAlike (CC BY SA) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>).