

Abstract – The First Norman Cathedral in Palermo.
Robert Guiscard’s Church of the Most Holy Mother of God – Palermo Cathedral is one of the Normans’ most important architectural accomplishments in Southern Italy. Begun as a church, it was transformed into a mosque during the Muslim occupation (827–1061), and was then converted back to a Christian rite when the Normans conquered Palermo in 1072. Though transformed yet again in the neo-classical style in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the church that stands today is unanimously considered to be that rebuilt by Archbishop Walter II *Protofamiliarios* and consecrated in 1185. A critical and detailed analysis of near-contemporary sources for the conquest of Palermo and the conversion of the mosque into a church under the patronage of the Norman duke, Robert Guiscard, sheds new light on this fascinating palimpsest of a building. Reinterpretation of the primary sources discovers a hidden and hitherto overlooked phase of construction, and clears the field of misunderstandings and doubts. A new edifice emerges – a material sign of Christian worship in recently conquered Muslim Palermo – that offers a fresh perspective on the cathedral at the time of the coronation of King Roger II in 1130.

Keywords – Norman Palermo, Norman Cathedral, transcultural Palermo, Siculo-Norman architecture in medieval Palermo, Galka, Robert Guiscard, Norman conquest of Palermo, *Historia Normannorum*, Anonymous Vaticanus

Ruggero Longo
Università della Tuscia, Viterbo
longorughi@gmail.com

The First Norman Cathedral in Palermo

Robert Guiscard's Church of
the Most Holy Mother of God*

Ruggero Longo
with an Addendum by *Jeremy Johns*

*Bisogna profittar molto delle cose ritrovate,
e sforzarci a indagar quanto si è trascurato*¹.

The Cathedral in Palermo. Introduction and *Status Quaestionis*

Walking through the historical center of Palermo along the modern Corso Vittorio Emanuele, which roughly corresponds with the medieval

his endless knowledge on Norman Sicily without withholding precious tips and suggestions. A large contribution to this article derives from the in-depth conversations I had with him about the implications of my argument, especially with regard to al-Idrīsī's description of the cathedral, and I am pleased that he offers here his translation and commentary on al-Idrīsī's paragraph, (see below).

* Acknowledgements: I wish to express my gratitude to Elisabetta Scirocco, who strongly suggested publishing this essay in this volume, for her generosity in offering advice and support. I also thank the editorial board for their work leading to the publication of the volume. I finally express my utmost gratitude to Jeremy Johns, who followed my research with patience, sharing with me

1 "We must make the most of what we find and strive to search out what has been overlooked". Cit. in Gioacchino Di Marzo, *Delle Belle Arti in Sicilia. Dai Normanni sino alla fine del secolo XIV*, vol. 1, Palermo 1858, p. 4, paraphrasing Aristotle, *Politics*, section 1329b: "διὸ δεῖ τοῖς μὲν εὐρημένοις ἰκανῶς χρῆσθαι, τὰ δὲ παραλελειμμένα



1/ Southern façade, with Antonino Gambara's portico (1453) and Ferdinando Fuga's dome (1801), Palermo Cathedral

Via Marmorea², one cannot help but come upon the cathedral, a majestic but quite uneven monument, that presents its southern façade, flanked by towers to the east and west [Fig. 1].

Palermo Cathedral has had, and continues to have, a complicated life. It is a living organism, and, like the Royal Palace nearby, is one of the most important architectural palimpsests of the city³. An early seventh-century letter of Pope Gregory the Great addressed to Bishop John of Palermo⁴ attests to the existence of a Christian cathedral, which presumably stood on the same site that the cathedral occupies today. That church was transformed into a congregational mosque (*masġid al-ġāmi'*) after the Muslim conquest of Palermo (831), and then converted back into a Christian church by Duke Robert Guiscard on 10th January 1072⁵. A century later, in the 1180s, Archbishop Walter II commissioned the construction of the present cathedral. Although the new cathedral was consecrated in 1185⁶, work continued throughout the centuries, and the western façade was not completed until the fourteenth century⁷. In 1425–1426, a monumental portal, designed by Antonino Gambara, was added on the western end of the south façade and completed by a gothic portico executed by Gambara himself in 1453⁸. The old sacristy, located to the southeast of the sanctuary, was refashioned in the same period⁹, while a new sacristy was built to the east side of its predecessor early in the sixteenth century. Finally, in 1781, a massive reconfiguration of the building began, according to the design of the royal architect Ferdinando Fuga (Florence 1699 – Naples 1782). The cathedral that we see today is the result of this final radical transformation, concluded in 1801, which gave a new, neoclassical aspect to the entire building¹⁰.

All scholars agree that the mosque, mentioned by the Iraqi traveler Ibn Ḥawqal in ca 976¹¹, was converted back into a church in 1072, on the day that Duke Robert Guiscard entered the city. In particular, there is broad consensus amongst historians that the Guiscard converted the mosque into a church merely by dismantling the *miḥrāb*, introducing an altar, and reconsecrating the church to the Christian cult by installing the Greek Archbishop Nicodemus¹².

Indeed, Amatus of Montecassino, in his *Historia Normannorum*, reports that, after the conquest

- πειρᾶσθαι ζητεῖν" ("Hence we should use the results of previous discovery when adequate, while endeavoring to investigate matters hitherto passed over"). See: Aristotle *Politics*, with an English translation by H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library ed., London/Cambridge 1959, pp. 581–583.
- 2 Hugo Falcandus, "Epistola ad Petrum Panormitane ecclesie thesaurarium de calamitate Sicilie", in *La "Historia" o "Liber de Regno Sicilie" e la "Epistola ad Petrum Panormitane Ecclesie Thesaurarium" di Ugo Falcando*, Giovanni Battista Siragusa ed., Rome 1897, pp. 169–186, sp. p. 181.
 - 3 On the Cathedral see: Giovanni Maria Amato, *De principe templo panormitano libri XIII*, Panormi 1728; Antonio Zanca, *La Cattedrale di Palermo: (1170–1946)*, Giuffrè-La Duca ed., Palermo 1981; Giuseppe Bellafiore, *La Cattedrale di Palermo*, Palermo 1976; *La Cattedrale di Palermo*, Leonardo Urbani ed., Palermo 1993; *L'architettura medievale in Sicilia: la Cattedrale di Palermo*, Angiola M. Romanini, Antonio Cadei eds, Rome 1994. On the Royal Palace see Roberto Calandra et al., *Palazzo dei Normanni*, Palermo 1991; *The Royal Palace of Palermo*, Maria Andaloro ed., Modena 2011; Ruggero Longo, "In loco qui dicitur Galca'. New Observations and Hypotheses on the Norman Palace in Palermo", *Journal of Transcultural Medieval Studies*, III/1–2 (2016), pp. 225–317.
 - 4 See Paulus F. Kehr, *Regesta pontificum romanorum. Italia Pontificia. X*, Berlin 1975, pp. 59, 227.
 - 5 During the works of restoration carried out in 1982–1999, a pavement was found in the area of the diaconicon, about one meter beneath the present floor. This pavement has been identified with that of a large building pre-existing the late twelfth-century cathedral commissioned by Archbishop Walter II, thus permitting scholars to demonstrate that the current cathedral stands in the same place where the first church was erected and then converted into a mosque. See Irina Garofano, "Nuove scoperte archeologiche nel cantiere di restauro della Cattedrale di Palermo", *Kokalos*, XLIII–XLIV/2 (1997–1998), pp. 587–590, sp. pp. 587–588, n. 3; Carmela A. Di Stefano, Guido Meli, Lina Bellanca, Irina Garofano, "New Archaeological Finding on the Restoration Site of Palermo Cathedral", in *Protection and Conservation of the Cultural Heritage of the Mediterranean Cities: Proceedings of the 5th International Symposium on the Conservation of Monuments in the Mediterranean Basin* (Sevilla, 5–8 April 2000), Emilio Galán, Fulvio Zezza eds, Lisse 2002, pp. 343–345. See also Franco D'Angelo, "La città di Palermo tra la fine dell'età araba e la fine dell'età normanna", in *La città di Palermo nel medioevo*, Franco D'Angelo ed., Palermo 2002, pp. 7–33, sp. pp. 17–20, fig. 6; Lina Bellanca, Guido Meli, "I luoghi del tesoro", in *Il Tesoro della Cattedrale di Palermo*, Maria Concetta Di Natale, Maurizio Vitella eds, Palermo 2010, pp. 9–37, sp. pp. 15–17, ns 6, 7 and 8 and fig. 10. I will return on this point below, § a) The Ground Plan of the Walter II's Cathedral.
 - 6 Bellafiore, *La Cattedrale* (n. 3), p. 16.
 - 7 Gianluigi Ciotta, "La facciata occidentale. Vicende edilizie e caratteri figurali", in Urbani, *La Cattedrale* (n. 3), pp. 157–164.
 - 8 Simonetta La Barbera, "Il portico meridionale della cattedrale di Palermo: immagini e simboli", *Storia dell'arte*, XCIII–XCIV (1998), pp. 158–168, with related bibliography.
 - 9 It has been proposed that the old sacristy was formerly the chapel of St Mary Magdalene, built by Queen Albira († 1135). See Guido Meli, "Il restauro della cattedrale di Palermo", in *L'architettura medievale in Sicilia: la cattedrale di Palermo*, Angiola M. Romanini, Antonio Cadei eds, Florence 1994, pp. 43–96, sp. pp. 82–95. On this point, see below § c) The Chapel of St Mary Magdalene.
 - 10 On Fuga's interventions, see Salvatore Boscarino, "La 'restaurozione' della Cattedrale nel Settecento"; Gaetana Cantone, "Il progetto di Ferdinando Fuga"; Maria Giuffrè, "Il cantiere della Cattedrale di Palermo da Ferdinando Fuga a Emmanuele Palazzotto", all in Urbani, *La Cattedrale* (n. 3), pp. 93–102; 141–156; 255–264.
 - 11 Ibn Ḥawqal, *Ṣūrat al-arḍ*, Michael J. De Goeje, Johannes H. Kramers eds, Leipzig 1938, p. 116.
 - 12 See especially Zanca, *La Cattedrale* (n. 3), p. 7; Bellafiore, *La Cattedrale* (n. 3), 16; Paolo Collura, "Per una storia della Cattedrale", in Urbani, *La Cattedrale* (n. 3), pp. 165–169, sp. pp. 166–167.

of Palermo, Duke Robert Guiscard, accompanied by his younger brother Roger, his wife Sichelgaita, and other members of his family and entourage, converted the mosque back into a Christian church dedicated to the Virgin, and had holy mass said by the archbishop¹³. Similarly, Malaterra, in his *De rebus gestis Rogerii et Roberti Guiscardi*, testifies that this ancient church, converted into a mosque by the Saracens, was reconverted into a church by Robert, who also brought back the Greek archbishop from “a wretched church”¹⁴. Only William of Apulia, in his *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*, insists that Robert Guiscard first destroyed (*destruxit*) the mosque and then built (*fabricavit*) the cathedral¹⁵, which some scholars have dismissed as mere “poetic license”, exercised in celebration of his patron Duke Robert¹⁶. It might, therefore, seem reasonable to believe that the surviving remains of the Norman cathedral, still visible alongside the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century transformations, are those belonging to Walter II’s building, dating from the late twelfth century. However, most scholars have overlooked a second passage regarding the cathedral in the account given by Amatus of Robert Guiscard in Palermo. This passage is crucial to our discussion, and for the chronology of the church. In order to make this clear, we need to re-examine the text of Amatus, and its interpretation, and to take into account other details concerning the conquest of the town in 1072.

Amatus, the *Historia Sicula* and the Topography of Palermo

Several studies of Amatus’s *Historia* and of other primary sources relevant to it have recently been published¹⁷, and their principal findings may be summarized as follows. The *Historia Normannorum* was completed before 1086, is dedicated by Amatus to Robert the Guiscard and to Richard Drengot, Prince of Capua, and ends in the 1078, the year of the latter’s death¹⁸. The French translation of Amatus, made in Southern Italy soon after 1343¹⁹, is followed by another French history of the early Normans, known as the *Chronique de Robert Viscart et de ses frères*, which seems to be

based on the *Historia Sicula*, a thirteenth-century work attributed to – and often referred to as – the *Anonymus Vaticanus* (Città del Vaticano, BAV, MS Vat. lat. 6206), the narrative of which continues until the mid-twelfth century. The *Historia Sicula* has often been dismissed as a mere excerpt of Malaterra’s history, written in 1098–1099, but there now remains little doubt that it was an independent work, composed around the turn of the eleventh century²⁰, and then copied and updated in the mid-twelfth century, together with the *Historia Normannorum*²¹.

In other words, in addition to the accounts of the Norman conquest of Palermo given by Amatus, Malaterra and William of Apulia, both the Latin *Historia Sicula* and the French *Chronique* contribute a further independent and thus highly valuable account. In particular, only the *Historia Sicula* and the *Chronique* mention the fact, crucial to this argument, that Robert Guiscard built his fortress in Palermo in a place called *galea* or *galga*, thus referring to the district known as the Galca, a term generally believed to derive from the Arabic *al-Ḥalqa*, meaning “the ring”²².

In early January 1072, after a siege that had lasted nearly five months, Robert Guiscard and his brother Roger led a concerted assault upon Palermo from two sides. According to Amatus (VI.19), the Duke ordered wooden siege ladders to be placed against the walls in order to enter the town. While Roger’s forces attacked the walls from one side, Robert was able to enter the town from the other. Then Amatus reports:

“However, as Palermo had become larger than it was originally, that section of the city that was the first to have been inhabited was the strongest, and that part was called ‘Old Palermo’. Thus, they started to fight against the citizens inside this Old Palermo²³.”

Likewise, according to William of Apulia²⁴, one can argue that the Normans conquered first the outer town and then turned to face the old inner town²⁵. Malaterra also speaks about an outer town stormed by means of ladders raised against the city-wall, and an inner town, where the citizens took shelter²⁶. From the newly discovered *Book of Curiosities*, we also learn that already by the mid-eleventh century the new quarters of the

outer city were enclosed by a wall²⁷. This supplies an important detail: the external town conquered by the Normans was not necessarily the Khālīṣa, the Fāṭimid citadel built in 937, as is often stated, but may have been a bigger town that incorporated the Fāṭimid citadel. In this light, the passage in Amatus, previously so difficult to interpret, now becomes clear and is more accurate than the other accounts. In other words, the new town, enclosed by its own walls, surrounded ancient Palermo and incorporated the Fāṭimid al-Khālīṣa²⁸. Consequently, we can no longer be certain that the Normans really did enter the new outer city by penetrating the well-defended Khālīṣa through

- 13 Amatus, *Historia*, VI.19: “[...] Et ensi, come home cristiennissime, avec la mollier et avec ses frere, et avec lo frere de la moiller, et avec ses princes, s'en ala, o grant reverence plorant, a l'eglize de Saint[e] Marie, laquel eclize avoit esté temple de li sarrazin, et en fist chacier toute l'ordesc et ordure, et fist dire messe a lo catholique et saint archevesque.” Aimé du Mont-Cassin, *Ystoire de li Normant*. Édition du manuscrit BNF fr. 688, Michèle Guéret-Laferté ed., Paris 2001, pp. 431–432.
- 14 “Primum quaerite regnum Dei, et omnia adiiciuntur vobis, ecclesiam sanctissimae Dei Genitricis Mariae, quae antiquitus archiepiscopus fuerat – sed tunc am impiis Saracenis violata, templum superstitionis eorum facta erat –, cum magna devotione catholice reconciliatam, dote et ornamentis ecclesiasticis augment. Archiepiscopum, qui, ab impiis deiectus, in paupere ecclesia sancti Cyriaci – quamvis timidus et natione graecus –, cultum Christianae religionis pro posse exequatur, revocantes restitunt.” See Gaufredo Malaterra, “De rebus gestis Rogerii Calabriae et Siciliae comitis et Roberti Guiscardi ducis fratris eius”, II, 45, in *De rebus gestis Rogerii Calabriae et Siciliae comitis et Roberti Guiscardi ducis fratris eius auctore Gaufredo Malaterra monacho benedictino*, Ernesto Pontieri ed., Bologna 1927–1928, pp. 3–108, sp. p. 53. For the reference to Archbishop Nicodemus, see: Tommaso Fazello, *De rebus Siculis decades duae, nunc primum in lucem editas* [...], Palermo 1558, vol. I, p. 179; Rocco Pirri, *Sicilia sacra disquisitionibus, et notitiis illustrata* [...] 1–2, Antonino Mongitore, Vito Maria Amico eds, Palermo 1733, I, col. 53. Nicodemus was confirmed as archbishop by Pope Alexander II in 1072 or 1073 (Kehr, *Regesta* [n. 4], p. 228, n. *19). Nicodemus archiepiscopus Panormitanus is named in a Latin transumpt (31 May 1309) of a Greek donation of Roger I, dated 14 November 1092 (see: *Documenti latini e greci del conte Ruggero I di Calabria e Sicilia*, Julia Becker ed., Rome 2013, no. 27, pp. 125–126), even though the Latin Alcherius was appointed archbishop no later than 1083 (*ibidem*, pp. 169–170). Malaterra adds that Nicodemus was of Greek origin (*natione graecus*), and thus arguably depended from the Byzantine Patriarch and still performed the Byzantine rite.
- 15 “Glorificansque Deum templi destruxit iniqui / Omnes estructuras, et qua muscheta solebat / Esse prius, matris fabricavit Virginis aulam; / Et quae Machamati fuerat cum daemone sedes, / Sedes facta Dei, fit dignis ianua coeli.” See William of Apulia, *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*, in *Guillaume de Pouille, La geste de Robert Guiscard*, Marguerite Mathieu ed., Palermo 1961, p. 182.
- 16 Especialy Collura, “Per una storia della Cattedrale” (n. 12).
- 17 The most recent studies on Amatus and his *Historia* are: Jakub Kujawiński, “Alla ricerca del contesto del volgarizzamento della ‘Historia Normannorum’ di Amato di Montecassino. Il manoscritto francese 688 della Bibliothèque nationale de France”, *Bullettino dell’Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo*, CXII (2010), pp. 91–136; *idem*, “‘Ystoire de li Normant’. Una testimonianza del secolo XI?”, in *La reliquia del sangue di Cristo. Mantova, l’Italia e l’Europa al*

- tempo di Leone IX*, Glauco Maria Cantarella, Arturo Calzona eds, Verona 2012, pp. 359–371; *idem*, “Quand une traduction remplace l’original. La méthode du traducteur de l’*Historia Normannorum*’ d’Aimé du Mont-Cassin”, in *In principio fuit interpres*, Alessandra Petrina with the assistance of Monica Santini eds, Turnhout 2013, pp. 63–74. See also the substantial introduction to her new edition of the text by Michèle Guéret-Laferté, *Ystoire de li Normant* (n. 13), pp. 9–230; Prescott N. Dunbar, *Amatus of Montecassino, The History of the Normans*, revised with introduction and notes by Graham A. Loud, Woodbridge 2004. Beside these, the studies on the so-called Anonymus Vaticanus, *Historia Sicula*, are also important in this context, among which Charles D. Stanton, “Anonymus Vaticanus. Another source for the Normans in the South?”, *Haskins Society Journal*, XXIV (2012), pp. 79–94.
- 18 See Dunbar, *Amatus* (n. 17), pp. 18–23, sp. p. 20.
- 19 Kujawiński, “Alla ricerca del contesto” (n. 17), pp. 110, 116; Dunbar/Loud, *Amatus* (n. 17), p. 18; Stanton, “Anonymus” (n. 17), p. 89 dated the French manuscript around 1305–1310.
- 20 Kujawiński, “Alla ricerca del contesto” (n. 17), p. 121; Stanton, “Anonymus” (n. 17), pp. 82–88, 92.
- 21 Kujawiński, “Alla ricerca del contesto” (n. 17), p. 129 sq. In my opinion, these most recent studies mean that one cannot exclude that this late eleventh-century account was also written by Amatus himself, as formerly proposed by Champollion-Figeac in his *editio princeps* (see: *L’Ystoire de li Normant, et La chronique de Robert Viscart, par Aimé, moine du Mont-Cassin*, Jacques-Joseph Champollion-Figeac ed., Paris 1835, LXVIII–LXXXI, *Prolegomenos*). On this point, see R. Longo, “‘In loco qui dicitur Galca’” (n. 3), pp. 235–238.
- 22 “[...] duo fortissima Castra, alterum juxta mare, alterum in loco, qui dicitur Galea, brevi tempore constituerunt”. Anonymus Vaticanus, *Historia Sicula*, Giovanni Battista Caruso ed., in *Biblioteca historica regni Siciliae, sive historicorum, qui de rebus Siculis a Saracenorum invasione usque Aragonensium principatum illustriora monumenta reliquerunt, amplissima collectio* [...] 2, Palermo 1723, pp. 829–859, sp. p. 846. “[...] firent faire. IJ. chasteaux moult fors, l’un après de lamer, et l’autre en un lieu qui se clame Galga, et les firent faire en brief temps”. Anonyme, *La chronique de Robert Viscart par Aimé, moine du Mont-Cassin*, Champollion-Figeac ed., in *L’Ystoire* (n. 21), p. 295. Michele Amari, *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia*, Carlo A. Nallino ed., Catania 1933–1939, III.1, pp. 138–141, and the notes and primary sources cited therein. For a brief synthesis on the Galca, see Longo, “‘In loco qui dicitur Galca’” (n. 3), pp. 242–244.
- 23 “Mes pour ce que Palerme estoit faite plus grant qu’elle non fu commencié premerement, dont de celle part estoit plus forte dont premerement avoit esté commencié. La cité se clamoit la antique Palerme. Il commencèrent entre celle antique Palerme [a] contrestre cil de la cité”. Amatus, *Historia Normannorum*, VI. 19, (n. 13), pp. 430–431, English translation in Dunbar, *Amatus* (n. 17), p. 154. On the interpretation of this sentence, see also Amari, *Storia* (n. 22), III, I, p. 129, n. 3; Vincenzo De Bartolomaeis, *Storia de’ Normanni di Amato di Montecassino volgarizzata in antico francese*, Rome 1935, p. 281, n. 2; Aimé du Mont-Cassin, *Ystoire* (n. 13), p. 431, n. 370.
- 24 “Urbe nova capta, veteri clauduntur in urbe.” William of Apulia, *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* (n. 15), p. 181.
- 25 See Amari, *Storia* (n. 22), III, I, pp. 128–133, ns 1, 2; See also Vincenzo Di Giovanni, *La topografia antica di Palermo dal secolo X al XV*, Palermo 1889–1890, vol. II, pp. 33–36, 148–149.
- 26 “[...] a Guiscardensibus, scalis apposis, murus transcenditur. Urbs exterior capitur; portae ferro sociis ad ingrediendum aperiuntur [...] Panormitani delusi [...] in interiori urbe refugium petendo, sese recipiunt”. Malaterra, “De rebus gestis” (n. 14), II.45, p. 53.
- 27 Jeremy Johns, Emile Savage-Smith, “‘The Book of Curiosities’. A Newly Discovered Series of Islamic Maps”, *Imago mundi*, LV (2003), pp. 7–24, sp. p. 16; Jeremy Johns, “La nuova ‘Carta della Sicilia’ e la topografia di Palermo”, in *Nobiles officinae. Perle, filigrane e trame di seta dal Palazzo Reale di Palermo*, Maria Andaloro ed., Catania 2006, vol. II, p. 16.
- 28 A similar scenario was already proposed by Ferdinando Maurici, *Castelli medievali in Sicilia. Dai bizantini ai normanni*, Palermo 1992, p. 60, and restated in *idem*, *Palermo Normanna. Vicende urbane d’una città imperiale (1072–1194)*, Palermo 2016, pp. 32–33.

the Porta della Vittoria²⁹. However, it is easy to understand, as Amari did³⁰, that the Normans first seized the outer city and, once they had conquered it, then turned against the old inner city, called 'Old Palermo' (Cassaro/Qaṣr), which included the old cathedral transformed by the Muslims into a mosque.

That night, the Muslim citizens determined to surrender. At dawn, two military commanders, representing the elders of the community, surrendered Palermo to Count Roger, who entered the city with a strong force and made it secure, before returning to his brother.

“On the fourth day the duke sent out a thousand knights to clear out and hold the meeting place of the Saracens³¹. Then, like a most Christian man, accompanied by his wife, his brother, the brother of his wife, and his princes, he went weeping with great reverence to the church of St Mary, which had been a Saracen temple. He ordered all the rubbish and filth to be cleaned out, and he had the catholic and holy archbishop say mass³².”

Amatus does not end the story here. Chapters 20, 21 and 22 are respectively dedicated to: the miracles witnessed in the new church; the surrender of Mazara to duke Robert and the donations of lands that the duke made in favor of his brother Count Roger; finally, the praise of Duke Robert, who surpassed the German Emperor Otto II and the Byzantine Emperor Constantine IX, who had both failed to conquer the Saracens of Italy³³.

Amatus next returns to Robert Guiscard in Palermo in chapter VI.23, but this chapter both presents textual difficulties and poses problems of interpretation. In particular, the bulk of the chapter is devoted to a single anecdote, but this is first preceded and then followed by interjections in the translator's own voice³⁴. Be that as it may, a hitherto unnoticed lacuna at the beginning of the chapter must once have explained precisely where the following anecdote took place.

“He chose a very high place, upon which he constructed a strong citadel, and he had it well garrisoned and stocked with a great quantity of provisions, sufficient to last for a long time. One day he went [all round] the citadel³⁵, and he saw the great palaces of the Saracens, in the midst of which he saw the church of St Mary, which looked like an oven. The duke sighed, for the palaces of the Saracens were tall, whereas the court

[of the church] of the Virgin Mary with its drab colors could hardly be seen. Then he spoke these words: ‘I want that church torn down’. He gave a great deal of money for marble and dressed stone, and he had it rebuilt on a fitting scale³⁶.”

As to the interpretation of this anecdote, the principal problems concern the identification of the site and the identity of the church of St Mary. The episode is evidently set in Sicily because, on its conclusion, the Guiscard returns to Calabria. The chapter headings, which were added by the translator and were not part of the original Latin text, leave no room for doubt that the translator understood the anecdote to belong to the narrative of the conquest of Palermo, and that he believed the church of St Mary to be identical with that in which the miracles occurred³⁷. Moreover, the combination of a stronghold built and provisioned by Duke Robert himself (the future Royal Palace), a church dedicated to the Virgin (the cathedral recently converted from the congregational mosque), and the tall palaces of the Saracens (which al-Idrīsī, and the *Letter to Peter the Treasurer*, both report lined the principal streets of the old city), can only indicate Palermo³⁸.

Roche, Citadel and Halqa. Identifying the Church of St Mary

Michele Amari was the first to associate the *roche* in this anecdote with the palatial quarter of the old city known as *al-Halqa*. He interpreted it as relating how Duke Robert had gone one day to inspect the building site of *al-Halqa*, and in doing so had noticed the little church of St Mary, so grimy and meagre that it looked like an oven, amidst the many, tall palaces of the Saracens³⁹. As we shall see, Amari believed this to be the church of St Mary of Jerusalem, which lay within *al-Halqa*⁴⁰.

The earliest reference to *al-Halqa* possibly comes in the *Historia Sicula* which, as we have seen, may have been composed as early as the end of the eleventh century. It reports that, over a short period of time in 1072, the Guiscard built two castles (*castra*) in Palermo, one by the sea – the *Castrum ad Maris* – and the other “in the place that is called *Galca*”⁴¹. Clearly Amari believed that, in the anecdote of Amatus, the word *roche*, which

Dunbar and Loud translate as “citadel”, refers not to what the *Historia Sicula* calls the *castrum* but rather to the walled palatial district in which it lay: *al-Halqa*. In support of this interpretation, Amatus says not that Duke Robert went simply to the *roche*, but that *ala par tote la roche* – “that he went *all round* the citadel” – as if the *roche* encompassed a large area. Indeed, *al-Halqa* occupied the western tip of the ridge on which the ancient city was built. To the north, west and south, it was enclosed by the walls of the old city. Their course can be roughly traced in the street plan of the modern city as already done by Di Giovanni and Columba⁴² [Fig. 2].

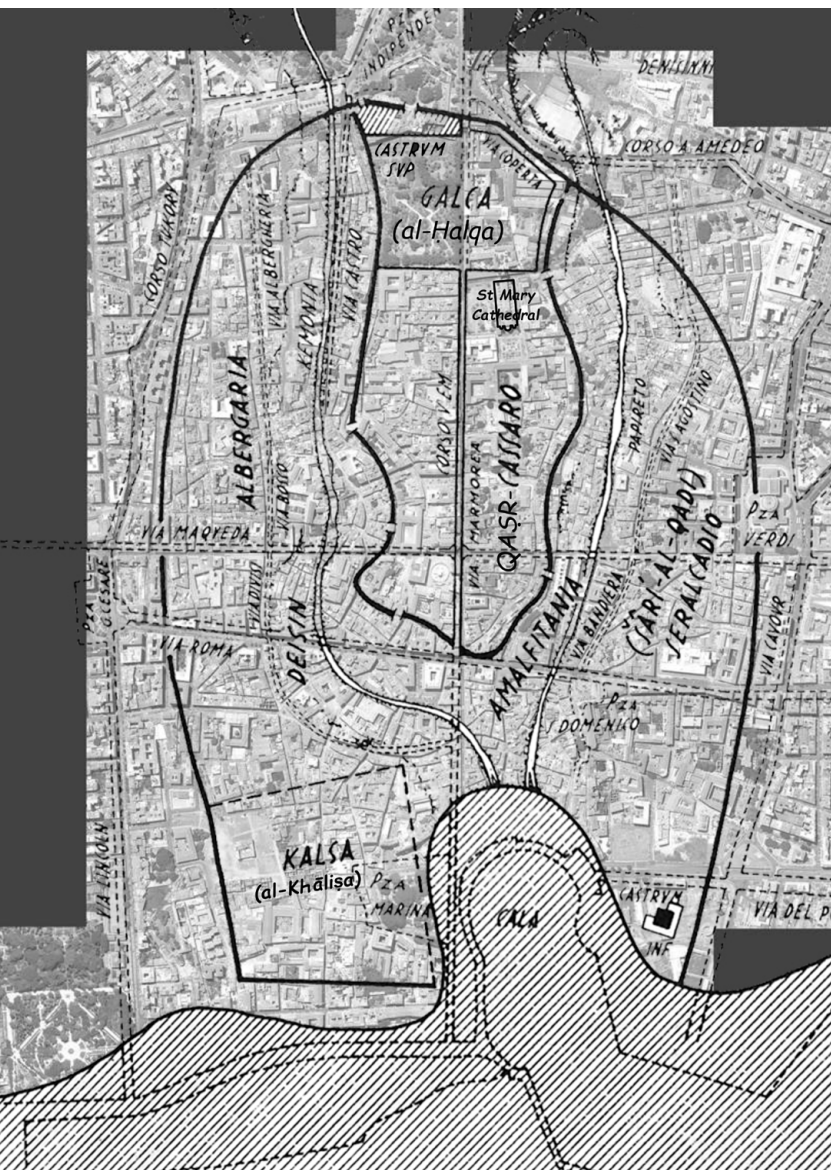
Had Duke Robert passed through *al-Qaṣr* on his way to or from the *roche*, or had he inspected the eastern wall of *al-Halqa* from the outside, he must have passed within a few meters of the recently converted mosque. Moreover, if Amari’s setting of the scene for the anecdote from Amatus is correct, Duke Robert was visiting the whole of the palatial quarter of *al-Halqa*. Either from within that enclosure, or from on top its eastern wall, he would have had an open view over the residential city of *al-Qaṣr*. In the foreground, just beyond the wall of *al-Halqa*, dwarfed by “the great palaces of the Saracens” that lined the Via Maremorea, he would have seen the very church of St Mary which, on the day that he had entered the city just a few weeks earlier, he had hastily converted from a mosque into a Christian church in order to thank God for his victory.

Remarkably, the obvious conclusion that the church of St Mary rebuilt by the Guiscard was none other than that which he had previously

urbanistica (831–1072), Palermo 2015, p. 71. The identification of the site of the Fatimid gate with the spot where the wooden gate is preserved in Santa Maria della Vittoria was already questioned by Elena Pezzini, “Un tratto della cinta muraria della città di Palermo”, *Mélanges de l’Ecole française de Rome. Moyen-Age, Temps modernes*, CX/2 (1998), pp. 719–771, sp. p. 765.

- 30 Amari, *Storia* (n. 22), III, I, p. 24. The day was 10th January 1072.
- 31 “Lo place de lo encontre de li Sarrasin”: presumably Amatus is here referring to the congregational mosque – *masǧid al-ǧāmiʿ* – where the male Muslim citizens assembled for Friday prayers. Robert was securing the mosque in order to facilitate its conversion back into a Christian church.
- 32 Amatus, *Historia* (n. 13), VI.19, pp. 431–432: “Et lo quart jor, lo duc manda avant mille chevaliers, liquel chazassent et retenissent la place de lo encontre de li sarrasin. Et ensi, come home cristiennissime, avec la mollier et avec ses frere, et avec lo frere de la moiller, et avec ses princes, s’en ala, o grant reverence plorant, a l’eglize de Saint[e] Marie, laquel eclize avoit esté temple de li sarrazin, et en fist chacier toute l’ordesc e ordure, et fist dire messe a lo catholique et saint archevesque.” Translation: Dunbar, Amatus (n. 17), p. 154. See also Amari, *Storia* (n. 22), III, I, pp. 130–131.
- 33 Amatus, *Historia* (n. 13), VI.20–22, pp. 430–434, translation: Dunbar, Amatus (n. 17), p. 150–158.
- 34 Amatus, *Historia* (n. 13), VI.23, p. 434: “Or se dit ensi l’estoire que, puiz que lo conte Rogier fu mis en possession de toute la Sycille par la main de son frere, s’esforça, par lo commandement de lo duc de prendre autres cités. Et pensa lo duc les liez especials des cités.” Guéret-Laferté adds the following note to the last word of this passage: “Le pluriel est surprenant puisqu’il s’agit ici de Palerme; il pourrait toutefois se justifier parce que, comme on l’a vu, la ville se compose de parties bien distinctes.” (p. 434, no. 379). The interposition of a lacuna seems more probable. For the interventions by the translator and the lacunae in the text, see Aimé du Mont-Cassin, *Ystoire* (n. 13), pp. 43–63.
- 35 The text in square brackets is mine. Dunbar and Loud’s translation fails to give the full sense of the French “Et un jour ala par tote la roche” – “One day he went all round the citadel”.
- 36 Amatus, *Historia* (n. 13), VI.23: “Il eslut un lieu molt haut, la où il fist une forte roche, et la fist molt bien garder, et la fornì de choses de vivre pour lonc temps et a grant abondance. Et, un jour, ala par tote la roche et vit grandissime palaiz de li sarrazin, entre liquel vit l’eglize de Sainte Marie a la maniere d’un four. Et lo duc souspira, quar li palaiz de li sarrazin estoient haut et la cort de la Vierge Marie o laides colors appene apparoit. Et puiz dist ceste parole: ‘Je voil que ceste eglise soit abatue’. Et donna molt de denier pour marbre et pour pierres quarrees, et molt honestement la fist rehedifier.” Aimé du Mont-Cassin, *Ystoire* (n. 13), p. 434, translation: Dunbar, Amatus (n. 17), pp. 159–160. It may be significant that the words “Il eslut un lieu molt fort [...]” open a new line in the manuscript (Paris BNF Français 688, f. 177b, col. 2, l.35), but this is more likely to be mere coincidence.
- 37 “XVIII. Coment fu prise Palerme, et coment lo Duc et toui l’ost i entra. XX. De lo miracle de l’eglize de Sainte Marie. [...] XXIII. Coment lo Conte ala à venchre li autres cités, et coment lo Duce fist la roche et rehedifica l’eglize de Sainte Marie, et prist l’ostage et torna en Calabre”: BNF Français 688, f. 172b; L’*Ystoire* (n. 21), p. 166; De Bartolomaeis, *Storia* (n. 23), p. 258.
- 38 For the palaces of the Saracens, see al-Idrīsī (Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Idrīs al-Ḥammūdī al-Ḥasanī), *Opus Geographicum sive “Liber ad eorum delectationem qui terras peragrarè student”*, Alessio Bombaci, Umberto Rizzitano et al. eds, Naples/Rome 1970–1978, p. 591, trad. Michele Amari, *Biblioteca arabo-sicula ossia raccolta di testi arabici che toccano la geografia, la storia, le biografie e la bibliografia della Sicilia* 1, Umberto Rizzitano ed., Palermo 1997, p. 59; Falcandus, *Epistola* (n. 2), p. 181.
- 39 Amari, *Storia* (n. 22), III, p. 140: “Racconta Amato, che sopravvedendo Roberto un dì i lavori della al-Ḥalqah notò la chiesetta di Santa Maria, sparuta e sudicia che pareva un forno, in mezzo a tanti splendidi palagi dei Saraceni.”
- 40 Amari, *Storia* (n. 22), III, p. 141 and ns 2 and 3; Fazello, *De Rebus Siculis* (n. 14), I, 8, 1, 172; II, 7, 1, 434; Di Giovanni, *La topografia* (n. 25), vol. I, p. 430, n. 1. See also below.
- 41 See n. 22.
- 42 Di Giovanni, *La topografia* (n. 25), vol. I, p. 281 sq., and especial-ly pp. 421–437; 2, p. 54 and n. 3, with plates; Gaetano Mario Columba, “Per la topografia antica di Palermo”, in *Centenario della nascita di Michele Amari* 1910, vol. II, pp. 395–426, sp. pp. 414–426. See also Longo, “In loco qui dicitur Galca” (n. 3), pp. 242–244, with related bibliography.

29 Indeed, according to historiographical tradition, the Normans entered the town through one of the gates of the al-Khālīṣa, named Bāb al-fuṭūh (Gate of the Conquests) already in the Islamic period, as attested by al-Muqaddasī and Ibn Ḥawqal (al-Muqaddasī, *Kitāb Aḥsan at-taqāsīm fi maʿrifat al-aqālīm*, Michael J. De Goeje ed., Leiden 1877, p. 225; Ibn Ḥawqal, *Ṣīrat al-ard* [n. 11], pp. 121–122), and called Porta della Vittoria in the early modern period. See especially Amari, *Storia* (n. 22), III, I, pp. 128–129. See also the recent contribution by Theresa Jäckh, “Space and Place in Norman Palermo”, in *Urban Dynamics and Transcultural Communication in Medieval Sicily*, Theresa Jäckh, Mona Kirsch eds, Heidelberg 2017, pp. 67–96, sp. pp. 81–85, although the external town is still identified with al-Khālīṣa and the location of Bāb al-fuṭūh is erroneously identified as the Cappella della Vittoria, in the church of Santa Maria della Vittoria. Archaeological evidence demonstrates that this place does not correspond with the site of the Bāb al-fuṭūh, and nor do the surviving walls belong to al-Khālīṣa. See Francesca Sptafora, “Nuovi dati preliminari sulla topografia di Palermo in età medievale”, *Mélanges de l’Ecole française de Rome. Moyen-Age, CXVI/1* (2004), pp. 47–78, sp. pp. 61–68. See also Ferdinando Maurici, *Palermo araba. Una sintesi dell’evoluzione*



2/ The topography of Medieval Palermo (black foreground, after La Duca, *Palermo ieri e oggi. La città, Palermo 1990*) drawn over the current view of the town (grey background)

converted into a church from a mosque has escaped most scholars, who have continued to search for it within rather than outside the Galca⁴³. We have already seen that Michele Amari believed the church of St Mary to be the chapel of St Mary of Jerusalem, which survived inside the Royal Palace until the sixteenth century⁴⁴. Like Amari, Vincenzo Di Giovanni was profoundly influenced by traditional Palermitan antiquarian scholarship, which was obsessed with demonstrating the continuity of Christian worship in Palermo by tracing the history of the city's churches from Late Antiquity and the Byzantine period, through the centuries of Islamic domination, until the Norman "reconquest"⁴⁵. Di Giovanni dismissed the possibility that the church mentioned by Amatus could have been St Mary of Jerusalem, on the grounds that it was a chapel built within the walls of what was to become the Royal Palace⁴⁶. He then went on to list the three other churches dedicated to St Mary that lay within the Galca: St Mary *Depicta* or *la Pinta*; St Mary *dell'Itria*; and St Mary *la Masara*. Of these, Di Giovanni ruled out St Mary *Depicta*, even though he believed it to be mentioned in documents of Roger I, commenting only that it could never have resembled an oven – presumably going by the ground plan made before its demolition in 1648–1649⁴⁷. St Mary *dell'Itria* originally lay on the southern edge of *al-Halqa*, below the walls of the palace, but it would seem to be attested for the first time only in 1355⁴⁸. St Mary *la Masara*, or *Mazara*, lay on the northern side of *al-Halqa*. The date of its foundation is unknown, but the Arabic inscriptions, now lost, that once adorned the bell tower of the contiguous church of St James *la Masara* appear to date from the time of King Roger, so it was almost certainly founded after 1130⁴⁹. It follows that none of these churches of St Mary can possibly have been the one to which Amatus refers.

Although Di Giovanni had shown beyond reasonable doubt that the chapel of St Mary of Jerusalem within the Royal Palace could not have been the church of St Mary described in the anecdote of Amatus, the idea re-emerged in the late twentieth century. Eve Borsook, apparently following an observation by Lucio Trizzino, suggested that the chapel beneath the Cappella Palatina was an

earlier structure, “possibly S. Maria di Gerusalemme”⁵⁰. Soon after, Vladimir Zorić argued that the same chapel, called in modern times St Mary *delle Grazie*, also known as *Santa Maria Hierusalem*, was indeed the first palace chapel, but had been built by the Emir Christodoulos after 1093, and so cannot have been the church of St Mary rebuilt by Robert Guiscard⁵¹. Indeed, Zorić agreed with Amari that the church of St Mary in the anecdote by Amatus was St Mary *della Grotta*⁵², and concluded that the church rebuilt by Duke Robert Guiscard in *al-Ḥalqa* existed “only in fable”⁵³. Subsequently, Marina Scarlata, relying precisely on Zorić’s conclusion concerning the first palatine chapel, insisted that, on the contrary, the chapel under the Cappella Palatina was that rebuilt by the Guiscard in the anecdote by Amatus, and later called St Mary of Jerusalem⁵⁴. She also argued that, since it could not have been built under Islamic rule, it must originally have been a Byzantine structure, and that Amatus’s description of it as “like an oven” (à la maniere d’un four) referred to it having had a centrale plan, with a central dome.

To conclude, none of these attempts to identify the church of St Mary in the anecdote reported by Amatus with one of the churches dedicated to St Mary later known to have existed in *al-Ḥalqa* survives critical scrutiny. In fact, there is no evidence, material or written, that there was any church active within the walls of *al-Qaṣr* at the time of the Norman conquest⁵⁵. Indeed, once it is accepted that the church of St Mary demolished and then rebuilt by Duke Robert was identical with the church that he had earlier converted from the congregational mosque, all of the other sources fit neatly into place.

William of Apulia, as we have already seen, reports that Duke Robert first destroyed the mosque, and then built a church dedicated to the Virgin Mother⁵⁶. Malaterra implies that the Normans knew that the Byzantine cathedral had been dedicated to Mary the Most Holy Mother of God, “which had been the ancient archbishopric but then, violated by the impious Saracens, had been made into the temple of their superstition”⁵⁷.

43 With the exception of Mathieu, *Guillaume* (n. 15), p. 300, noticed only by Benedetto Paterna, *L’arte della Sicilia normanna nelle fonti medievali*, Palermo 1980, p. 28, n. 40 and disregarded by all later scholars.

44 This is a gross simplification of the mare’s nest found by Amari. He began by identifying Amatus’s church of St Mary with the Greek monastery of St Mary *della Grotta*, and then erroneously confused the latter with St Mary of Jerusalem: see Di Giovanni, *La topografia* (n. 25), vol. 1, p. 430, n. 1. As regard the long-established tradition concerning St Mary of Jerusalem, see Fazello, *De rebus siculis* (n. 14), I.8, p. 172; Marina Scarlata, “Configurazione urbana e habitat a Palermo tra XII e XIII secolo”, in *Storia di Palermo*, 3: *Dai Normanni al Vespro*, Rosario La Duca ed., Palermo 2003, pp. 133–182, sp. p. 148, n. 81.

45 Di Giovanni, *La topografia* (n. 25), vol. 1, p. 430.

46 *Ibidem*, n. 1.

47 *Ibidem*. The church lay to the east of the palace, near the Sala Verde, and was demolished in 1648: *ibidem*, vol. 1, pp. 27–28, n. 3, pp. 385–389; vol. 2, pp. 191–207. St Mary *Depinta* is not mentioned in any of the documents of Roger I collected by Julia Becker, see *Documenti* (n. 14), and first appears only in 1167: Cap. Pal. No. 13; Luigi Garofalo, *Tabularium regiae ac imperialis Cappellae collegatae divi Petri in regio Panormitano Palatio Ferdinandi 11 regni utriusque Siciliae regis*, Palermo 1835, no. X, pp. 24–25. Henri Bresc suggested that it was a mosque, converted into a church after the Norman conquest: “Filologia urbana: Palermo dai Normanni agli Aragonesi”, *Incontri Meridionali. Rivista di Storia e Cultura*, 3 ser., vol. 1–11 (1981), pp. 9–40. The description and sketch plan published by Inveges is the only evidence for what does indeed look like the small (30 × 30 passi), rectangular, T-plan prayer-hall of a mosque. For Inveges’ description and plan, see Di Giovanni, *La topografia* (n. 25), vol. II, pp. 191–207. See also Rosa M. Bonacasa Carra, “Palermo paleocristiana e bizantina”, in *Storia di Palermo*, 1: *Dal tardo-antico all’Islam*, Rosario La Duca ed., Palermo 2000, pp. 31–50, sp. pp. 37–38.

48 Di Giovanni, *La topografia* (n. 25), vol. 1, pp. 25, 27–28, 303, 430, 432; Ruggero Longo, “Bāb al-Abnā, Sant’Andrea in Kemonia e l’ingresso normanno del Palazzo Reale di Palermo”, in *L’officina dello sguardo. Scritti in onore di Maria Andaloro*. 1. *I luoghi dell’arte*, Giulia Bordini et al. eds, Rome 2014, pp. 91–96.

49 The two churches lay in the general vicinity of what is now a Caserma dei Carabinieri on the northern side of Corso Vittorio Emanuele. Salvatore Morso, *Descrizione di Palermo antico ricavata sugli autori sincroni e i monumenti de’ tempi*, Palermo 1827, pp. 136–148; Jeremy Johns, “Le iscrizioni e le epigrafi in arabo. Una rilettura”, in *Nobiles Officine. Perle, filigrane e trame di seta dal Palazzo Reale di Palermo*, II, Saggi, Maria Andaloro ed., Catania 2006, pp. 46–67, 324–337, sp. pp. 47–48, 324.

50 Eve Borsook, *Messages in Mosaic: the Royal Programmes of Norman Sicily (1130–1187)*, Woodbridge 1998, pp. 18, 43, n. 13 and 101. Lucio Trizzino, *La Palatina di Palermo: dalle opere funzionali al restauro, dal ripristino alla tutela*, Palermo 1983, p. 34, merely hopes that a restoration might clarify the structures on the site predating the Cappella Palatina.

51 Vladimir Zorić, “Arx praeclara quam palatium appellant. Le sue origini e la prima cappella della corte normanna”, in *Contrade e chiese nella Palermo medievale*, Palermo 2000, pp. 31–139; *La città di Palermo nel medioevo*, Franco D’Angelo ed., Palermo 2002, pp. 85–193, 114–116, 122–126, 130–133, 165.

On this hypothesis, see now Ruggero Longo, Giuseppe Romagnoli, “Le ‘Segrete’ e la Chiesa Inferiore del Palazzo Reale di Palermo. Nuove osservazioni sulla stratigrafia degli alzati”, in *Studi in memoria di Fabiola Ardizzone*, Lucia Arcifa, Rosa M. Bonacasa Carra eds, (forthcoming).

52 See above, n. 44.

53 Zorić, “Arx praeclara” (n. 51), p. 107: “*Continua ad esistere così solo nella favola l’esistenza di una chiesa normanna all’interno del recinto fortificato ai suoi primordi [...]*”

54 Scarlata, “Configurazione” (n. 44), pp. 157, 173.

55 The “impoverished church of St Cyriacus” (*paupera ecclesia sancti Cyriaci*) mentioned by Malaterra as the seat of the Greek archbishop (see note 16 above) is traditionally identified with the church of Santa Kyriaca – also known as Santa Ciriaca, Latinised as Santa Domenica – in the present Baglio delle Case Salamone, Via Santa Domenica, Monreale. For Santa Kyriaca, see: Carlo A. Garufi, *Catalogo illustrato del Tabulario di S. Maria Nuova in Monreale*, Palermo 1902, ns 9, 10, 12–14.

56 See n. 15.

57 Bellafiore, *La Cattedrale* (n. 3), p. 14; Malaterra, *De rebis gestis* (n. 14), II.45, p. 53.

The present dedication of the cathedral to the Assumption of the Virgin Mary – *Santa Vergine Maria Assunta in Cielo*, or simply *Vergine Maria Assunta*⁵⁸ – is a modern innovation, and in the earliest, original Norman document it is known in Greek as “the church of the Most Holy Mother of God in Palermo”⁵⁹. In a breviary dated 1452, the festival for the dedication of the high altar of the cathedral is still referred to as *Dedicatio majoris altaris ecclesiae Dei Genitricis Mariae Panormi*⁶⁰.

Seen in this light, it becomes clear that the report in the *Chronicon Amalphitanum* (Chapter xxxvii) under the year 1077 – *In Panormo vero fecit idem Dux Robertus Monasterium in honorem sanctissimae Dei genitricis Mariae semper Virginis, Anno primo postquam cepit Salernum* – can only refer to the consecration of the cathedral⁶¹. Similarly, the following passage in Romuald of Salerno, probably based on the first version of the *Chronica Amalphitanorum* (early twelfth century) – *Anno dominice incarnationis MLXXVI, indictione xv [...] In Panormo [Robbertus dux] quoque fecit ecclesiam in honore Dei genitricis semperque virginis Marie, anno primo postquam cepit Salernum* – can again only refer to the consecration of the church of St Mary on Christmas Day 1077⁶².

Indeed, both the *Chronicon Amalphitanum* and Romuald’s *Chronicon* mention the church of St Mary in Palermo immediately after they report how Duke Robert, after conquering Salerno, had commissioned the construction of St Matthew’s⁶³. The two foundations of Palermo and Salerno were clearly linked in the chroniclers’ minds as important and significant symbolic acts performed by Duke Robert as an integral part of his conquest of these two cities.

Guiscard’s Cathedral: Implications and Meanings

To sum up the story so far, on 10th January 1072, four days after the surrender of Palermo, Duke Robert dispatched a force of one thousand knights to seize and secure what had until very recently been the congregational mosque of *al-Qaṣr*. Later that same day, the duke, his brother Count Roger, his wife Sichelgaita, his brother-in-law, and his sons, entered *al-Qaṣr* and processed to the mosque. From the seventh until the mid-ninth century,

that mosque had been the Christian cathedral of Palermo, dedicated to the Most Holy Mother of God, but, on the Muslim conquest of Palermo in 831, the cathedral had been seized and used as a congregational mosque. Now, Duke Robert presided over the conversion of that mosque back into a church, once again dedicated to the Most Holy Mother of God. Nicodemus, the Greek archbishop of Palermo, was brought from the church of St Cyriacus (or St Kyriaca), which may have lain outside the walls, near Monreale, in order to say mass.

Over the next weeks and months, Duke Robert presided over the refortification of Palermo and, in particular, constructed or strengthened two castles to consolidate the Normans’ hold upon the city – one, which was to become the Royal Palace, in the walled palatial district known as *al-Halqa*; and the other, the *Castrum ad Maris*, overlooking the port. One day in the spring or summer of 1072, Duke Robert made a tour of the former, and noticed how the tall palaces of the Muslims dwarfed the recently converted church of St Mary, which looked like a humble oven, with a drab courtyard that could scarcely be seen. It may be that the mosque converted into a church by Robert Guiscard preserved the form of the Late Antique building, for Amatus’s description of it as *à la manière d’un four* might indicate that it preserved the aspect of a Byzantine central-plan church – as suggested by Marina Scarlata – despite its conversion into a mosque in 831. In any case, Duke Robert ordered this building to be demolished, and, laying out a considerable sum for marble and dressed stone, had a new church built on a scale more fitting the dignity of the cathedral of Palermo. The reconstruction was completed by Christmas Day 1077, the year after Duke Robert’s conquest of Salerno in December 1076⁶⁴. In other words, the works lasted about five years, from the summer of 1072 to December 1077, a reasonable span for the reconstruction from scratch of the cathedral.

Soon after the work on his new cathedral was begun, in the late summer or early autumn of 1072, Duke Robert left Palermo, never to return. Before he did so, according to Amatus, he invested his younger brother, Count Roger, with half of the city, retaining half for himself; although,

Malaterra reports, on the contrary, that Robert kept all of Palermo in his own hands⁶⁵. In any case, the duke appointed officials to look after his interests in Palermo. William of Apulia claims that, immediately after the capture of the city, Robert appointed a knight (*miles*) as emir (*amiratus*) of Palermo⁶⁶. It would seem, therefore, that in the absence of the duke himself, his officials in Palermo supervised the building projects that he commissioned or patronized⁶⁷, and are therefore likely to have been responsible for the rebuilding of the cathedral between Duke Robert's departure from Palermo in 1072 until its consecration on Christmas Day 1077.

All that Amatus reveals about Duke Robert's cathedral is that it was built of dressed stone and marble, and was intended to compete in terms of architecture, height and color with the surrounding "palaces of the Saracens". Very few sources, material or written, refer to the architecture and decoration of the cathedral during the long century that separates its consecration from its reconstruction by Archbishop Walter II in ca 1184. Nonetheless, what little evidence does survive may help begin to understand the nature and history of Duke Robert's building.

a) The Ground Plan of Walter II's Cathedral

First and foremost, it should be noted that the ground plan of Walter II's cathedral is extremely conservative for a church built *ex novo* in the last quarter of the twelfth century. Mid and late twelfth-century Norman-Sicilian churches, such as the cathedrals of Cefalù and Monreale, clearly exhibit transalpine – Benedictine and later Cistercian – features, ultimately derived from Cluny II, such as the towers at the corner of the buildings, the elongated basilical naves and the protruding transept⁶⁸. However, compared with the ground plans of such twelfth-century churches, the cathedral of Palermo looks so different that Krönig had to write: "it is overall a Sicilian creation"⁶⁹. Indeed, its ground plan, especially the sanctuary

- Catholic Church acknowledged it only under Pope Pius XII in 1950.
- 59 Palermo, Archivio storico diocesano, Tabulario, doc. no. 5; *Documenti* (n. 14), no. 149, pp. 197–199: "τὴν ὑπεραγαίων Θεοτόκον Πανόρμου". This presumably was the original for a number of Latin translations, like *Sanctae Mariae Panormitanae Matris Ecclesiae*, and *Ecclesia Beatae Dei genitricis Mariae, que Panormo est*, for which see Pirri, *Sicilia Sacra* (n. 14), col. 74–75 sq.; Antonino Mongitore, *Bullae, privilegia, et instrumenta Panormitanae metropolitanae ecclesiae, regni Siciliae primariae, collecta, notisque illustrata ab Antonino Mongitore* [...], Palermo 1734, p. 6.
- 60 See: Pirri, *Sicilia Sacra* (n. 14), col. 111; Bellafiore, *La Cattedrale* (n. 3), p. 19.
- 61 Ludovico Muratori, *Antiquitates Italicae medii aevi. Tomus primus*, Milan 1738, cols 207–216, sp. col. 214; Chronicon Amalphitanum, in *Amalfi im frühen Mittelalter (9.–11. Jahrhundert)*, Ulrich Schwartz ed., Tübingen 1978, p. 215; Carlo A. Garufi, "Romualdi Salernitani Chronicon (AM 130 – AC 1178)", in Lodovico A. Muratori, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, Giosuè Carducci, Vittorio Fiorini eds, Città di Castello 1835, p. 189, n. 6. *Chronicon Amalphitanum* refers to the interpolation of two versions: *Chronica Amalphitanorum* (339–1102) and the *Chronicon Amalphitanum* (339–1294). Although sometimes seen as separate works, these are essentially two stages of the development of the same text, which dates from the early twelfth century. See: Peter Damian-Grint, *Chronicon Amalphitanum*, in *Encyclopedia of the Medieval Chronicle*, Graeme Dunphy, Cristian Bratu eds, published online 2016, consulted online on 30 November 2017 http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2213-2139_emc_SIM_00542.
- 62 Garufi, "Romualdi" (n. 61), p. 189; Romualdo II Guarna, *Chronicon*, Cinzia Bonetti ed., Cava dei Tirreni 2001, p. 95. Indiction XV ran from September 1077.
- 63 "anno primo postquam cepit Salernum": see *Chronicon Amalphitanum*, XXXV–XXXVI, in Muratori, *Antiquitates* (n. 61), col. 215; Garufi, "Romualdi" (n. 61), p. 189. Romualdo II Guarna, *Chronicon* (n. 62), p. 95. According to Romualdus II Guarna (*ibidem*), the construction of Salerno cathedral, ordered by Robert himself, also began immediately after the conquest of the town (i.e. 1077). Salerno was granted to Duke Robert in December 1076, after the death of the Longobard Prince Gisulfus. See Francesco Aceto, s. v. *Salerno*, in *Enciclopedia dell'Arte Medievale Treccani*, published online 1999. See also Antonio Braca, *Il Duomo di Salerno. Architetture e culture artistiche del Medioevo e dell'Età Moderna*, Salerno 2003, p. 13.

64 See n. 63.

65 Amatus, *Historia* (n. 13), VI.21, p. 431; Malaterra, *De rebus gestis* (n. 14), vol. II, p. 45. See: Vincenzo D' Alessandro, "Il problema dei rapporti tra Roberto il Guiscardo e Ruggero I", in *Roberto il Guiscardo e il Suo Tempo. Relazioni e comunicazioni nelle Prime Giornate normanno-sveve* (Bari, maggio 1973), Rome 1975, pp. 91–106; Léon R. Ménager, "Amiratus-Ἀμιράτς L'Emirat et les origines de l'Amirauté, Paris 1960, pp. 23–26; Huguette Taviani-Carozzi, *La Terreur du monde: Robert Guiscard et la conquête normande en Italie. Mythe et histoire*, Paris 1996, pp. 367–369.

66 *Reginam remeat Robertus victor ad urbem / Nominis eiusdem quodam remeant Panormi / Milite, qui Siculis datur amiratus haberi*: William of Apulia, *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* (n. 15), III, pp. 341–343. See the discussion of these problematic verses by Ménager, "Amiratus" (n. 65), pp. 21–23.

67 Nicholas, son of Leo, the *parathalassites* of the port of Palermo, is a case in point. While his title indicates that he exercised control over maritime traffic, he appears in a Greek inscription dated 6589 AM (1080–1081 AD) as the donor of the church of St Peter and St Paul, built under the supervision of "the most humble priest and *taboularios* Nicholas", near to the *Castrum ad Maris*, "in the reign of the magnificent Duke Robert and his wife Sichegaita". St Peter and Paul *de Balneariis*, also known as St Peter *La Bagnara*, was demolished in 1834. It once lay on the northwestern edge of the *Castrum ad maris*, a few metres southwest of Bastione San Giorgio, near to the corner now made by Via Francesco Crispi and Via Filippo Patti. On Nicholas, son of Leo, and the Greek inscription, see Ménager, "Amiratus" (n. 65), pp. 23–26 and Appendix II, docs 1–2, pp. 167–168. Andre Guillou, *Recueil des inscriptions grecques medievales d'Italie*, Rome 1996, no. 195, pp. 210–211.

68 For a synthesis, see Corrado Bozzoni, "Elementi lessicali e sintattici nella Cattedrale gualteriana", in Urbani, *La Cattedrale* (n. 3), pp. 103–122.

69 Wolfgang Krönig, *Il duomo di Monreale e l'architettura normanna in Sicilia*, Palermo 1965, p. 165.

58 The dedication to Santa Maria Assunta probably occurred after the works of renovation completed in 1801. In fact, even though the dogma of the Assumption dates back to the fourth century, the

and transepts, recalls the late eleventh-century proto-Norman basilicas of Calabria – especially the Most Holy Trinity in Mileto (ca 1080) and St Mary of Roccella in Squillace (ca 1090)⁷⁰. At the same time, there are echoes of the Latin basilical plan, employed already in Montecassino (1071), and soon after in Salerno cathedral (1076–1084), also founded by Robert Guiscard⁷¹ [Fig. 3].

Again, it is striking that the crypt, which reliably dates back to the time of Walter II, was built outside the east end of the church, and not beneath the sanctuary⁷². Clearly, the late twelfth-century builders were unable or unwilling to disturb the existing sanctuary in order to excavate and build the crypt.

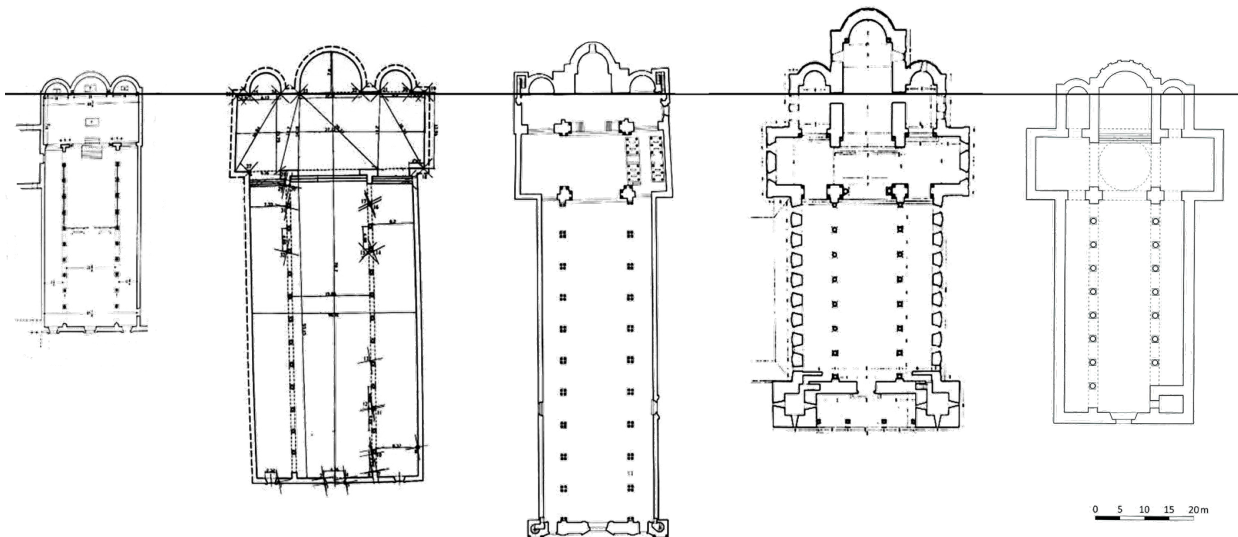
These two iconographic observations both indicate that Walter II's church to a large extent adhered to the ground plan of Duke Robert's cathedral, and that the design of the late twelfth-century church was largely determined by existing structures.

This is confirmed by the excavations carried out within the cathedral in 1997–1998, which

uncovered a paved surface more than a metre beneath the present floor, beneath which were sealed ceramics dated between the eighth to ninth centuries and the first half of the tenth century⁷³. These clearly indicate a *terminus post quem* for the excavated pavement, which would seem to be too late to have belonged to the mosque⁷⁴. It may well, therefore, belong to the cathedral built by Robert Guiscard in 1072–1077. In short, there can be little doubt that, even after the transformations ordered by Archbishop Walter II and, centuries later, by Ferdinando Fuga, the cathedral still sits on the same spot where Robert Guiscard had built it, and may well incorporate some of its fabric.

b) Bellafiore's Hypothesis: The Speed of Works Commissioned by Archbishop Walter II

The existence of a phase of the cathedral attributable to Robert Guiscard might also explain the controversial problem surrounding the apparent speed with which the work commissioned by



Montecassino
(Carbonara)

Salerno
(Sebastiano)

Palermo
(Bellafiore)

Cefalù
(Krönig)

Mileto
(Occhiato)

Archbishop Walter II proceeded, from its inception in 1184 to the consecration of the church in 1185. According to the *Chronicon Siculum*, written in the mid-fourteenth century⁷⁵:

"[...] venerabilis Gualterius, [...] Archiepiscopus Panormitanus [...] per quem Archiepiscopum anno domini MCLXXXIV, regni regis Guillelmi Secundi anno XVIII, mensis Aprilis secundae indictionis incepta fuit aedificari, et deinde facta est major panormitana mater ecclesia, et dotata de thesauro per eum invento prope ecclesiam Sancti Spiritus de Panormo [...]"]⁷⁶"

The new church was then consecrated in 1185⁷⁷. As late as the eighteenth century, the dedicatory inscription giving the year could still be read on the top of the diaconicon, implying that the great

between churches in Sicily, Campania and the north of Europe, see Isabella Di Resta, "Le cattedrali campane e il Duomo di Palermo", in Urbani, *La Cattedrale* (n. 3), pp. 193–210, sp. pp. 204–207. On the relationship between Montecassino and Salerno, see also the diverse perspective in Oliver Becker, "Der Dom von Salerno und die Abteikirche von Montecassino: Anspruch und Wirkung zweier Bauprojekte in Unteritalien im 11. Jahrhundert", *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, XLI (2007), pp. 105–140.

72 Bellafiore, *La Cattedrale*, (n. 3), pp. 35–40.

73 See above, n. 5.

74 See Alessandra Bagnera, "From a Small Town to a Capital: The Urban Evolution of Islamic Palermo (9th – mid-11th Century)", in *A Companion to Medieval Palermo: the History of a Mediterranean City from 600 to 1500*, Annliese Nef ed., Leiden 2013, pp. 61–88, sp. p. 66, n. 25.

75 *Chronicon Siculum* or *Cronica Siciliae*, Vat. Lat. 3972, written soon after 1343 by the so-called Anonimo Palermitano, copied several times from 16th to 18th centuries and finally edited by Rosario Gregorio in 1792. See Rosario Gregorio, *Bibliotheca scriptorum qui res in Sicilia gestas sub Aragonum imperio retulere*, II, Palermo 1792, pp. 117–267; Pietro Colletta, "Sull'edizione della 'Cronica Siciliae' di Anonimo del Trecento a cura di Rosario Gregorio", *Mediterranea. Ricerche storiche*, II (2005), pp. 567–582, sp. pp. 567–577, ns 1, 2, 8.

76 Gregorio, *Bibliotheca* (n. 75), vol. II, p. 128. The eighteenth-century Sicilian tradition states: "A li 1184, fu incomenzata la matre ecclesia di Palermo per lo Archiepiscopu Gualtieri": Vincenzo Di Giovanni, *Cronache siciliane dei secoli XIII. XIV. XV*, Bologna 1865, p. 207. Tommaso Fazello is basically consistent with the *Chronicon Siculum*: "Predicant quoque Panormitani, ducta per maiores fama, quibus et Siculorum annales conveniunt, Gualterium ex thesauro apud aedem Sancti Spiritus extra moenia anno salutis 1184, mense aprili e a se reperto, celeberrimum et somptuosissimum hoc totae Italiae templo eodem anno et mense inchoasse." Fazello, *De rebus siculis* (n. 14), I, VIII, p. 175.

77 Amato, *De principe* (n. 3), pp. 77–78.

70 On this issue, see: Giuseppe Occhiato, "Osservazioni in merito ad alcuni problemi interpretativi concernenti le scomparse abbaziali di Mileto e di Sant'Eufemia, in Calabria (XI sec.)", in *Archivio Storico per la Calabria e la Lucania*, LXX, pp. 27–48, with related bibliography; Paola Romeo, *La Santissima Trinità di Mileto: una revisione critica dell'architettura religiosa normanna in Calabria e le sue conseguenze in Sicilia*, Venice 2015, available on-line at <http://hdl.handle.net/10579/5629>.

71 On the plan of Salerno cathedral, see Sebastiano-Cioffi in Braca, *Il Duomo* (n. 63), pp. 47–49, with figures. On the comparanda

bulk of the sanctuary was already complete just one year after work had begun⁷⁸.

The reliability of these data – more commemorative than historical – is questionable. Moreover, the year of consecration does not necessarily correspond with the end of the work of reconstruction. Indeed, we will see in the next paragraph that building work was still underway in the eastern end of the cathedral. Wolfgang Krönig assumed, without any evidence, that the Walter II's reconstruction might have started as early as ca 1177⁷⁹. Conversely, Giuseppe Bellafiore argued that the rebuilding could have been completed with extraordinary rapidity thanks to the political power of the patron and the availability of large numbers of workmen, especially specialized Muslim artisans⁸⁰. Finally, it has even been proposed that the reconstruction of the cathedral did not begin until 1178, on the grounds that the work was financed by the discovery of a hoard of treasure, believed to have been uncovered during the construction of the Church of the Holy Spirit, also commissioned by Walter II, and consecrated in that year⁸¹.

Be that as it may, it is nonetheless important to note that, had Walter II's rebuilding indeed been completed in little more than a year, this could be easily explained had his new church incorporated significant portions of Duke Robert's cathedral. Only future research will test that possibility.

c) The Chapel of St Mary Magdalene

In 1187, Archbishop Walter asked King William II for permission “to remove the royal chapel of St Mary Magdalene next to the wall of the Church of the Mother [of God], in which rest the precious bodies of the most illustrious dukes and queens of blessed memory, from the same church of the Mother [of God], and to collect them in another chapel not far from the same [church]”⁸². The chapel of St Mary Magdalene lay towards the eastern end of the southern wall of the cathedral. It is traditionally identified with the “chapel of Queen Elvira of blessed memory” that is mentioned in the gold-and-purple charter for the Cappella Palatina, dated 28th April 1140⁸³, and is said to have been founded in 1130–1131⁸⁴. Archaeological traces of what may be this chapel seem to be still preserved in Walter

II's cathedral⁸⁵. Indeed, it may be that the chapel was not physically destroyed but that its function was simply changed, and transferred to the chapel built not far from the cathedral and also dedicated to St Mary Magdalene⁸⁶. The petition of 1187 claims that the chapel “was obstructing both the building works and the divine office” (*et opus fabricae simul et divinum impediabat officium*). More than the chapel itself, might the presence of the tombs have somehow obstructed both the celebration of the divine office and the work of reconstruction? In any case, it is clear that the chapel of St Mary Magdalene built in 1130–1131 against the eastern end of the south wall of the cathedral was still there after the consecration of the cathedral in 1185, when most of the reconstruction had already been completed. It follows that, even had the chapel of St Mary Magdalene really been destroyed in 1187, the wall shared between the chapel and the cathedral would probably have survived. In fact, in this spot there survives a wall that is parallel neither to the wall of the nave, nor to the northern wall of the north transept (see [Fig. 4]). This peculiar orientation has often been related to the possible survival of ancient structures, preserved within Walter II's building⁸⁷, and there can be little doubt that it originally belonged to the chapel of St Mary Magdalene [Fig. 4]. The point is that, since this chapel was not built until 1130–1131, the eastern end of the south wall against which it was built, and which survives to this day, must almost certainly belong to the Guiscard's cathedral.

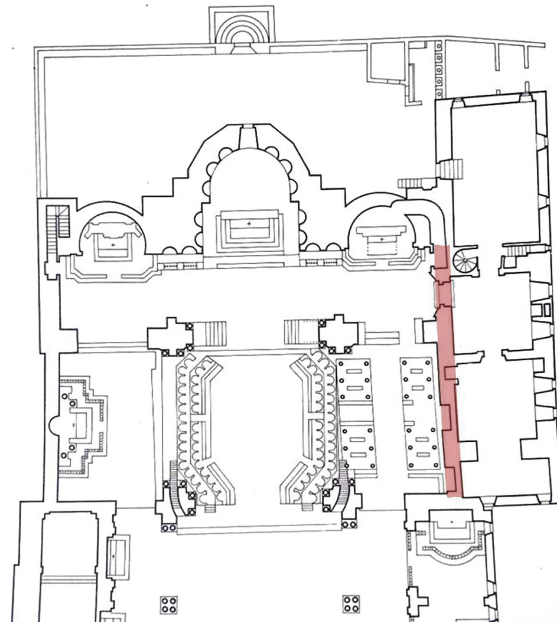
d) The Transcultural Cathedral and a New Phase of Archaeometrical Studies

Although Palermo Cathedral undeniably underwent massive reconfiguration in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, even after the transformation of the sanctuary and the addition of the dome, most of the structure still consists of the medieval fabric. Furthermore, close observation of the external masonry of the building could still yield evidence of the possible overlapping of medieval phases [Fig. 5]. As the architect Marvuglia himself attests⁸⁸, even in the eighteenth century, the restorers had great respect for the ancient structure. Moreover, it was simply good economic

sense to preserve as much as possible of the medieval fabric. For the same reasons, perhaps, in the late twelfth century, Archbishop Walter II chose to retain as much as possible of Duke Robert's cathedral, in order to complete his transformation rapidly and with minimum expense. One should also take into account that King William II had commissioned his own cathedral, St Mary *La Nova* in Monreale, as early as 1174⁸⁹. The creation of a second cathedral and archdiocese, just a few kilometers from and within clear sight of Palermo, issued an open challenge to Archbishop Walter, who sought to reestablish his power and authority by the symbolic but concrete sign of the renovation of his own cathedral church. This may also suggest that Walter II, although he started with a very different plan, tried to align it as much as possible to the plan of the newly constructed cathedral of Monreale.

In complete contrast, in 1072, Robert Guiscard was confronted by a church that had originally been built before the early seventh century, and had then been deconsecrated, violated and profaned by the Saracens – a church dwarfed and surrounded by the tall palaces of the infidel, that looked like an oven, drab and colorless. Small wonder that he chose to demolish it completely and rebuild it from the ground up. In the account of Amatus, the Benedictine monk from Montecassino, this is an act of *damnatio memoriae*, expunging all trace of devilish Saracen dominion. Duke Robert himself understood, and even practised, such grand symbolic gestures, as when he appropriated marble columns and the iron gates from Palermo and set them up in Troia as trophies of his victory over the Saracens⁹⁰. Duke Robert's cathedral, more than anything else, was a victory monument, a material sign of the passage from Muslim to Latin-Christian domination, religion and culture.

Palermo Cathedral, as it stands today on the site of the original Late Antique cathedral, converted first into a mosque, and then back into a church, and then demolished and rebuilt as the church of the Most Holy Mother of God – arguably the first Norman cathedral on the island – then refashioned by Walter II in the late twelfth century and finally transformed by Ferdinando



78 Bellafiore, *La Cattedrale*, (n. 3), pp. 16–18. The inscription, in Bellafiore's transcription, runs as follows: "Si ter quinque minus numerent de mille ducentis / Invenient annos, Rex Pie Christe, tuos / Dum tibi constructam Praesul Gualterius aulam / Obtulit officii post tria lustra sui. / Aurea florebant Willielmi regna secundi / Quo tantum tanto sub duce fulsit opus. / Sit tibi laus perpes, sit gloria Christi perennis, / Sit decus et templi sit tibi cura tui. / Tu quoque florigerae mater pulcherrima turbae, / Perpetuus sacrae virginittatis apex, / Respice prostrati lacrymas et vota clientis / Aeternis penses haec sua dona bonis."

79 Krönig, *Il duomo* (n. 69), pp. 166–167.

80 See the controversial hypothesis by Giuseppe Bellafiore, "Sulla datazione della cattedrale normanna di Palermo", *Palladio*, XVIII (1968), pp. 42–46 and Bellafiore, *La Cattedrale* (n. 3), pp. 16–26. Bellafiore basically agreed with Amato's interpretation of the available data and sources, for which see the long discussion in Amato, *De principe* (n. 3), pp. 77–78.

81 Collura, "Per una storia della Cattedrale" (n. 3), pp. 168–169.

82 Cap. Pal., Tab. no. 18; Garofalo, *Tabularium* (n. 47), no. 18, p. 39.

83 Cap. Pal. Tab. no. 7; *Rogarii II. regis diplomata latina*, Carlrichard Brühl ed., Cologne 1987, no. 48, pp. 133–137.

84 Amato, *De principe* (n. 3), p. 50. Queen Elvira died in 1135.

85 See n. 9.

86 Founded in the same year 1187 by the Archbishop Walter II and still located within the Caserma dei Carabinieri (*ex quartiere militare di San Giacomo*) in Corso Vittorio Emanuele 473. Meli, "Il restauro" (n. 9), pp. 92–93, n. 21, following Amato, *De principe* (n. 3), pp. 50–51, misinterpreted the 1187 document, assuming that the tombs were removed, not the chapel (*corpora removenda* instead of *cappellam removendam*). The correct transcription of the document, which is even reproduced in *L'età normanna e sveva in Sicilia. Catalogo della mostra storico documentaria e bibliografica*, Rosario La Duca ed., Palermo 1994, no. 35, pp. 104–105, is given by Garofalo (see n. 82), but disregarded by Meli. Nevertheless, the archaeological evidence of the masonry, suggests that we should interpret *removendam cappellam* not as the physical removal of the chapel, so much as the transfer of its function.

87 Meli, *Il restauro* (n. 9), p. 94.

88 Maria Giuffrè, "Il mito della cupola", in *I disegni d'archivio negli studi di storia dell'architettura*, Atti del Convegno (Napoli, 12–14 giugno 1991), Giancarlo Alisio, Gaetana Cantone, Cesare De Seta, Luisa M. Sclavini eds, Naples 1994, pp. 189–196, sp. p. 192.

89 Krönig, *Il duomo* (n. 65); Thomas Dittelbach, *Rex imago Christi: der Dom von Monreale: Bildsprachen und Zeremoniell in Mosaikkunst und Architektur*, Reichert 2003.

90 *Chronicon Amalphitanum*, xxxv–xxxvi, in Muratori, *Antiquitates* (n. 61), col. 213, p. 214; repeated by Garufi, *Romualdi* (n. 61), p. 188; Romualdo II Guarna, *Chronicon* (n. 61), p. 93.

4/ Palermo Cathedral: plan of transept before Fuga's intervention. On the right of the transept are the old sacristy, in the south-eastern corner, and, contiguous with it to the west, the new sacristy. In red is the wall of the southern transept, with its odd orientation



5/ Façade of southern transept, detail of the masonry where the misaligned courses suggest the overlapping of different medieval phases of construction, Palermo Cathedral

Fuga in 1781–1801, is the transcultural building *par excellence*, the most eloquent witness to the overlapping of hidden layers and the stratification of cultures in Sicily. The surviving fabric deserves to be carefully and thoroughly interrogated by new analyses and archaeometrical investigations through which it may still be possible to discover as yet unknown traces of construction from the period of Robert Guiscard, and thus to throw new light upon the architecture, style and culture of early Norman Sicily.

Norman Palermo, ca 1154 al-Idrīsī's description of the cathedral

Jeremy Johns

The only detailed description, brief as it is, that survives of the Norman cathedral before its transformation under Archbishop Walter II comes in the account of Palermo given by the Arab geographer al-Idrīsī in the so-called *Book of Roger* completed in ca 1154.

Transcription

وبها الجامع الأعظم الذي ⁶ كان في الزمن الأقدم وأعيد في هذه المدة على حالته كما كان في سالف ⁷ الأزمان وصفته الآن تغرب عن الأذهان لبديع ما فيه من الصنعة والغرائب ⁸ المفتعلة المنتخبة المخترعة من أصناف التصوير وأجناس التراويق والكتابات al-Idrīsī, ed. Bombaci *et al.* (n. 38), p. 591, ll. 5–8

Reading:

wa-bi-hā l-ḡāmi'ū l-a'zamu llaḏī ⁶ kāna fī-l-zamani l-aqdamī wa-u'ida fī hādīhi l-muddati 'alā ḥālati-hi ka-mā kāna fī sālifi ⁷ l-azmāni wa-ṣifatu-hu l-āna taḡrubu 'ani l-aḏhāni li-badī'i mā fī-hi mina l-ṣan'ati wa-l-ḡarā'ibi ⁸ l-muftā'alati l-muntaqabati l-muḡtarā'ati min aṣnāfi l-taṣwīri wa-aḡnāsi l-tazāwīqi wa-l-kitābāti.

Translation:

“And in it (i.e. al-Qaṣr, the Cassaro) is what, in olden times, was the congregational mosque, which, in this age, has been returned to the condition in which it was in the still more ancient past. Today, it is difficult for the mind to comprehend it, because of the wonder of the marvels and workmanship that it contains, designed, created and selected from all kinds of images and all types of ornament and inscriptions.”

Commentary

In twelfth-century Palermo, the cathedral was known to Christian Arabic-speakers as “the holy congregational [church] of St Mary” (*al-ḡāmi' al-muqaddas Ṣanta Māriya*), and even as “the

great congregational church” (*al-ḡāmi' al-a'zam*), precisely the same term used for the cathedral by al-Idrīsī⁹¹. By using it, he alludes to the fact that the cathedral of Byzantine Palermo had been converted into a mosque by the Muslims, and then back into a Christian cathedral by the Normans. He thus refers to three distinct chronological periods: “olden times” (*al-zaman al-aqdam*), “this age” (*hādīhi l-mudda*), and “the still more ancient past” (*sālif l-azmān*). Al-Idrīsī employs the first of these (*al-zaman al-aqdam*) to refer with great delicacy, as so often in his account of Sicily, to the Muslim past of the island, as if not to offend his Christian patron. In contrast to this, the third term – “the still more ancient past” (*fī sālifi l-azmān*) – refers to the period of Byzantine rule, before the Muslim conquest, about which he can have had only the vaguest of ideas. By his use of the second phrase (*fī hādīhi l-mudda*), al-Idrīsī is again being deliberately imprecise, but now he does so in order to imply, without ever stating explicitly, that the retransformation of the mosque into a cathedral had been accomplished recently, by King Roger, rather than by the latter's uncle and father before he was even born. Although no other written source states that the cathedral was redecorated during the reign of Roger II, this is precisely the impression that al-Idrīsī is here anxious to convey.

As to the nature of the decoration, al-Idrīsī deliberately juxtaposes “images” (*al-taṣwīr*) with “ornament and inscriptions” (*al-tazāwīq wa-l-kitābāt*),

91 Salvatore Cusa, *I diplomi greci ed arabi di Sicilia pubblicati nel testo originale, tradotti ed illustrate*, Cologne 1982, p. 40, (lithographic reproduction of original edition, Palermo 1868–1882). See also the Arabic and Judaeo-Arabic texts of the epitaph commissioned by the royal priest Grisandus for his mother, Anna: Jeremy Johns, “The Quadrilingual Epitaph of Anna, Mother of Grisandus, a Priest in the Cappella Palatina, Palermo”, in *Visual Arts, Material Culture and Literature in Later Byzantium (1081 – ca 1330)*, Foteini Spingou ed., Cambridge (forthcoming). Note that the Jewish synagogue, too, could also be called *al-ḡāmi'*: Girolamo Caracausi, *Arabismi medievali di Sicilia*, Palermo 1983, p. 27.

as if to contrast the use of figural religious art appropriate to a Christian church, with the aniconic ornament and epigraphy that Islam permitted in a mosque, alluding to the multicultural nature of the Rogerian decoration.

Al-Idrīsī also stresses that the decoration of the cathedral had been drawn from multiple sources. By referring to “the wonder of the marvels and workmanship” (*badī’i mā fī-hi mina l-ṣan’ati wa-l-ḡarā’ibi*), he echoes the words of his account of King Roger’s palace (*hiṣn*) – the Royal Palace – which was adorned “with the most wonderful curiosities” (*bi-ā’ḡabi l-muḡtaribāt*) and filled “things of the most extraordinary character” (*badā’i’ l-ṣifāt*)⁹². He points out that such marvels and wonders did not come from but a single source, but rather were “designed, created and selected from all kinds of images and all types of ornament and inscriptions”. Here, al-Idrīsī is very much on message, making exactly the same point as other contemporary commentators upon the nature of King Roger’s programme, which aimed to construct a new multicultural monarchy in order to demonstrate the king’s power to “harmonise the inharmonious, and mix together the unmixable [...] with wise foresight blending and uniting into a single race disparate and incongruent peoples”⁹³.

It is impossible to be sure, of course, whether al-Idrīsī was describing images, ornament and inscriptions that King Roger himself had commissioned for Duke Robert’s cathedral, or was rather seeking to describe Duke Robert’s original decoration in such a manner that it might appear to have been commissioned by his own patron. However, the survival in the cathedral

of the small vault of a *muqarnas* niche covered with plaster in the southern apsidal tower⁹⁴, and of wooden roof beams painted in a style and with motifs closely related to the ceilings of the Cappella Palatina⁹⁵, raises the distinct possibility that Queen Elvira’s chapel was not the only addition to Duke Robert’s cathedral made during the reign of King Roger. These sorry remnants of what was clearly a much larger decorative scheme, drawn ultimately from Islamic models, cannot conceivably have belonged to the *masḡid al-ḡāmi’* destroyed in 1072, nor can they be survivals of the original decoration of Duke Robert’s cathedral. Pending a new, systematic and thorough reexamination of the painted wooden beams, it would, however, be premature to attribute them to Archbishop Walter II’s reconstruction, and thus to rule out the possibility that they could be the remains of the decoration described by al-Idrīsī.

92 al-Idrīsī, *Opus Geographicum* (n. 38), p. 591, ll. 18–19. For the central importance of marvels and wonders (*‘aḡā’ib*) in the aesthetic programme of the painted ceilings of the Cappella Palatina – and by extension the whole of King Roger’s palace – see Johns 2010, 2015 and 2016.

93 Falcandus, *Epistola* (n. 2), p. 6; Johns 2002, p. 82; Eugenius 1964, no. 24, pp. 127–31 (trans. 162–4), ll. 65–69.

94 Vincenza Garofalo, “A Methodology for Studying *muqarnas*: the Extant Examples in Palermo”, *Muqarnas*, xxvii (2010), pp. 357–406, sp. p. 365 n. 38, 370, fig. 21 (see also fig. 22 for the row of five masonry *muqarnas* niches on the exterior of the southwest tower, the deployment of which, to my mind, suggests that they may have travelled further from their Islamic source than did the vault inside the apsidal tower).

95 Francesca M. Anzelmo, “I soffitti dipinti della Cappella Palatina di Palermo e l’orizzonte mediterraneo”, PhD thesis, in *Memoria e materia dell’opera d’arte attraverso i processi di produzione, storicizzazione, conservazione, musealizzazione*, Viterbo 2013, vol. I, pp. 81–100 (with full bibliography), sp. pp. 84–88, and vol. II, plates II.48–51. The essence of her conclusions may be found in *eadem*, “I soffitti dipinti della Cappella Palatina di Palermo e le coperture lignee ‘islamiche’ della Sicilia normanna”, in *Memoria e Materia dell’opera d’arte. Proposte e riflessioni*, Elisa Anzellotti, Costanza Rapone, Luca Salvatelli eds, Rome 2014, pp. 13–26. I am, as always, extremely grateful to Dr Anzelmo for having shared and discussed her work with me.

První normanská katedrála v Palermu

Chrám nejsvětější Matky Boží Roberta Guiscarda

Palermská katedrála je jedním z nejdůležitějších architektonických úspěchů Normanů v jižní Itálii. Z křesťanské baziliky se během muslimské okupace Sicílie (827–1061) stala mešita. Budova se vrátila ke své původní funkci kostela v roce 1072, kdy Palermo dobyli Normané. I když byl chrám v pozdním osmnáctém a raném devatenáctém století upraven v neoklasicistním stylu, je jeho dnešní podoba jednomyslně považována za stavbu objednanou arcibiskupem Waltrem II. *Protofamiliarium* a vysvěcenou v roce 1185.

Kritická a podrobná analýza pramenů o dobytí Palerma a o přeměně mešity v chrám pod patronátem normanského vévody Roberta Guiscarda vrhá nové světlo na tento fascinující stavební *palimpsest*.

Reinterpretace písemných pramenů, zvláště Amatovy *Historia Normannorum*, nám poskytuje důležité informace o topografii Palerma v období normanského vítězství. Město bylo rozděleno na tři oblasti: vnější město obklopené hradbami a zahrnující nové čtvrti s fátimovskou citadelou nazvanou al-Khāliṣa, staré vnitřní město Qaṣr, a nakonec další malou citadelu v rámci Qaṣru s názvem Galca. Právě v poslední jmenované založil Robert Guiscard po dobytí města v roce 1072 novou normanskou pevnost.

Díky objasnění topografického rozvržení města je možné lépe porozumět i jedné z doposud přehlížených pasáží Amatova spisu, v níž Robert Guiscard při své procházce po Galce uviděl katedrální chrám Matky Boží, který byl umístěn v Qaṣru, velmi blízko Galcy. Nařídil jeho stržení a nové vystavění, které mělo být hmatatelným znamením křesťanské úcty v nově dobytém muslimském Palermu. Tato interpretace je potvrzena

dvěma dalšími písemnými prameny, badateli často chybně interpretovanými, které ve skutečnosti odkazují právě k vysvěcení nové katedrály v Palermu v roce 1077.

Od základů nová výstavba normanské katedrály v letech 1072–1077 odporuje teorii o pouhé proměně předchozí stavby a zcela mění naše vnímání katedrály postavené arcibiskupem Waltrem II. v pozdním dvanáctém století. Nová katedrála do velké míry použila a obsáhla Guiscardův chrám. Důkazem je půdorys katedrály, který se liší od současných siculo-normanských chrámů, které byly echem prvních normanských fundací v jižní Itálii. Díky těmto novým poznatkům může být vysvětlena i předpokládaná rychlost prací objednaných Waltrem II. Důkaz o stavbě, která předcházela chrámu z pozdního dvanáctého století by mohla poskytnout také přítomnost krypty vně apsidy a kaple sv. Máří Magdalény na jižní straně transeptu.

Katedrála v Palermu tak může být považována za transkulturní stavbu *par excellence*. Zároveň by měly být provedeny nové archeometrické studie, které by objasnily osudy první normanské katedrály v Palermu. Vyvstává před námi totiž stavba, nabízející nový pohled na katedrálu v období korunovace krále Rogera II v roce 1130.

Jeden z nejdůležitějších pramenů popisujících katedrálu před renovací Waltra II. pochází z pera královského geografa al-Idrīsī, který svůj spis dokončil před rokem 1154. V Addendu ke článku představuje Jeremy Johns překlad al-Idrīsīho popisu a přidává tak nové prvky i důležitá vodítka k sestavení nového pohledu na Palermskou katedrálu v době krále Rogera II.