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Twenty Itineraries
Designed to Help
You Explore the
Cultural Heritage
of Palermo and
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Soprintendenza per i Beni culturali
e ambientali di Palermo

ARCHITECTURE AND ART IN THE 14TH CENTURY

by **Gaetano Bongiovanni**

REGIONE SICILIANA
Assessorato dei Beni culturali
e dell'Identità siciliana



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Architecture and Art in the 14th Century

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ARCHITECTURE AND ART IN THE 14TH CENTURY

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The 14th century is crucial to the history of Sicily. It is at this point that some of the underlying characteristics are determined, lasting through almost to the time of the Unification of Italy itself and perhaps even beyond.

The most important is the end of a strong centralised government as it was under the Normans, and its replacement by feudalism and the fragmentary power of the barons. At the end of this era, at the beginning of the 15th century, Sicily ceases to be an independent kingdom and becomes a Viceroyalty. The sunset of the aims of the Norman sovereigns, who had made the Island the centre of their power, the place from which it shone out. Sicily becomes independent after the peace of Caltabellotta (1302), but contextually isolated, becoming a marginal territory with respect to monarchical realities far more organised and powerful (the Angevins of Naples, the Aragonese and successively the Castillians), destined to become easy prey, though riotous and not easily governed.

Art, during this period, is therefore characterised, like its political history, by the presence of the great feudal families, who become the principal patrons, substituting themselves for the Sovereigns. They modify the urban cityscape with the construction of large important Palazzi, as tangible signs of their power. These magnificent buildings (Palazzo Chiaramonte, Palazzo Sclafani, Palazzo of Count Frederick etc), as is normal in an era of factions and strife, all look as though they are impenetrable fortresses. And in fact even the churches and monasteries that are built to house the influx of friars (the Franciscans,

Dominicans, Augustinians), are also built to the same plan, massive and robust (the Church of San Francesco d'Assisi, and that of Sant'Agostino).

The artistic beauty comes out in the particulars, where the craftsmanship of the master carvers and stone sculptors shines out: portals, windows, rose-windows, capitals all possess the lightness, the finesse, the preciousness that ponderous defensive walls seem to negate. If the cities resemble ancient palimpsests (handwritten codices that were erased and rewritten for lack of parchment), then it is possible to assert that in a city like Palermo, although heavily redesigned by the Baroque era, the imprint of the 14th century has not been cancelled out. It permeates not only the Palazzi and the churches mentioned previously, but also the little details that the visitor can glimpse if he takes the time to raise his eyes in the historical city centre: delicate mullion windows, both *bifore* and *trifore* (two and three lights), elegant two-coloured arches, embellished by the black of the lava stone, towers that reach up to the sky as if to liberate all the energy contained in these massive buildings. This 14th century Palermitan codex also has some magnificent illuminated pages, which bear witness to the pomp and luxury of an era usually defined as the autumn of the Middle Ages. One such page is the wooden ceiling, painted around 1380, of the *Sala dei Baroni* in the Palazzo Chiaramonte, known as the Steri. It is without doubt a unique and fascinating work of art, resembling a multicoloured casket.

ARCHITECTURE AND ART OF THE 14TH CENTURY

The artistic culture of 14th century Palermo and its Provinces appears dominated by a strong sense of dualism. On one hand the vitality of the architectural and artistic traditions of the Norman and Swabian eras, which continues to provide models and customs, both for the compositional framework and the architectural construction, as well as for some other iconographical and typological examples [other arts]. It is a figurative culture, tightly interwoven with the political and economical history that reflects the feudal dimension.

On the other hand, works of art arrive from outside the Island, via the trade routes between the port of Palermo and those of the Italian peninsula, above all from Pisa and Genoa. These works introduce a more modern artistic culture, originating mainly from the principal Tuscan centres.

The double accounting artistic register of tradition and circulation can at first glance refer to the feudal families who replaced the power of the sovereign in the 14th century. The cultural updates are due to the penetration of models that lie outside the Norman-Swabian traditions, but also to the arrival of works of art from outside Sicily. This last aspect marks the opening of 14th century Palermo towards new, figurative contexts. This dichotomy between internal and external, tradition and cultural circulation is the basis for understanding the existing monuments, through which it is possible to trace the history of art throughout the 14th century.

The peace of Caltabellotta, in 1302, brought a long lasting truce between the Aragon, who governed the Island and the Angevin who, from their Neapolitan base, endeavoured to reconquer Sicily. The truce lasted until 1337, year of the death of Frederick III of Aragon. For almost sixty years the historical events in Sicily are

connected to a political and social scene in which a real feudal anarchy (created by the predominance of the local power of the barons over the unitary power of the monarch), first eroded and then basically wiped out regal authority. The baronial factions—Catalan and Latin, principally represented by the Palizzi, Ventimiglia, Chiamonte, Sclafani and Alagona families—predominate in this particular period. Following the death of Frederick IV, the Simple, the guardianship of the Infanta Maria—entrusted to Artale of Alagona, who then assumed the Regency—reopened old contrasts between the barons.

It was Alagona who proposed a peaceful solution, with the suggestion that Sicily should be divided into four zones of influence. Artale of Alagona took Catania and its hinterland, Manfredi Chiamonte dominated Modica, the Agrigentine and above all, Palermo, Francesco Ventimiglia controlled the Nebrodi and the Madoni whilst Guglielmo Peralta received all

the southern part of the Island. The manoeuvres of feudal Sicily were focused on the destiny of the heir to the throne, Maria of Aragon, kept by Alagona in the Ursino castle in Catania, from where she was kidnapped and taken to Spain by the Catalan faction. Here she was married to Martin of Aragon. Aspiring to the Sicilian throne, his army brought Queen Maria back to Sicily, landing at the port of Trapani in March of 1392. The conflict with the Latin faction, headed by Andrea Chiaramonte, concluded dramatically two

months later, with the execution of the Baron in his magnificent family Palazzo, right in front of the symbol of the feudal power of the Chiaramonte family.

The most accredited historiographer defines as 'Chiaramontan' the 14th century Sicilian art, present, above all, in the western area of the Island. This privileged the formal character of this feudal patronage, which is evident in the architecture and in its decoration, works created by master craftsmen who were formed in the workshops during the Swabian era or in the

1
*Palermo, Church of
San Francesco d'Assisi.
Façade*



ARCHITECTURE AND ART IN THE 14TH CENTURY

2

*Palermo, Palazzo
Chiaromonte. Portal*

Palermitan Cathedral. Their ability can be clearly seen in the carvings on the portals and windows, in the molding of the frames and the shelves, that is in those works that they had habitually executed.

3

*Palermo, Church of
Sant'Agostino. Main
entrance and rose
window*

The most important architectural monuments are certainly the fortified Palazzi of the Chiaromonte and the Sclafani in Palermo; Palazzi that were like Royal Palaces, copying the latest Norman architectural style, the one with the most chromatic verve. But it should be pointed out that “it was certainly a reinterpretation or a continuation realised by different artists from those of the creators” (Bellafiore, 1970, p. 107). Up until the ‘70’s, the strong anti-Angevin sentiments of the Aragon Kings



did not favour artistic circulation with the Neapolitans, where the Angevins reigned, even if there was a certain exchange of courtesies between the two dynasties. In fact the wife of Frederick III of Aragon, Eleanor of Anjou, was the sister of the King of Naples. However, relations with Liguria and Pisa and even the Kingdom of Aragon, were excellent all through the 14th century, helped on by the presence of merchants from those lands, working out of Palermo, where they held a kind of monopoly on commerce. It should be noted that the oath taken by Peter III of Aragon, at the moment of his Sicilian coronation, to return to the good government of the Norman King William II, should not be taken in the sense of a programmed return to the figurative culture of the Norman dynasty. Even if the continual return to the architectural motifs and plastic decorations of Norman-Swabian origin are a given fact, it must be born in mind that it is necessary to distinguish architectural events from those—far more open to outside influences—of paintings and sculpture, especially imported works of art, which notwithstanding their intrinsic quality, open new figurative horizons.





Architecture

The 14th century Palermitan architecture shows certain peculiarities that allow it to be only partially in accordance with figurative gothic art, both Transalpine and Mediterranean. There are stylistic gothic elements, such as the lancet arches, decorative tracery of rose windows and windows, vertical emphasis inserted in a complex network of bi-chromic decoration with an ample use of lava stone all these elements repeat the decorative procedures used in Sicily in the Norman era. Ever present in the portals and the windows of the churches and Palazzi of the nobility is a decorative motif formed by a broken line, a zig-zag of Norman origin and visible both in the Cathedral of Cefalù and in that of Monreale. The principal examples of these motifs, widespread throughout Palermo, are to be found in the archivolts of the overlapping arches of the portal

of the Church of San Francesco d'Assisi, in a window of the loggia of Palazzo Chiaramonte, other portals of the same building, in the portal of the Church of Sant'Agostino and in a whole series of Chiaramontan edifices in Agrigento, Favara and Sambuca.

The examples of this decorative fantasy, created by a refined composition of lava stone tiles, are found in the windows of the Steri in Palermo. This type of architecture, heavily influenced by the highlighting of plastic elements through the decoration, has been dubbed 'Chiaramontan', even if in some other buildings such as the Chapel of Sant'Antonio, built alongside the Steri, there is a purer gothic style, which can be compared, according to Toesca, to the Angevin constructions in Naples. The building that synthesises—as if it were a declaration—the peculiarities of the Chiaramontan architecture is without

4
*Palermo, Palazzo
Chiaramonte. Mullion
window*

ARCHITECTURE AND ART IN THE 14TH CENTURY

5

Palermo, Palazzo
Sclafani. Detail of the
façade

doubt the *Hosterium magnum* of Palermo, the Steri. In 1306, Giovanni Chiaramonte having bought a piece of land from the prior of the Monastery of Santa Maria of Ustica, situated between the Arabic citadel (the *Halisah*, Kalsa) and the sea, builds his own Palazzo, agreeing also to drain the area. It is possible to compare the Osterio Magno of Cefalù, built by the Ventimiglia, to this building, of which the two *bifore* and a *trifora* are worthy of attention. The sensation of suppressed energy emitted by the simple and severe architectural elements of the bifore of the Osterio Magno are attenuated in the large triode,

which shows evidence of a desire for rich ornamentation in the archivolts, the bandings and in the arches sitting on broad pulvins. Other significant architectural elements of this style are the portal of the ex church of the Annunziata, nowadays the Music Academy of Palermo, the tower of the Palace of Count Frederick and that of the Church of San Nicolò in the Albergheria, nowadays transformed into a belfry. It is also necessary to cite the architectural decoration of the Capitulary Hall of the monastery of Santa Caterina of Palermo, found after the Baroque plaster was removed: the location of the doorway,





flanked by mullioned windows, according to the historian Spatarisano, faithfully reproduces the typical façades of the 14th century Capitulary Hall. This can also be observed in the monastery of Sant'Agostino, that of the Baida in Palermo and in the Monastery of the Santo Spirito in Agrigento.

A more complex and minutely detailed decoration, in which every single ornamental element is inserted into a complex and elaborate (convoluted) decorative plan, can be found in the façade of the Cathedral of Palermo, giving onto Via Matteo Bonello. It also appears on two of the higher levels of the so-called belfry of the Martorana, which, according to certain historiographers, could have been built and decorated during the 14th century. In fact, the first two levels of the Martorana reflect the characteristics of architecture from the Norman era, whilst the last two levels propose a decorative diversity, in which the light, filtering through the tracery of the ornamentation, plays its part in liberating the construction into the surrounding spatiality.

The other great 14th century Palazzo in Palermo was the one erected by Matteo Sclafani in 1330, perhaps in direct competition with the Chiaramonte. A little larger than the *Hosterium magnum*, the Palazzo does not show, just as the Steri

does not, any direct connection with the surrounding cityscape. The unknown architect wanted to exalt the abstract geometric volumes with a rhythmic repetition of spaces, and the decorative positioning of the pillars, connected by the interwoven ornamental arches, identical on all four façades. Compared to Palazzo Chiaramonte, this Palazzo is decorated with a distinct Islamic taste, shown principally by the thin interwoven arches. The ground plans of the two great Palermitan Palazzi express a net volume, almost crystalline, with a cloistered courtyard, which echoes the iconographic schemes of the Castles of the early Kings of Sicily.

The other important moment in the 14th

6
Cefalù, Osterio Magno. Main block on Via Amendola with two mullion window

7
Palermo, Conservatorio di Musica 'V. Bellini'. Detail of the portal

8
Palermo, Convent of Badia





century architecture is related to religious architecture and above all that of the Friars, who built or transformed their buildings: the Monasteries of Sant'Agostino (order of the Augustinians), of San Domenico (Dominican Friars) and of San Francesco d'Assisi (Franciscans), besides other important buildings of arch-brotherhoods such as that of the Holy Annunciata. They had only a partial autonomy, because in the religious buildings one often comes across the patronage of the aristocracy, as born out by the presence of the coat-of-arms of both the Chiaramonte and the Sclafani on the façade of Sant'Agostino, and those of the Chiaramonte in the cloisters of San Domenico. The coat-of-arms of the Sclafani family is also in the centre of the small feudal town of Sclafani Bagni. Benedetto Mastrangelo, heir to a well-known Palermitan family, endowed, in his will of 1310, the building of a large Dominican monastery, in his houses on the Cassaro—thus founding the Monastery of Santa Caterina. The religious buildings reflect the vows of poverty and rigour taken by the founding orders that settled in Palermo: the Franciscans in the Kalsa, the preachers and the Augustinians in the Seralcadio (nowadays il Capo), the Carmelites in the Albergheria. After the initial phase of settling in, these churches added Chapels, usually for the use of the noble families. Amongst these is that of the Blessed Gérard and of the Calvello in the Church of San Francesco d'Assisi. The historians of urban planning have frequently underlined how, in the context of the lay out of 14th century Palermo, the imposing Palazzi of the Chiaramonte and

the Sclafani are of great significance: Palazzo Sclafani is located in the upper city near the Royal Palace whilst Palazzo Chiaramonte is next door to the Arab citadel known as the *Halisab* (or Kalsa). Therefore it appears fair to say that the buildings of the two powerful families constitute almost a redefinition of the city of Palermo, in relation to the new feudal anarchy.

Bottari's assumption, although still valid, sees Sicilian architecture as the epilogue of the Swabian tradition, but the gothic echoes need to be pointed out—not only represented by the rose windows on the Church façade—but also as a direct Island influence, in the architectural patrimony of the feudal era, with first one then the other aspect predominating according to the taste and choices made by the patron.



10
*Palermo, Cloisters of
the Convent of San
Domenico*

11
*Palermo, Cloisters of
the Convent of San
Domenico*

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12

*Palermo, Cloisters of
the Convent of San
Domenico. Detail*

Sculpture

Sculpture in 14th century Palermo appears to be mostly connected to the architecture of the time, as it dealt mainly with capitals and pulvins in monasteries such as those in San Domenico and the Baida, (a pulvin is an element in the shape of the base of an upside-down pyramid, sometimes positioned on columns, between the capital and the impost of the arch that rests on the column).

Three of the mediaeval corridors remain of the cloisters of San Domenico. The fourth was demolished in 1640, during the enlargement of the adjacent church. The compositional choice of load bearing, tall twinned columns together with



massive, decorated pulvins, on which the ogival arches of the archivolt rest, are very similar to the examples of the Norman cloisters in Cefalù and above all of Monreale. By reutilising an older and nobler model, they offer a style featuring the customary typologies and plasticity of the Norman era. The phytomorphic vigour of the decoration, even if it is created in a rather crude style, can be found in other Palermitan 14th century decorative elements, as for example, in the windows of the Steri. Important families of the time contributed to the building of the cloisters, and the coat-of-arms of the Chiaramonte are carved into the foliage of two of the capitals in the north corridor. The Marquis of Villabianca offers an interesting proposal for the chronology of the cloister and its sculptural decoration, by attributing the construction to Manfredi Chiaramonte



the Elder, thereby dating it to the second decade of the 14th century. The sculpture in the Baida cloisters appears far more integrated, as it was built at the same time as the monastery in 1388, commissioned by Manfredi Chiamonte the Younger, but subsequently confiscated by the State as the feudal Lord had fallen into disgrace. The church's façade does not really resemble any other building of the time, but the upper part reveals certain Gothic similarities, with an encased mullion window with five lobes, figuratively recalling the coat-of-arms of the Chiamonte. It has been suggested that both in the cloisters of San Domenico and that of the Baida, local Sicilian stonemasons used a technique more suited to graveyard chisellers than to Master sculptors, creating capitals and pulvins that have variously been interpreted as a more cursive 14th century version of those in

the Monreale cloisters, which is, without doubt, of a much higher iconographical level. On closer inspection, the work of the graveyard sculptors imitates some of the details of the Monreale cloisters, such as the corner motif 'Annunciation', formed of two beasts with a single head, which is reproduced on the base of one of the columns in the Baida. According to Guttilla, in her thesis published in 1985, "presumed elements of the Roman repertoire (Cefalù, Monreale), migrate into a Gothic style, betraying its essential characteristics and announcing what amounts to a complete division between the model and the architectural context". The other aspect of the diffusion of sculpture in 14th century Sicily is connected to its external relationships, principally with Naples, which displays a language that is intrinsic to the Tuscan and in particular to the Sienese schools.

A precious bas-relief depicting the 'Annunciation', now in the Academy of Music in Palermo, has been attributed by the writer to an unknown Neapolitan follower of Tino di Camaino. The work probably originates from the Church of the old Arch-Brotherhood of the Annunciata, founded in 1345. Amongst the other 14th

13
Palermo, Conservatorio di Musica "V. Bellini". Neapolitan follower of Tino di Camaino 'Annunciation'

14
Sclafani Bagni. Coat of Arms of the Sclafani family

15

Palermo, Galleria
Regionale della Sicilia
di Palazzo Abatellis.
Neapolitan sculptor,
'Providence'



century works of art present in the Church of the Annunciata is the triptych of 'Saint Anna, the Madonna and Child amongst the Saints' commissioned in 1387 from the Pisan painter Jacopo di Michele, known as Gera, now in the Diocesan Museum of Palermo. It is proof, together with the bas-relief, of the 'high' level of the patrons of art in the 14th century. The bas-relief is not a plaque in itself but thanks to the chiseling between the partition with the Angel and that with the aedicule with the Virgin, it is possible to imagine that the work was part of a series of reliefs forming a plastic complex, probably placed as ornamentation of the opening of a window, a portal or an arch. Elements provided by a stylistic analysis lead to a Neapolitan influence and above all to the work of the Sienese painter and architect Tino di Camaino (Siena circa 1280 – Naples 1337), executed together with an imposing workshop, who carry the influence of the sculptor long past the time of his death. Our bas-relief, attributable to one of Tino da Camaino's Neapolitan followers, can be dated some time around 1345, year of the foundation of the Arch-Brotherhood and was, in all probability, imported from Naples.

In this work of art it is evident that the pictorial line influenced by the school of Giotto, very present in the Neapolitan artistic culture, emanating from the work of Giotto and his pupil Maso di Banco in Naples, moves with great ease from sculpture to painting, as can be seen in the figure of the Angel of the Annunciation, with wide spread wings, ornamented with a variety of decorative carved lines.

That the imports from Naples were not



sporadic can be attested to by other works, as for example the little statue of the 'Providence' in the gallery of Palazzo Abatellis, attributed to a Neapolitan sculptor of the first half of the 14th century. To conclude our itinerary through 14th century sculptures, one cannot forget to mention the sarcophagus of Frederick of Antioch (1305), in the crypt of the Cathedral in Palermo and that of William of Aragon, Duke of Athens (1328), in the same Cathedral. The bas-reliefs on these two sarcophagi, especially that of Frederick of Antioch, reproduce archaic models that can be connected to some of the classifications of the Byzantine artistic culture and that are also to be found on the 14th century lid of the sarcophagus of Lucca Palizzi, now in the Church of Santa Maria della Catena in Palermo, with fine phytomorphic bas-relief decorations and coat-of-arms on the sloping lid. The sarcophagus of Frederick of Antioch appears far more coordinated, showing on the front, the 'clypeus' (that is the decorative element in the shape of a shield) with Christ blessing between

the announcing Angel and the Virgin on the throne, under ogival arches. The dramatic wooden *Crucifix*, donated to the Cathedral of Palermo in 1331 by Manfredi Chiamonte the Elder, deserves a mention. It is a tangible sign of a further adoption of the model of Christ suffering on the Cross, found throughout Europe, especially in the Holy Roman Empire (Germany). Recently this work has been attributed to a Rhenish sculptor, perhaps active in Palermo through the intermediation of the Teutonic Knights of the Magione, but it is more probable that it was imported.



16
Palermo, Cathedral crypt. Sarcophagus of Frederick of Antioch

17
Palermo, Church of Santa Maria della Catena. Sarcophagus of Lucca Palizzi

18

*Palermo, Palazzo
Chiaromonte. Painted
wooden ceiling*

Painting

The most complex work, the ultimate pictorial test for the comprehension of feudal 14th century Palermo, is certainly the grandiose wooden ceiling of the Reception Room in Palazzo Chiaromonte. It was decorated, by order of Manfredi III, between 1377 and 1380 by the Sicilian painters Cecco da Naro, Simone da Corleone and Darenu da Palermo. The ceiling seems to be divided in two, lengthways, by a band that runs along the median arch. On each side of this central axis are 24 rectangular transversal beams. This complex wooden construction made of main beams, secondary transverse beams and coffers, is entirely decorated with a dense, non figurative ornamentation with floral and naturalistic motifs that are almost geometrical in their design.

In his thesis on the ceiling of the Steri, published in 1975, Ferdinando Bologna suggests that this method of densely filling all the available space can be traced back to the Muslim decorative taste, present in the ceilings of both the Palatine Chapel and that in Cefalù. From a historical point of view, the decoration of this ceiling can be placed in the context of the marriage of Manfredi Chiaromonte with Eufemia Ventimiglia, a member of one of the four most powerful Sicilian families of the 14th century. In fact, it is possible to read into the Steri ceiling all the pride of the Chiaromonte family of being the centrepin of all the families related to them by marriage. This aspect is reinforced by the profusion of coats-of-arms that covers the entire ceiling, as if it were a chivalric declaration aimed at celebrating the





19-20
Palermo, Palazzo
Chiaramonte. Detail of
the ceiling



21

Palermo, Palazzo
Chiaromonte. Lunette
depicting the Virgin and
Child sitting amongst
the Saints

prestige of the feudatory patron. In the décor of this ceiling there are correlations with the illustrations in the codex: miniatures transposed in larger versions, with anaconical motifs, some of Islamic influence and others of western origin such as the 'drôleries' [*drôlleries*], representations that are simultaneously fantastic and monstrous. Historians of mediaeval literature have stated how the ceiling of the Steri constitutes a "figurative summary of romantic literature" and following a recent supposition "it is highly probable that Manfredi Chiaromonte... was a keen reader of chivalric romances and loved... to see reproduced in the rooms in his Palazzo the stories from his favourite readings, with the addition of moral allegories" (this was written by Francesco Abbate in 1988 in his *Storia dell'arte nell'Italia meridionale* [History of Art in Southern Italy]). The frequent presence of female figures (Iseult, Suzanne, Judith, Helen of Troy, Helen of Narbonne) has been interpreted as homage to his recent marriage with Eufemia Ventimiglia. From the point of view of the linguistic style it has been suggested that the painters working on the site were familiar with both the

Maghrebi artistic culture and with that stemming from Moorish Andalusia. The critical reading of the ceiling's paintings leads to the opinion that this work is a revisitation in a western chivalric and advanced gothic key, of the ceilings painted during the Norman era (Cefalù and the Palatine Chapel). Moreover, it would seem undeniable the presence, in most of the paintings, of a 'courtly' aspect, attributable to artists who were more accustomed to painting on panels—like the Maestro del Polittico di Trapani, to whom, however, Bologna assigns a marginal role in this building site.

Bologna's efforts to identify the various individuals that contributed to the pictorial decoration, does not in any way affect the idea of a work-of-art that has a strong visual impact, notwithstanding the quality of the single depictions. The painters mentioned above did not have the exclusivity; Bologna has identified others on the basis of stylistic groupings. Amongst others, besides the cited Maestro del Polittico di Trapani, the Maestro del Giudizio di Salomone emerges, as the painter of numerous panels, amongst which are the '*Woodland Spirits fighting*'



and the *Fight between the Crusaders and the Saracens*, as well as various 'Stories of Helen of Narbonne' (a famous character in mediaeval stories and also present in Boccaccio's *Decameron*). The vivacious narration of these stories makes it obvious that the artist was familiar with the humorous 14th century miniatures of the Bolognese school. Other panels that have been removed from the ceiling of the Steri are now in the Gallery of Palazzo Abatellis. One of these is the '*Biblical Scene*', by the Maestro di Paride ed Elena, another of the painters identified by Bologna.

There are also some frescoes in the Steri and the adjacent Chapel of Sant'Antonio, which reveal a culture very similar to the painted ceiling and which can, therefore, be defined as belonging to the Chiaramontan circle. Of importance are the '*Virgin with Child between the Saints John and Peter the Martyr*' painted on one of the walls of the portico and the '*Face of Christ*' in the Chapel. This important pictorial fragment was certainly executed by two of the painters working on the ceiling: the Maestro del Giudizio di Salomone (the Master of the Judgement of Solomon) and the Maestro della Tradizione Giottesca Napoletana (the Master of the Neapolitan Tradition of Giotto). Evidently, the use of the same artisans for the frescoes and the

painted ceiling resulted in a unity in the stylistic composition.

The more modern aspects of 14th century painting reach Sicily via the trade routes from Genoa and Pisa. Genoese painting at that time was heavily influenced by the culture of Pisa and Siena, and many works of art created in the inland cities of Tuscany, principally in Siena and Florence, were exported from the port of Pisa. In 1346 the '*Madonna of Humility*' arrives in Palermo from Liguria. The painting is signed by Bartolomeo Pellerano da Camogli and is now in the Gallery of Palazzo Abatellis. It is a typical artistic expression of Siennese art.

Iconographically and stylistically similar to this work is another tempera on wood, once again depicting the '*Madonna of Humility*', nowadays in the Diocesan Museum in Monreale. This Siennese work

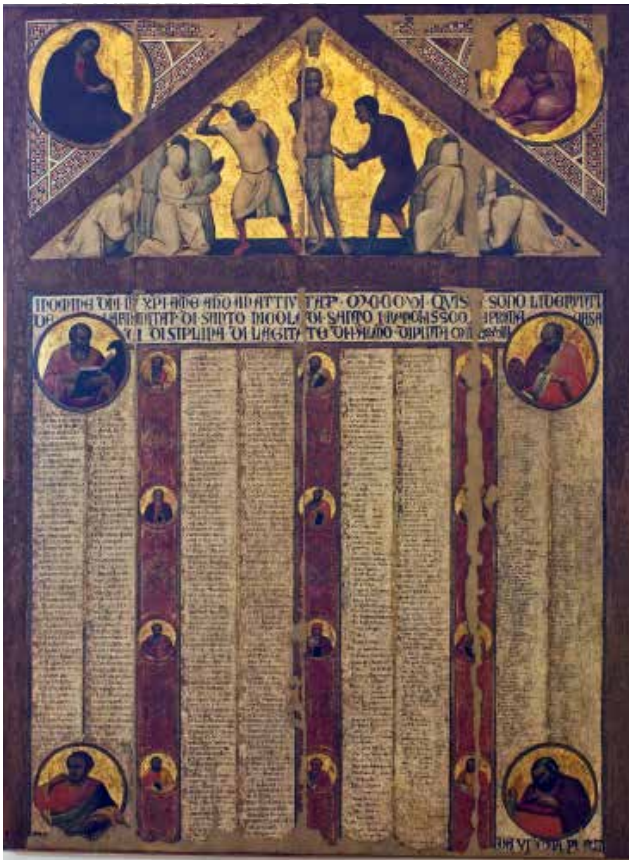
22

Palermo, Chapel of Sant'Antonio Abate in the Steri. The face of Christ

23

Palermo, Galleria Regionale della Sicilia di Palazzo Abatellis. '*Madonna of Humility*' by Bartolomeo Pellerano da Camogli





origin. But the most important work to be exported from Pisa was the *'Panel with the list of the Departed'* for the Brotherhood of San Nicolò Reale, dated and signed by Antonio Veneziano (Antonio the Venetian), who worked on the great site of the Camposanto in Pisa around the '80's, and it is now in the Diocesan Museum of Palermo. The Adriatic influence on the formation of Antonio Veneziano is very evident in this work, and produce some tangents with the so-called Venetian Cretan style. In the *Panel* the frontal positioning of the figures is in *'tondi'* (round frames).

Jacopo di Michele, known as the Gera, also painted two of the panels from a dismantled pictorial complex depicting *Saint George and Saint Agatha*—now on show in the Gallery of Palazzo Abatellis. Arriving from Genoa, besides the *Madonna* by Pellerano da Camogli, was also *Saint George transfixing the Dragon*, by the Ligurian Nicolò da

24
 Palermo, Diocesan Museum. *'Tabellone dei defunti'* by Antonio Veneziano (Antonio the Venetian)

25
 Monreale, Diocesan Museum. *'Madonna of Humility'*

from the second half of the 14th century, was probably commissioned for the Cathedral of Monreale either by the Archbishop Emanuele Spinola (1338-1362) or even more likely, by the Archbishop Guglielmo de Monstri, Archbishop of Monreale from 1362 to 1379. Numerous other works arrive from Pisa, including the *'Madonna with Child sitting on the throne surrounded by Angels'* (originally in the Abbey of San Martino delle Scale), by Tuino Vanni and the triptych with *'Saint Anne Metterza between the Apostles John and James'* (originally in the Arch-Brotherhood of the Santissima Annunziata), by Jacopo di Michele, known as the Gera. Both were painters from Pisa and incorporated certain refined aspects of the Sienese culture, without forgetting others of Florentine





26
Termini Imerese, Church of the Gancia. 'Saint George slays the dragon' by Nicolò da Voltri

27
Palermo, Diocesan Museum. Triptych by Jacopo di Michele, known as Gera of Pisa

28
Palermo, Galleria Regionale della Sicilia di Palazzo Abatellis. 'Deesis' (Goddess)

Voltri, who signed it on the scabbard of the knight's sword. It was commissioned for the Franciscan Church della Gancia in Termini Imerese.

In the management of the iconographic theme, *Saint George* confirms the chivalric area of the 'courtly combat'. There are at least two more panels, which belong in the context of Palermitan 14th century painting, still heavily influenced by traces of the Byzantine style. One is the little icon depicting the *Haghiosoritissa Virgin*, in the Treasury of the Cathedral in Palermo, similar in style to the works of Paolo Veneziano, and the very vivacious '*Deesis*'—in the Regional Gallery in Palazzo Abatellis—by a Sicilian painter with a Byzantine culture, which expresses a chromatic range of colours, based on the blue tones, interlaced with touches of red (noted by Guida in a study in 2013). Concluding the pictorial itinerary of 14th century Palermo, is a work that opens a series of questions as to its probable date and its executor: the *Cross*, painted only on one side, in the Norman Church of the Santo Spirito in Palermo, dated at



ARCHITECTURE AND ART IN THE 14TH CENTURY

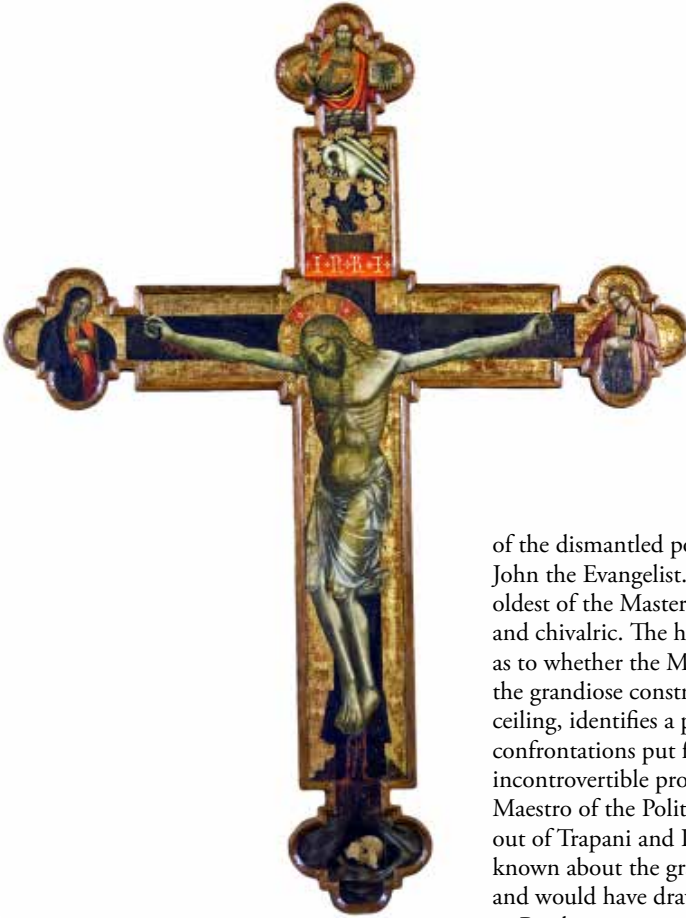
around the earliest part of the 14th century and which recalls typical Sienese works of art, such as those of Luca di Tommè and Giovanni di Pietro from Napoli, whilst the extended figure of Christ and the transparency of the loincloth, marked with repeated graphemes, point to a reference model originating from Pisa or Siena. The work has been attributed to the Maestro

del Polittico di Trapani, already cited in relation to his possible participation in the painting of the Steri ceiling. The Maestro del Polittico, so called because of his large polyptychs, now in the Pepoli Museum in Trapani, can, according to the art historian Roberto Longhi, be considered the first Sicilian artist who disconnects himself from the traditions of the late-Byzantine style



29

Palermo, Galleria
Regionale della Sicilia
di Palazzo Abatellis.
*'Incoronation of the
Virgin between the
Archangels Michael
and Raphael', by the
Maestro del Polittico di
Trapani*



and assumes, as a model, the Tuscan school of art, especially the models originating from Siena and Pisa, known to the Sicilians through the importation of works of art via the commercial trade routes.

Numerous works of art have been attributed to the Maestro del Polittico di Trapani, not just painted panels but miniatures, as well. In Palermo, besides the 'Cross' in the Church of the Santo Spirito, it is possible to view the 'Coronation of the Virgin between the Angels Michael and Raphael' as well as the 'Madonna of the Flower', both of which are on show in the Gallery of Palazzo Abatellis, where there is a panel which has survived from one

of the dismantled polyptychs with Saint John the Evangelist. This is perhaps the oldest of the Master's works, late Gothic and chivalric. The hypothesis of Bologna, as to whether the Master participated in the grandiose construction site of the Steri ceiling, identifies a probable origin, but the confrontations put forward do not provide incontrovertible proof. Certainly the Maestro of the Polittico, working mostly out of Trapani and Palermo, would have known about the grandiose Steri complex, and would have drawn some ideas from it. But his successive activities for the Brotherhoods and Religious entities show a different figurative culture.

In Palermo, and its province there is further pictorial evidence, mainly frescoes, which date anywhere between the 14th and the 15th century, but, in the language utilised, refer to the mature Gothic style. An example is the large fresco depicting the 'Mystical wedding of Saint Catherine of Alexandria' from the old Main Church of Castelbuono, the ancient stronghold of the Counts of Ventimiglia. Notwithstanding some elements of folklore, the calligraphic and linear style is expressed in thin figures with small lips and long hands; almost as if it were a vernacular translation of the late Gothic painting common in Sicily.

30
Palermo, Church of Santo Spirito. Maestro del Polittico di Trapani, painted cross

THE STORY OF HELEN OF NARBONNE

Amongst the stories belonging to the Chivalric cycle depicted in the ceiling of the Steri, the story of Helen of Narbonne is particularly interesting. It was largely circulated throughout the Middle Ages and is remembered for two equally famous versions. One of these was elaborated by William Shakespeare in his comedy ‘*All’s well that ends well*’. The other is in the 14th century *Decameron* by Giovanni Boccaccio, in the ninth Novel of the Third Day, in which the character is named Giletta.

“Giletta di Nerbona guerisce il re di Francia d’una fistola; domanda per marito Beltramo di Rossiglione, il quale, contra sua voglia sposatala, a Firenze se ne va per isdegno, dove vagheggiando una giovane, in persona di lei Giletta giacque con lui ed ebbene due figliuoli; per che egli poi, avutola cana, per moglie la tenne”.

This is how Boccaccio sums up the plot: Giletta, daughter of a celebrated physician, is in love with Count Bertrand of Roussillon. After she cures and heals the King of France and the King promises to recompense her, she asks for Bertrand’s hand in marriage. But Bertrand, once the marriage has been celebrated, abandons her and goes to live in Florence. Here Giletta joins him and takes the place of a woman with whom he is in love. She becomes pregnant and bears two sons by her husband, but unbeknownst to him. When they are grown up, she returns

to Bertrand and is finally received with all the honours of a wife.

The following is the finale of the novella, in a direct translation of the original text from the *Decameron*:

‘When the Time was expired (she was delivered of two Sons, both very like their Father, and as soon as she was able to bear the Fatigue of Travelling she left Florence, and) came without being known by any one to Montpellier; there she rested two or three Days, and then with her Children took the Road to Roussillon.

On her Arrival she enquired after the Health of her Lord, and hearing that he was well, and was that Day giving a great Feast to some Noblemen and Ladies in his Palace, she presented herself in the Hall where they were all assembled, wearing the Habit of a Pilgrim, in which she had left Roussillon, and holding her two Sons in her Arms: Then throwing herself at the Feet of her Husband with Tears streaming from her Eyes, she said: —”My Lord, I am your unhappy Wife, who, abandoned by you, did notwithstanding apply myself diligently to the Management of your Affairs; I have long wandered miserably about the World, and now come to demand you in the Name of God, since I have been able to accomplish those two Conditions you proposed by the Gentleman I sent to you; look on me, my Lord, and behold in my Arms not only one Son by you but two, behold likewise your Ring, and according to your Promise

receive and acknowledge me for your Wife.

The Count, who had listened attentively to her, was struck motionless with Astonishment. He knew the Ring, and observed the Children to be very like him, and wholly lost in the Perplexity into which those Accidents had thrown him, he asked her how it could be?

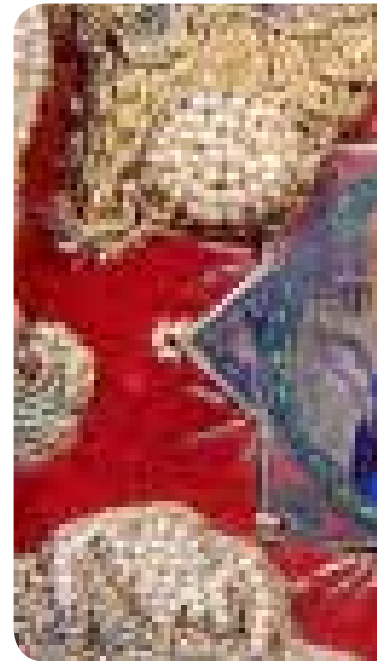
The Countess then, to the great Amazement of her Lord and all who were present, related every Circumstance that had happened to her since her Departure from Roussillon. Bertrand being convinced of the Truth of what she said, was struck with her Perseverance and Wisdom, and gazing on the Children, which he knew by their Resemblance to him to be his own, mindful of the Promise he had made her, and moved with the Remonstrances of the Ladies and Gentle|men that were with him, and the Intreaties of his People, who all conjured him to receive and acknowledge her, his Obstinacy at last gave Way. He raised the Countess from her Knees, embraced her tenderly, acknowledged her to be his lawful Wife, and the Children she brought with her his Sons. And then giving Orders for her being drest according to her Rank and Fortune, passed the rest of that Day and many others following, in Feasting and rejoicing, to the great Satisfaction of all the People in Roussillon. From this Time he always lived with her as his Wife, esteemed and honoured her for her Virtues, and loved her with the greatest Degree of Tenderness.

Gold and Silverware

As with the paintings and the sculpture, the gold and silverware, through the rare examples still existing, can be traced both to works influenced by the goldsmiths of the late Norman-Swabian era and to those imported, mostly from Tuscany. Amongst the decorative arts of the 14th century, the choice of picking out certain goldsmiths is connected to a search, by persons of refined taste, for that chivalric cycle and in relation to an art both regal and feudal. Enamelled, translucent plaques, realised in the first three decades of the century, representing the figures of the *Apostles* and the *Virgin*, were made in Palermo in the traditional mediaeval style of the Royal Palace. The technical execution is certainly traditional, but the more 'modern' translucent aspect evidences the desire for a decorative update. The figures are inserted into clypei, which are in turn framed by two staggered squares that form an eight-point star. Six of these enamels were inserted in the well-known *Paliotto Carondelet*, [frontal commissioned by Carondelet] now on show in the Cathedral Treasury. This is an extremely complex work, composed of elements that differ both in style and chronology. [Giovanni da Carondelet, born in Dole, France in 1469, son of the Chancellor of Bourgogne, was Archbishop of Palermo between 1519 and 1544].

The 14th century enamels, inserted in the frontal, along with two more depicting the Saints Peter and Jacob, also kept in the Cathedral Treasury, reflect a Byzantine taste in sacred iconography. Accascina pointed this out in his thesis of 1974 on Sicilian gold and silverware.

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31-32
Palermo, Cathedral Treasury. Antependium (Altar Frontal) 'carondelet', enameled plaques with St. Peter and the Virgin

“The great Barons, besides being privileged consumers of vestments, jewellery, silver for entertainment, [were] also patrons of religious gold and silverware for the churches in their feudal possessions” (taken from Abbate in his *Storia dell'arte nell'Italia meridionale*). The Reliquary in vermeil, in the Main Church in Geraci Siculo, dedicated to Santa Maria Maggiore, is made in two parts, which were then assembled together. The first part, dated by Accascina as from the first half of the 14th century, constitutes the base and shaft, decorated with enamels depicting the Saints and the coat-of-arms of the commissioning family—the Ventimiglia—and of the city of Gerace. The inscription

on the article bears the name of the maker, Pino di San Martino of Pisa and of the patron, Francesco Ventimiglia. The upper part, made in the 16th century, is formed of a crystal theca, framed by rays of gold lamina and heads of cherubim, topped by a small statue of Saint Bartholomew, patron Saint of Geraci. According to a more recent hypothesis, the work of art can be dated 1361-1365, when the Francesco II of Ventimiglia receives the title of Count of Geraci. The importation of the works of art from the Italian continent also involves what are known as the minor arts, and remaining in the context of 14th century Sicily, one cannot forget the arrival of the *Bust Reliquary of Saint Agatha*, the work of



the Sieneese Giovanni di Bartolo (Catania, Cathedral) and also of the Astylar Cross (that is on a pole so that it could be carried in procession), realised by Giovanni dei Cioni of Pisa, for the Main Church in Salemi, now in the Diocesan Museum of Mazara del Vallo.

It is likely that the very few surviving pieces from the 14th century allow one to presume a greater importation of works, above all from Tuscany, almost certainly dispersed over the centuries. And finally, there is an important *Pisside* (pyx or pyxides) from the 14th century, hexagonal in shape, decorated with figures of kings, originally in the Cathedral of Monreale.



33
*Monreale, Diocesan
Museum. Pyx*

INFORMATION SHEETS

34

*Palermo, Church of
San' Antonio Abate.
The Belfry*

BELFRY OF SANT'ANTONIO ABATE

Via Roma (corner Corso Vittorio
Emanuele) Palermo

Situated near the ancient Porta dei Patitelli, the belfry, adjacent to the Church of San' Antonio Abbate, was commissioned by John I and Manfred I of Chiaramonte between 1302 and 1313. The corners of the west and south façade are decorated with the coat-of-arms of the Chiaramonte family, the Palermitan Senate and the King of Aragon.



FAÇADE OF THE CATHEDRAL OF PALERMO

Corso Vittorio Emanuele Palermo

Between the end of the 13th century and the beginning of the following century, the growing taste for verticalism resulted in the modification of the size of the Cathedral and the addition of slender belfries on each of the four corner towers. Contextually, an ornamental plastic taste comprised of detailed decorations with slim arches, columns and various reliefs are visible on the building's façade, which gives onto



Via Matteo Bonello. The end result creates a chiaroscuro effect in evident contrast with the pure lines of all the Norman architecture. A slender mixtilinear cornice frames, on the façade, the central nave and the elegant mullioned windows in Chiaramontano style, perfectly aligned with the gothic portal dated 1352, crowned by an aedicula with the *Madonna*. The coat-of-arms of Aragon and that of the Palermitan Senate are placed either side. The architectural unity of the Cathedral's façade is compromised by the bronze doors added, in 1951, by the sculptor Filippo Sgarlata.

35
*Palermo, Cathedral.
Façade*

36
*Palermo, Cathedral.
Detail of the façade*

37

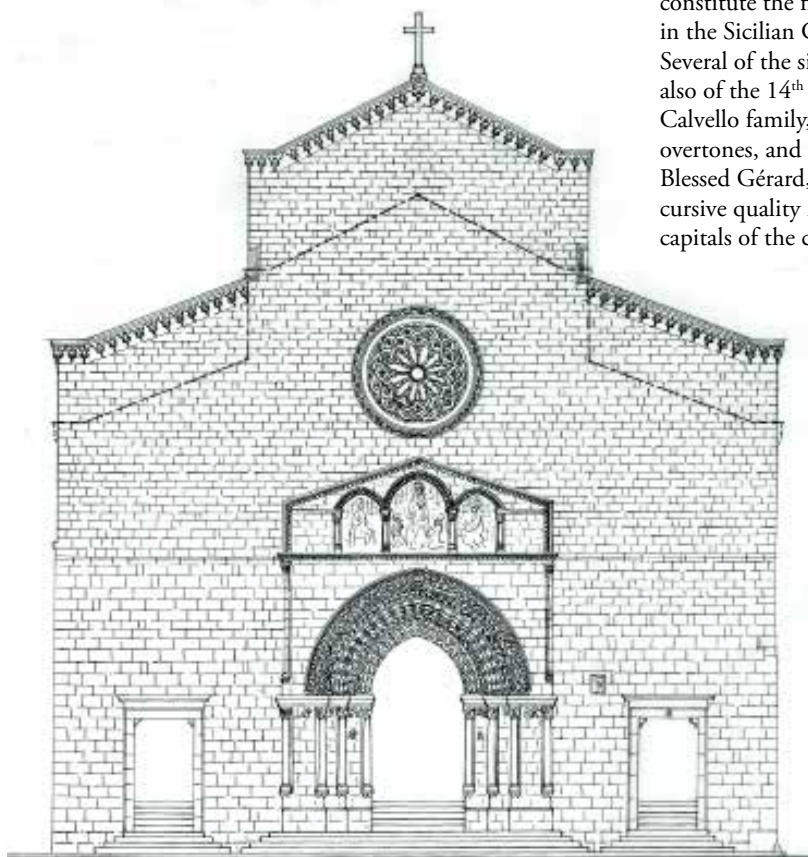
Palermo, Church of
San Francesco d'Assisi.
Drawing of the façade

**CHURCH OF SAN FRANCESCO
D'ASSISI**

Piazza San Francesco d'Assisi Palermo
Tel. +39 0916162819

The Church of San Francesco d'Assisi
was finished in 1277, year in which it

was dedicated to the Saint of Assisi. The building's façade, with a basic three-nave floorplan, is embellished with a richly decorated portal from 1302, characterised by its simultaneous plasticity and architectural complexity. It is decorated with a play of varied zig-zag motifs carved into the stone, with two plaques depicting the *Annunciation* and the *Symbols of the Evangelists*, which are considered to constitute the first examples of sculptures in the Sicilian Chiaramontan style. Several of the side-chapels on the aisles are also of the 14th century. One is that of the Calvello family, which has definite Norman overtones, and another is dedicated to Blessed Gérard, which has a more defined cursive quality in the carvings on the capitals of the corner columns.





39 CHURCH OF SAN NICOLÒ LO GURGO

Palermo, Church of
Sant'Agostino. The Rose
window

Piazza Sant'Andrea Palermo

The small church was built in 1306 by the Amalfitans, who had settled, like many other 'foreign' merchants, in the neighbourhood known as 'the Loggia'. The building was almost totally reconstructed in the 17th century, in the style of the late Renaissance, under the aegis of the Brotherhood of the Calzetta (Sockmakers). The early 15th century wooden statue of *San Nicola di Bari*, sculpted by Giovanni Gili, painted by Mario di Laurito, comes from this ancient church. The statue is now in the city's Diocesan Museum.

CHURCH AND CLOISTERS OF
SANT'AGOSTINO IN PALERMO

Via Francesco Raimondo, 3 Palermo
Tel. +39 091584632

The simple and harmonious gabled façade was built in the early 14th century, financed by the Sclafani and Chiamonte families. Their families coat-of-arms are displayed left and right of the portal. On the surface of the façade, built of wide ashlar, the outline of the portal stands out clearly, formed by a succession of lancet arches that become progressively smaller and less acute. Inserted inside the archivolt are calligraphical decorations in lava stone. The highly decorative rose window above is formed of twelve arches with an '*Agnus Dei*' (Lamb of God) in the circle at the

centre. In comparison to other religious buildings of the Chiamontan era, the Church of Sant'Agostino is far more linear with a clean-cut and continuous profile. Moreover, in the southwest corner of the late Renaissance cloister is the portal, flanked by mullioned windows (*bifore*), which leads to the ancient Chapter Hall, built along the lines of the Chapter Hall of the Benedictine cloister of Monreale.





40
*Palermo, Convent of
Sant'Agostino. Cloisters*

41
*Palermo, Convent of
Sant'Agostino. Portal of
the Chapter Hall*



**ARCHITECTURE AND ART
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CLOISTERS OF SAN DOMENICO

Piazza S. Domenico, 1 Palermo
Tel. +39 091589172

42

*Palermo, Convent of
San Domenico. Cloisters*

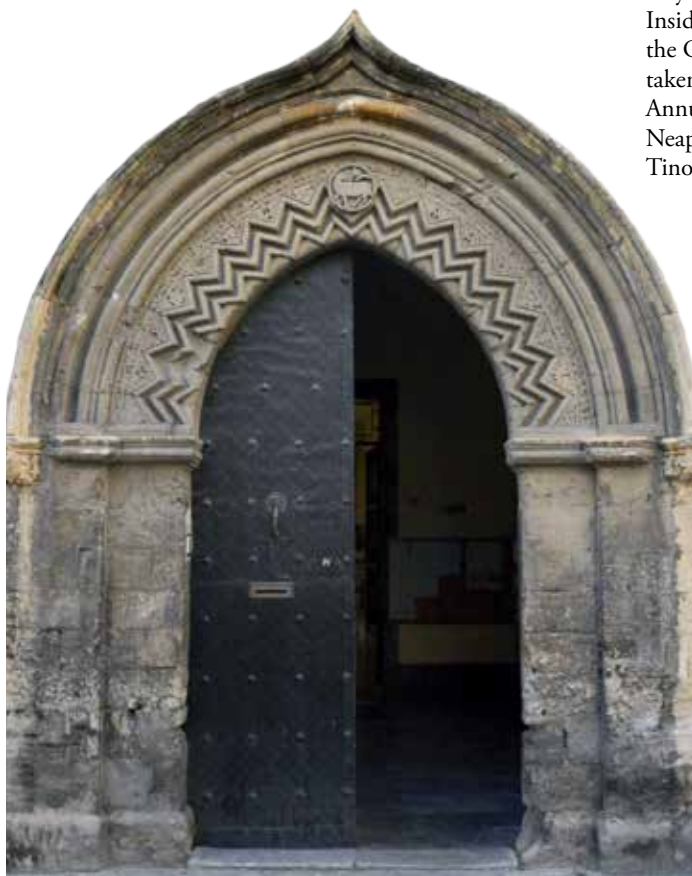
Only three sides—south, west and east— remain of the early 14th century cloisters. The overall plan shows a rigorous architectural structure formed by ogival arches on slender twinned columns, similar to the Benedictine cloisters of Monreale. The twinned columns and the massive decorated pulvins, on which the lancet arches rest, with archivolts embellished with nailhead flowers, are evidence of a severe but rich and varied decoration. The capitals are of different sizes and mainly decorated with leaves, but have different shaped bases, in order to compensate for the diverse heights of the columns. The overall look is highly fragmented but pulled together by the rigorous geometrical layout. This variety can perhaps be explained by the different origins of the ornamental carved motifs, created over time by the selection of sculptors and stonemasons who worked in the cloisters, all with diverse tastes and styles. The coat-of-arms of the Chiaramonte family, certainly amongst the building's patrons, can be clearly seen carved into the leaves of two of the capitals on the north side. The name Bonaventura, engraved on one of the capitals, leaves open to interpretation as to whether it was the name of the sculptor of that specific capital or that of the person who had begun the actual construction of the cloisters.

**CONSERVATORIO DI MUSICA
'VINCENZO BELLINI'**

.....
Via Squarcialupo, 45 Palermo
Tel. +39 091580921
.....

The current Academy of Music has been built on what was once the site of two different Churches of the Annunziata, respectively from the 14th and the 15th century. They were next door to each other

and the only remains, besides the belfry and a few octagonal columns inside the Academy, is the portal giving onto Via Squarcialupo, which nowadays allows access to the Academy. The archivolt of the portal is decorated in typical Chiaramontan style, although in a relatively soft plastic form. Above the chevron frets there are thin ribs inflected in the archivolts ending on the entablature. This style of molding connects the Chiaramontan forms to those of the Catalan style of Gothic architecture, very popular during the 15th century. Inside the Academy, on the first floor is the Gothic plaque with the 'Annunciation', taken from the 14th century Church of the Annunziata and painted by a 14th century Neapolitan Master, heavily influenced by Tino di Camaino.





MONASTERY OF SANTA CATERINA OF ALEXANDRIA

Piazza Bellini Palermo

This Dominican monastic complex has been totally rebuilt in the Baroque style. The original, simple monastery was founded by Benedetta Mastrangelo at the beginning of the 14th century, (her last will and testament is dated 13th September, 1310). Only the entrance to the Chapter Hall, giving onto the cloisters, consisting of an entrance flanked by two mullioned windows, typical of the façades of the

Chapter Halls in the Middle Ages, is still visible. The same plan can be seen in the Benedictine Cloisters of Monreale, in the 14th Church of Sant'Agostino in Palermo, in San Giovanni in Baida and in the cloisters of the Santo Spirito in Agrigento. The geometric detailing of the archivolts of the lancet arches of the entrance and the mullioned windows re-echo, in cursive form, traditional shapes from the Arab-Norman tradition, with keystone bosses that are to be found in many of the buildings in Palermo, such as the belfry of the Church of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio, known as the Martorana.

44
Palermo, Monastery of Santa Caterina of Alexandria

**ARCHITECTURE AND ART
IN THE 14TH CENTURY**

45

*Palermo, Palazzo
Chiaromonte*



PALAZZO CHIARAMONTE KNOWN AS THE STERI

Piazza Marina, 61 Palermo
Tel. +39 0916075306

The building generally known as Steri (*Hosterium Magnum: osterio*, from which comes the derivation Steri, an ancient word for Palazzo), was founded in 1305, by Giovanni Chiaramonte the Older, Admiral and Grand Executioner during the reign of the Kings of Aragon. The Palazzo was continually modified and enlarged whilst in the possession of the Chiaramonte family, but in 1392 Andrea Chiaramonte was beheaded and the family fortune confiscated. A significant date is that mentioned by Tommaso Fazello (1498–1570), who refers to the building and its context: “known as the pianura di mare (Plain of the Sea), where there existed already the houses of Manfredi Chiaramontano, Count of Modica, ancient because built in the year MCCCXX (1320) and which nowadays are known as Hosterium (or fortified buildings).” It then became the seat of the Royal Magna Curia and for a brief period also the residence of the Viceroy. Between 1600 and 1782, the Palazzo housed the Tribunal of the Inquisition. The Palazzo was restored several times, the first at the end of the 19th century and the latest in 1973, on a project by Roberto Calandra, consultant Carlo Scarpa. Nowadays the Palazzo is the seat of the University of Studies of Palermo. It is possible to visit the old prison cells of the Inquisition, with the dramatic paintings and graffiti made by the convicted prisoners and a collection of 20th art—recently mounted—with, on show, the grandiose *Vucciria* by Renato Guttuso, painted in



1974. The building was constructed as a square, with a courtyard of the same shape, arcades on the ground floor and loggias on the main floor. At the time of the death of the last Chiaramonte, the palace was in the process of receiving a third floor and the so-called *Sala delle Capriate*, because of its characteristic A-frame truss beams that support the crenellated roof, had already been completed.

The Aragonese never completed the project started by the Chiaramonte but a new building was later added right next door. The *Sala dei Baroni* is of great importance for the Sicilian figurative culture and for that of the late Middle Ages in particular, as it is an exceptional example of late mediaeval painting: the wooden ceiling painted between 1377 and 1380, is signed by Cecco da Naro, Simone da Corleone and Pellegrino Darenu from Palermo. However, many other still anonymous artists were also involved. Based on their style, they were identified by some of the most informed artistical historiographers —Ferdinand Bologna to name just one—under names such as the Maestro del Giudizio di Salomone (the Master of the Judgement of Solomon),

46
*Palermo, Palazzo
Chiaramonte,
mullioned window
(trifora)*



47

*Palermo, Palazzo
Chiamomonte. Internal
courtyard*

il Maestro della Tradizione Giottesca Napoletana (the Master of the Neapolitan Tradition of Giotto) and the Maestro del Polittico di Trapani (the Master of the Polyptych). Defined as the encyclopaedia of late mediaeval figurative art, the ceiling offers the most extraordinary selection of geometrical friezes, typical imagery from a bestiary and stories and tales taken from the chivalric romance of the time. Overall, the Palazzo is a mixture of a fortified building (on the ground floor externally) and an urban Palazzo (second

and third floors). Furthermore, the massive structure has a strong impact on the city skyline, acting as a sort of counterweight to the Royal powers exemplified by the Royal Palace, which dominates the city directly opposite the Chiamomonte edifice. The motifs of the Norman architecture have been reposed and reinterpreted by the 14th century figurative culture, known as the Chiamomontan style, taken from the name of the Chiamomonte family, the most powerful and important of that era.

CHAPEL OF SANT'ANTONIO ABATE IN THE STERI

Piazza Marina (inside the Steri complex)
Palermo

The façade of the small building immediately
next to the home of the Chiaramonte, known

as Steri, and dedicated to Sant'Antonio
Abbate, has a simple and elegant 15th century
portal. The external wall covering, of small
square ashlar bricks, mirrors the overall
composite façades of the Palazzo. The 14th
Church Hall with a polygonal apse and groin
rib vaulting was probably decorated with
frescoes from the time it belonged to the

48
*Palermo, Chapel of
Sant'Antonio in the
Steri. Façade*



ARCHITECTURE AND ART
IN THE 14TH CENTURY



49
*Palermo, Chapel of
Sant'Antonio in the
Steri. Inside*

Chiaramonte family. In fact, during a recent restoration, a clypeus emerged with the figure of *Christ*, which would appear to resemble the pictorial Chiaramontan *koinè*, located in the large painted ceiling of the Palazzo.

In particular this work has been attributed to two of the artists who worked on this pictorial complex: the Maestro del Giudizio di Salomone and the Maestro della Tradizione Giottesca Napoletana.

PALAZZO DIANA OF CEFALÀ

.....
Via Alloro, 99 Palermo
.....

The original nucleus of this Palazzo was a 14th century building with four registers of lancet arches made out of black and white

ashlar blocks of tuff, which enclose trifore mullioned windows surmounted by pierced rose windows. Later, during the 16th century, it was heavily transformed. The great portal in polygonal ashlar blocks dates from the 16th century.

50

*Palermo, Palazzo
Diana of Cefalà*



PALAZZO SCLAFANI

.....
Piazza S. Giovanni Decollato (Villa Bonanno)
Palermo

.....
Matteo Sclafani, Count of Aderò and Ciminna, began to construct his Palermitan residence in 1330, on the highest point of the city, next to the plateau with the Royal Palace. The Palazzo changed hands shortly after the first half of the 14th century, and had already been abandoned in 1432 when King Alphonse the Magnificent made it the seat of the New and Great Hospital of Palermo. The famous fresco of the *Triumph of Death* was painted around this time, though it has

now been removed and is on show in the Gallery of Palazzo Abatellis. In 1852 the building was transformed into a military barracks. The building is a perfect quadrangle and resembles that of Steri, with the main building showing a perfect regularity along the quadrangular body. There are still traces of some of the arches of the courtyard and the upper loggia as well as the marble columns of the north wing. The southern façade is an important part of the original building, as it is decorated with two-coloured (bi-chromic) calligraphic arches—in lava stone and tuff. Every muillioned window is enclosed in a lancet arch and crowned by slender arrow slits and by a circular grille surmounted by





an oculus with lobed foils. The same type of decoration was found during the latest restoration of the north façade, incorporated into later constructions. The entrance to the building has a magnificent portal with a lancet arch and a double archivolt crowned by a protruding aedicule with the coat-of-arms of the Sclafani and the Aragons and by a marble eagle, signed by Bonaiuto Pisano. The recent excavations, carried out at the same time as the restoration of the building, uncovered numerous items dating from Roman times, confirming their previous presence in this part of the city. Together with Palazzo Steri, this Palazzo represents the very best of the Palermitan residential architecture of the 14th century, very different both in layout, construction and overall decoration from the fortifications built at that time, represented in Palermo by the majestic Castle of Caccamo, which although founded during the Norman era, owes a great deal of its actual imprint to the Chiaramontan style of the 14th century.



52-53

*Palermo, Palazzo
Sclafani. Details*

PALAZZO VANNI DI SAN VINCENZO

Via del Celso (corner of Vicolo Marotta)
Palermo

The actual 18th century building has incorporated some of the ancient remains of much older buildings and in particular an elegant mullioned window dating back to the 14th century.

PALAZZO VATTICANI

Salita Sant'Antonio alla Loggia (cross roads with Corso Vittorio Emanuele) Palermo

This ancient Palazzo is located in Salita Sant'Antonio in Palermo. Having been recently restored it is usually considered to belong to the 16th century but the external cornice of a mullioned window in the façade would suggest an earlier date, sometime during the 14th century. It could also, however, be a building that was continuously being enlarged and redecorated throughout the 14th century Chiaramontan era and the early 15th century.

PORTA MAZARA

Via dei Benedettini Palermo

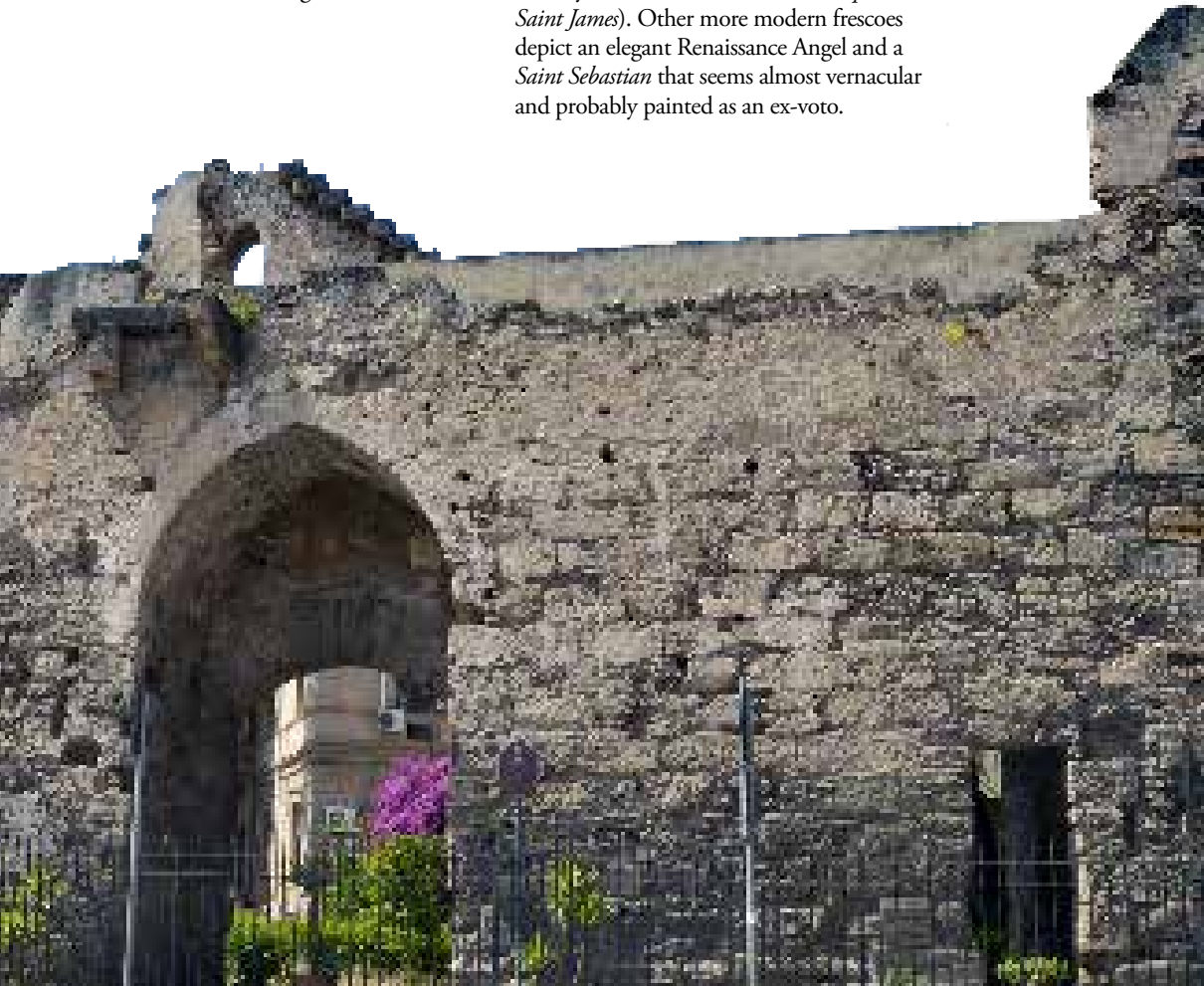
Opening onto the medieval walls that give onto the River Kemonia, it is cited for the first time during the Angevin assault, but most likely it was originally built in Norman times, probably on a preexisting Arab structure. Constructed of carved bricks, of the probable original three ogival entrances, only the largest of the three, in the centre, remains open. There are also several coat-of-arms belonging to the citizens' Senate and



to Federico Incisa, who, in 1325, financed the restoration of the door. It was not until the 16th century that it was swallowed up by the Bastione Pescara or Montalto, built by Antonio Ferramolino, who designed and strengthened the defences of the city of Palermo. When the walls and the town gates were dismantled in 1885, the Bastions were demolished, thus returning the mediaeval

Porta Mazara to public view.

In the intrados there are still some partial, late mediaeval affrescoes, which can be dated at some time around the middle of the 15th century. The main pieces have been lifted off the walls and are now on show in the Gallery of Modern Art in the Convent of Sant'Anna (in the frescoes it is possible to identify *Sant'Antonio Abate* and the *apostle Saint James*). Other more modern frescoes depict an elegant Renaissance Angel and a *Saint Sebastian* that seems almost vernacular and probably painted as an ex-voto.



PORTA SANT'AGATA

.....
Corso Tuköry Palermo
.....

The ancient town gateway, inserted into the mediaeval town walls of Palermo, which probably existed in Norman times, is dedicated to Sant'Agata and is mentioned in a notarial act of sale in 1275. The actual entrance, with supporting ogival arch, made of large ashlar blocks, could well date from the 14th century. There are still visible traces of a fresco decoration, commissioned in April, 1575 from the painter Antonino Spatafora, depicting the figure of *St. Christopher* and the *Arms of King Philip of Spain*.

55

*Palermo, Porta
Sant'Agata*







**TOWER OF THE PALAZZO OF COUNT
FREDERICK**

.....
Via dei Biscottari, 4 Palermo
.....

The Palazzo of Count Frederick, built in the 17th century and repeatedly altered in the subsequent century, has enclosed the so-called Tower of Busuemi, probably constructed on the base of the Arab Gate *Bab-el-Soudan* (Porta dei Negri). There is a very beautiful mullioned window in the Tower, decorated with a calligraphic design of bi-chromatic inlay work, carried out in the 14th century.

56

*Palermo,
Palazzo of Count
Frederick. Mullion
window (bifora)*

TOWER OF SAN NICOLÒ IN THE ALBERGHERIA

.....
Via S. Nicolò all'Albergheria
.....

The church's bell-tower, on the northeast corner of the ecclesiastical edifice, probably started out as a tower, closed at the base, but higher up there is a rank of mullioned windows decorated with bi-chromic inlays. In this area there are also some stringcourse cornices. The decoration of the mullions is in line with the decorations of the Chiaramontan style of architecture.



57

*Palermo, Church of San Nicolò
in the Albergheria. The Belfry*

**PALAZZI, CHIESE E MONASTERI
DEL TRECENTO FEUDALE**

58-59 CHURCH AND CONVENT OF BAIDA

*Palermo, Convent of
Baida, Capitals*

.....
Via al Convento di Baida 43 Palermo
.....

Manfredi Chiamonte, Count of Modica, founded the monastic complex in 1371. The cloisters, built only on two sides, are of extreme importance: five of the spans on the eastern side are supported on twinned columns with a variety of capitals, but only two on the south side can be dated from the 14th century.







61
*Palermo, Convent of
Baida. Cloisters*

The keystones of some of the groin vaults are adorned with the Chiaramontan coat-of-arms. The two corridors were finished in the year 1500, by order of the Archbishop of Palermo, Giovanni Paternò. Of the existing

church, the presbytery is clearly of the Chiaramontan era, as is the façade and the portico facing it. However, all of these have been subsequently heavily restored.

62
*Palermo, Church of Baida.
Façade*





OSTERIO MAGNO IN CEFALÙ

.....
Corso Ruggero Cefalù
.....

The Osterio Magno was built on the foundations of a previous building by the noble Ventimiglia family, who owned a vast estate of houses and parks in Cefalù. The earliest archives relating to the building can be traced to January 1387, when Francesco (Frances) II Ventimiglia dictated his last will and testament. The building, situated between Corso Ruggero and Via Amendola, is characterised by its turriform shape, which allows it to emerge from its surroundings. The trifora overlooking Corso Umberto is particularly interesting, together with the mullioned windows overlooking Via Amendola. The bifore are decorated with plain, simple moldings whilst the trifora shows evidence of a desire for rich ornamentation with thin archivolts and molding consisting of bands of three arches sitting on pulvins. The lower part of the building, along the Via Amendola, has an outer wall composed of bi-chromic bands that are probably from the second half of the 14th century. The building remained in the possession of the Ventimiglia family up until 1602 and was totally restored under the aegis of Silvana Braida, between 1988 and 1991.

**MUSEUM OF THE CHURCH
OF SANTA MARIA MAGGIORE
IN GERACI SICULO**

.....
Piazza del Popolo, 1 Geraci Siculo
tel. +390921643529
.....

The Museum, created in 1990, is in the crypt and has an interesting collection of silver liturgical vessels from the Main Church, dating from between the 14th and 18th century, as well as sacred vestments and ex-voto jewellery offered to the patron Saints. Most of the items are from the Baroque,

Rococò and Neoclassic eras. Of major interest is the *Reliquary of San Bartolo* (St. Bartholemew), a mediaeval base with a crystal reliquary topped by a small 16th century statue of St. Bartholemew. The oldest part, from the 14th century, is covered in enamel figures of the Saints and the coat-of-arms of the commissioning family. It was made by the Pisan goldsmith Pino di Martino or Martini, and commissioned by either Francesco I or II of Ventimiglia; if by the later then the actual date would be 1361–1365

64

*Geraci Siculo,
Museum of Santa
Maria Maggiore.
Detail of the
'Reliquary of San
Bartolo' by Pino di
Martino*



CHRONOLOGY

1250

Death of Frederick II, Emperor and King of Sicily. He is succeeded by his son Conrad IV, who dies in 1254

1258

Election of Manfred, son of the Blanche of Lancia, as Sovereign of the Kingdom of Sicily, which also covers Southern Italy

1262

Constance, daughter of Manfred, marries Peter III of Aragon. Pope Urban IV offers the crown of the Kingdom of Sicily to Charles of Anjou, brother of King Louis IX of France

1266

Manfred is beaten and killed by Charles of Anjou at the battle of Benevento. Charles is elected King of Sicily

1268

At the Battle of Tagliacozzo, Charles I of Anjou beats Conradin of Swabia, heir to Conrad IV, and has him put to death in Naples

1282

31st March. Revolt of the Vespers in Palermo: the Sicilians rebel against the Angevins. It is the start of the war of the Vespers between Charles I of Anjou and Peter III of Aragon

1285

Death of Charles of Anjou and Peter III

1286-1296

Reign of James II of Aragon, known as the Just

1296-1337

Reign of Frederick III of Aragon and II of Sicily

1302

The War of the Vespers ends with the Treaty of Caltabellotta. Frederick III keeps Sicily, but Southern Italy is separated and goes to the Angevins

1337

Death of Frederick III

1337-1342

Reign of Peter IV of Aragon and II of Sicily

1342-1355

Reign of Louis of Aragon

1347-1348

The Great Plague spreads throughout Sicily, especially in Catania and Trapani

1355-1377

Reign of Frederick IV, the Simple,

1377-1392

Reign of Maria, daughter of Frederick III and Maria of Aragon

1392-1409

Reign of Martin I, the Younger, who married Queen Maria in 1390

1409

Death of Martin I. He is succeeded by his father, Martin II of Sicily, known as Martin the Elder

1410

Death of Martin the Elder

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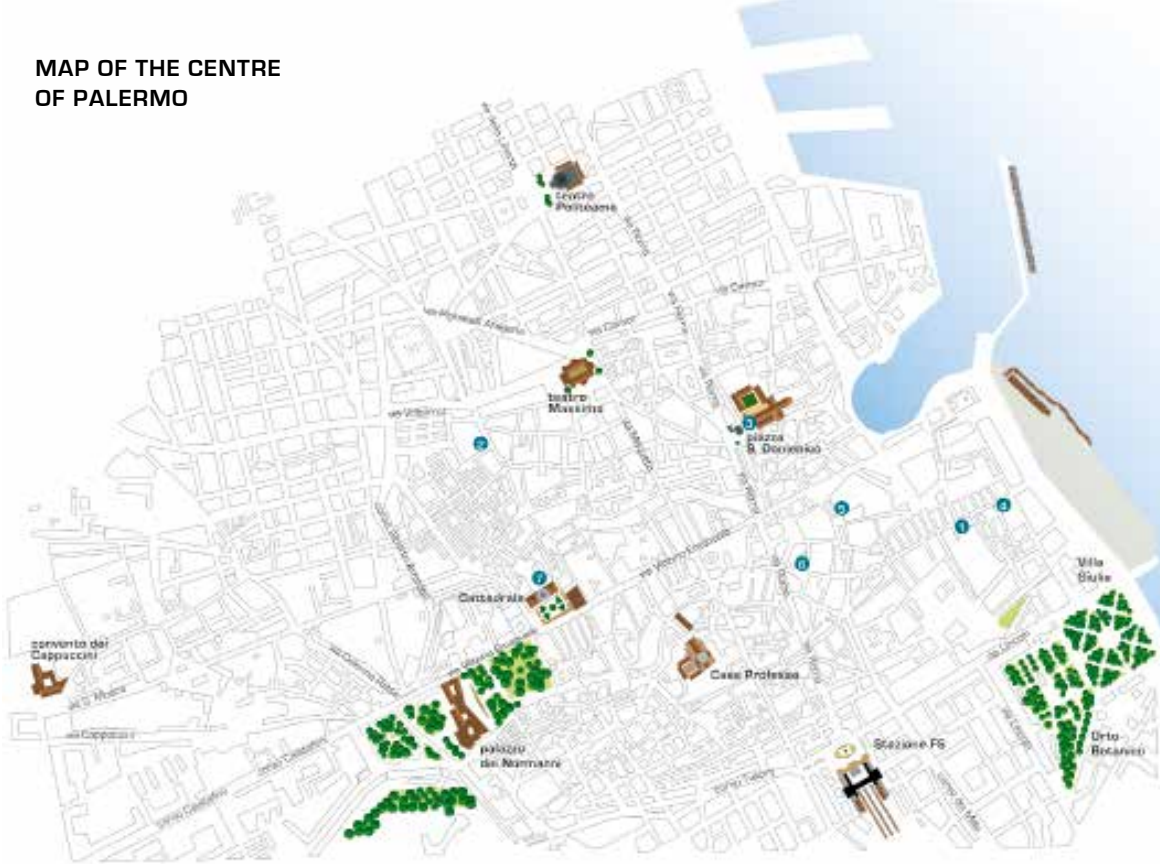
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MAP OF THE CENTRE OF PALERMO



CENTRE OF PALERMO

- ① Church of Sant'Antonio Abate
- ② Cathedral
- ③ Church of San Francesco d'Assisi
- ④ Church of San Nicolò lo Gurgo
- ⑤ Church and Cloisters of Sant'Agostino
- ⑥ Cloisters of San Domenico
- ⑦ Conservatorio di Musica "Vincenzo Bellini"
- ⑧ Monastery of Santa Caterina
- ⑨ Palazzo Chiamonte-Steri
- ⑩ Chapel of Sant'Antonio in the Steri
- ⑪ Palazzo Diana of Cefalù
- ⑫ Palazzo Sclafani
- ⑬ Palazzo Vanni di SanVincenzo
- ⑭ Palazzo Vatticani
- ⑮ Porta Mazara
- ⑯ Porta Sant'Agata
- ⑰ Palazzo of Count Frederick
- ⑱ Church of San Nicolò in the Albergheria
- ⑲ Church and Convent of Baida

PROVINCE OF PALERMO

- ⑳ Monreale – Diocesan Museum
- ㉑ Termini Imerese – Church of the Gancia
- ㉒ Cefalù – Osterio Magno
- ㉓ Geraci Siculo – Museum of the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore



