

I. Introduction¹

Most books on mosaics focus exclusively on the question of their iconography and their style, leaving aside any consideration of materials and craftsmanship. Indeed, the problem of most authors who deal with wall mosaics and frescoes is that they depend on reproductions that under the best circumstances are colour or black and white analogue or digital photographs, the latter taken with an i-Phone. It has been my good fortune, thanks to my Sicilian friends and colleagues², to have been able to climb the scaffolds of the Martorana, the Palatina and Cefalù Cathedral, where over the last 15 years the notes and photos for this book were taken. Moreover in Greece, thanks to the courtesy of several Greek friends I was able to climb the scaffolds in the churches of Daphni and Chios as well.³ Last, but not least, I am particularly grateful to Dr. Maria Lidova who enabled my access to the scaffold of the church of St Michael and to take pictures in the presbytery of Hagia Sophia in Kiev. This book is thus based mostly on direct observation. Repeated examination of the Norman mosaics at eye level drastically changed my ideas, and I started to study everything from scratch, including the written documents⁴ and the architecture of the monuments in question. Although I have studied early Christian, Byzantine and medieval mosaics up close from scaffolds for half a century, I only very slowly acquired a certain expertise with the Norman mosaics.⁵ It was

the repeated meeting with the mosaics at eye level that moved me from contemplation and reflection to a knowing seeing of the delicate forms and colours.

Moreover, digital photography and the various models of photoshop have enabled me to continue a close evaluation of many of the mosaics I studied while on the scaffolds. To make these photos I had to return dozens of times to the scaffolds, and switch repeatedly between one church and another. Most images were made with a professional camera with high resolution (24 mb), and this permitted me to discover the process of the making of the design and of how the *tesserae* were laid out. This perhaps sounds rather banal, but the laying-out of the tesserae was a technically complex and demanding job that had not been described before the invention of digital photography. Furthermore, the process of creating the Ruggerian mosaics in Sicily was particularly complicated, because all were made nearly contemporaneously. This in turn required a logistically sophisticated distribution of labor and organization of the various mosaicists who worked according to a master plan. The work force was divided into competencies: there were specialists for faces, figures, scenes, trees, architectures, inscriptions and gold grounds. The opportunity to analyse the lay-out of the tesserae led me to discover 'how things were made', and to detect the originality, mastery and craftsmanship of the mosaics. The third chapter is dedicated to these problems.

I have tried to accept each work of art for what it is – a unique and unrepeatable artistic creation connected in a more

1 The author's English text was not only cleared of errors by Julia Triolo with the greatest dedication and competence, but also considerably improved thanks to her thorough analysis of my arguments and trains of thought. My great debt of gratitude cannot be adequately expressed in words, but it comes from the heart.

2 I am especially grateful to Prof. Fabrizio Agnello and Architetto Gaetano Corselli D'Ondes who allowed me to access the scaffolding of Cefalù and the Martorana.

3 I am grateful to Prof. Panagiotis Vocotopoulos, Prof. Maria Panagiotidi and Prof. Sophia Kalopisi who kindly organized several visits and access to the scaffoldings of Daphni and Nea Moni in Chios.

4 I thank Dr. Peter Litwan and Dr. Bruno Häuptli for a correct interpretation of the Latin and Greek documents.

5 B. Brenk, Il concetto progettuale degli edifici reali in epoca normanna in Sicilia. Quaderni dell'accademia delle arti del disegno. Firenze 2 (1990) pp. 7–12; idem, La parete occidentale della Cappella Palatina a Palermo. Arte medievale II serie, Anno IV/2 (1990) pp. 135–149; idem, La simbologia del potere. I Normanni, popolo d'Europa 1030–1200. ed. M. D'Onofrio. Venezia 1994 pp. 193–198; idem, Zur Bedeutung des Mosaiks an der Westwand der Cappella Palatina in Palermo. Studien zur byzantinischen Kunstgeschichte. Festschrift für Horst Hallensleben zum 65. Geburtstag. eds. B. Borkopp, B. Schellewald, L. Theis. Amsterdam 1995 pp. 185–194; idem, Zur Programmatik der Kapitelle im Kreuzgang von Monreale. Rhetorik der ‚varietas‘ und herrscherliches Anspruchsdenken. Opere e giorni. eds. K. Bergdolt and G. Bonsanti. Venezia 2001 pp. 43–50; idem, Arte del potere e la retorica dell'alterità. La cattedrale di Cefalù e S. Marco a Venezia. Römisches Jahrbuch der Bibliotheca Hertziana 35. 2003/4 (2005) pp. 81–100; idem, Bronzi della Sicilia normanna: le porte del duomo di Monreale. Le porte del paradiso. ed. A. Iacobini

(Milion 7). Roma 2009 pp. 471–489; idem (ed.), La Cappella Palatina a Palermo (MIRABILIA ITALIAE 17). 4 vols. Modena 2010; idem, Rhetorik, Anspruch und Funktion der Cappella Palatina in Palermo. ed. T. Dittlbach, Die Cappella Palatina in Palermo. Swiridoff 2011 pp. 247–271; idem, Zum angeblichen Prothesis-Raum in der Cappella Palatina in Palermo. Filopation. Spaziergang im kaiserlichen Garten. Beiträge zu Byzanz und seinen Nachbarn. Festschrift für Arne Effenberger. eds. N. Asutay-Effenberger, F. Daim. Mainz 2012 pp. 11–26; idem, I volti delle botteghe bizantine: nuove osservazioni e conclusioni sulle tecniche dei mosaicisti nella Cappella Palatina di Palermo. Arte medievale IV. Ser./3 (2013) pp. 237–256; idem, Concetto e significato dei mosaici e delle pitture della Cappella Palatina a Palermo. Byzantino-Sicula VI. La Sicilia e Bisanzio nei secoli XI e XII. Atti delle X giornate di studio della Associazione italiana di studi bizantini. eds. R. Lavagnini e C. Rognoni. Palermo 2014 pp. 257–273; idem, Per la ricostruzione della parete settentrionale del presbiterio della Cappella Palatina a Palermo. Il potere dell'arte nel medioevo. Studi in onore di Mario D'Onofrio. Eds. M. Gianandrea, F. Gangemi, C. Costantini. Rome 2014 pp. 181–191; idem, Il percorso del Re. Riflessioni per il concetto architettonico del palazzo reale di Palermo sotto Ruggero II. Temporis Signa. Archeologia della tarda antichità e del medioevo 11 (2016) pp. 177–198; idem, The mosaics of Cefalù revisited: innovation and memory. Codex Aquilarensis. Revista de Arte Medieval. 34 (2018) pp. 13–33. B. Brenk, Zum Konzept des Königspalastes in Palermo (Palatium sacrum, Sakralität am Hof des Mittelalters, eds. M. Luchterhand, H. Röcklein. Regensburg 2021 pp. 235–260).

or less transparent manner to tradition. I begin from the assumption that the artist basically aspired to create a unity, a wholeness and an entirety, even if this was not always possible. I have felt no compelling need to slice up a building or a mosaic program into dozens of phases just so as to placate an aprioristic chronology of styles and iconographies.

I focused my investigation on the originality of Norman in comparison to Byzantine programs, and on the originality of Norman and Byzantine craftsmanship.⁶ I am convinced that the Norman spirit of these mosaics has yet to be discovered. While it has not always been possible to come to clear-cut conclusions, it must be said that a great deal of the present book attempts to reveal the Norman originality.

Whoever undertakes to study the Norman mosaics in Sicily must necessarily consult the monograph, still today unsurpassed, by the great Viennese Byzantinist Otto Demus: *The Mosaics of Norman Sicily*.⁷ Demus (1902–1990) wrote his *opus magnum* during and after the Second World War in England and in Canada, and published it in English in 1949. A year earlier Ernst Kitzinger (1912–2003), another great art historian who had fled Germany and found a new home at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, D. C., travelled to Sicily. Demus had been so generous as to allow Kitzinger to see the drafts of his as yet unpublished monograph. Also in 1949 Kitzinger published his paper on the mosaics of the Cappella Palatina in *The Art Bulletin*.⁸ Kitzinger reports that much of the material was gathered during a visit to Sicily in the summer of 1948. It seems to me that he mainly needed to check some final details once he arrived at the Cappella Palatina. Kitzinger was chiefly interested in the program and in the arrangement and function of the mosaics, following up on Demus's slightly earlier book 'Byzantine Mosaic Decoration: Aspects of Monumental Art in Byzantium' of 1947. Kitzinger's subtitle: 'An Essay on the Choice and Arrangement of Subjects', is a direct response to this book by Demus, which itself was an absolute novelty. Neither author, however, actually observed the Sicilian mosaics close up from a scaffolding. Interestingly, Demus never returned to the topic of the Norman mosaics, whereas Kitzinger went on to publish many articles on them, crowning his scholarly activity with the monograph on the mosaics of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio in 1990.⁹ His book is above all a study of the iconography of the mosaics. It is based on meticulous iconographic comparisons and the identification of the models that the author suspects lie behind each image. Its main thesis is that the mosaics of the Martorana were copies or remakes of those in the Cappella

Palatina (completed by 1143), and thus were created during the late forties of the 12th century. Despite the lack of a valid basis for his thesis, Kitzinger postulated that the mosaics of the Cappella Palatina and those of the Martorana were executed by two different and independent Byzantine teams who were called from Constantinople.¹⁰ The illogicality is obvious: why should a new team of mosaicists be recruited just a few years later again from Constantinople for the Martorana in order to simply copy the mosaics of the Cappella Palatina (1143) made by an earlier Constantinopolitan team? Is it at all plausible first that a new team could so easily be found, and second, be convinced to do such an inferior kind of work – that is copying rather than inventing?

I am unable to accept many of the hypotheses of Lazarev¹¹, Demus and Kitzinger¹², albeit these great scholars remain the most important Byzantinists of the twentieth century. The use of cultural generalisations (such as 'Byzantine', 'Arabicising', 'Eastern', 'Western', etc.) and their transfer to art is still endemic today and has always led to gross misunderstandings. I simply belong to another generation, and it seems to be a sort of biological necessity that each generation reinvents itself and needs a fresh start. I also am fully aware that among the readers of this text there will be prominent representatives of younger generations, and it is their right and duty to reinvent themselves, too, and to critique my findings.

Demus and Kitzinger reached their conclusions with the help of stylistic analyses, and for more than half a century their approach was universally considered with the greatest respect by scholars.¹³ Both Demus and Kitzinger were convinced that the Sicilian mosaics should be considered as proxies for the sadly no longer extant mosaics of Constantinople of the 12th century.¹⁴ With no proof offered and a total absence of supporting documents, the idea was cultivated that at any time it was possible to recruit as many mosaicists in Constantinople as one wished. Indeed, because of the lack of documentation,

6 Throughout this book, the term "Byzantine" is used to refer not exclusively to the art of Constantinople but more broadly to the art of the Christian territories associated with the Byzantine Empire.

7 O. Demus, *The Mosaics of Norman Sicily*. London 1949. Several years later the volume was reviewed at some length by Kitzinger in *Speculum* 28 (1953) pp. 143–150.

8 E. Kitzinger, 'The Mosaics of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo. An Essay on the Choice and Arrangement of Subjects', *Art Bulletin* 31 (1949) pp. 269–292.

9 E. Kitzinger, *I mosaici di Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio a Palermo*. Palermo 1990.

10 E. Kitzinger, 'Two mosaic ateliers in Palermo in the 1140s. Artistes, artisans et production artistique au moyen âge. vol. 1. Les Hommes (ed. X. Barral y Altet) Paris 1986 pp. 277–282.

11 V. N. Lazarev, 'The Mosaics of Cefalù', *The Art Bulletin* 17 (1935) pp. 184–232.

12 O. Demus, *The Mosaics* 1949; E. Kitzinger, *I mosaici di Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio a Palermo*. Palermo 1990; E. Kitzinger, *I mosaici del periodo normanno in Sicilia*. 6 vols. Palermo 1992–2000.

13 A critical approach to Demus' and Kitzinger's ideas is found in Liz James, *Mosaics in the Medieval World from Late Antiquity to the Fifteenth Century*. Cambridge 2017. See also B. Brenk, 'Ernst Kitzinger's Contribution to the Study of Norman Mosaics in Sicily', in *Ernst Kitzinger and the Making of Medieval Art History*, eds. F. Harley-McGowan, H. Maguire (London 2017) pp. 127–139.

14 O. Demus, *The Mosaics* 1949 pp. 371–372; E. Kitzinger, 'The Descent of the Dove. Observations on the mosaic of the Annunciation in the Cappella Palatina in Palermo. Byzanz und der Westen. Studien zur Kunst des europäischen Mittelalters. (ed. I. Hutter) Vienna 1984 p. 104: "Given the fact that the art of mosaic at the court of Roger II was a wholesale import from Byzantium (...)", E. Kitzinger, *Two Mosaic Ateliers in Palermo. Artistes, artisans et production artistique au moyen âge. vol. 1, Les Hommes* Paris 1986 pp. 277: "But it is evident also that two different Byzantine teams were employed in the two churches".

we may never know from where exactly the mosaicists were brought to Sicily. Be this as it may, the foremost targets of this book remain the analyses of the originality of the programs, the mastery and the technique and designs of the Ruggerian mosaics in Sicily. This book is written against the erosion of the facts, and would like to activate a critical debate.

The Norman mosaics in Sicily were determined by the ideology of a king and his admiral, Roger II and George of Antioch, both extremely powerful personalities eager to demonstrate their unsurpassable power and wealth. The architecture they commissioned is virtually flooded with mosaics, paintings and sculptures. They employed Greek and Latin mosaicists and Arabic-Fatimid painters, so that we find Latin, Greek and Arabic inscriptions on the decorated surfaces. A tangible instance of royal rhetoric is the monumental inscription of King Roger II in the dome of the Cappella Palatina (fig. 3) that states: “Other kings of former times built other sanctuaries for the saints, but I, Roger, mighty king (and) ruler of the sceptre (dedicate this church) ...”¹⁵ This formulation unequivocally asserts that King Roger’s goal was to surpass all his predecessors with the power of his royal rhetoric. Here we are dealing with a topical behaviour that could be described as “sovereign excelling” or kingly extravagance. Norman royal art therefore sees itself not as a continuation of local traditions, but as a form of unsurpassable and unrepeatable concept art. It aims to be unique, i. e. without a precedent and without a successor. Norman art in Sicily was thus a purely dynastic art: it did not develop slowly, but it was created in two decades after Roger II was crowned king in 1130, and two decades ended as abruptly as it had begun. There is no artistic evidence to suggest that after the Norman dynasty was extinguished in 1189, any of the subsequent German rulers of Sicily continued working on the Norman ecclesiastical buildings. Norman art came to an abrupt end under the Hohenstaufen. Roger II eternalized his name in the inscriptions in the Cappella Palatina and the Cathedral of Cefalù, while his admiral, George of Antioch, left a self-image in the mosaics of the Martorana (fig. 6).

If this is recognized, the search for precedents, influences and parallels loses its urgency, and we may devote ourselves to the question of originality and meaning and to the study of the art itself, for itself.

A new chronology of the Ruggerian mosaics (S. Maria dell’Ammiraglio: La Martorana; Cappella Palatina, both in Palermo; Cathedral of Cefalù)

An exact and reliable chronology of the earliest Norman mosaics in Sicily will probably always remain hypothetical because there is no source to tell us who first introduced wall mosaics in these churches in Sicily. Nor is there any written evidence for



Fig. 1 Palermo, Cappella Palatina. Apse and cupola (B)

the presence of Byzantine mosaicists in Sicily.¹⁶ The name of Roger II, however, is preserved on the lower rim of the cupola of the Cappella Palatina (fig. 3) and in the monumental apse inscription in the Cathedral of Cefalù (fig. 81). The name of admiral George as patron of the Martorana is handed down to us by a diploma of 1143, written in Greek and Arabic, and he is furthermore represented in the well known mosaic in the Martorana (fig. 6), kneeling in prayer before the Virgin.¹⁷ The near contemporaneity of a church’s construction and a mosaic program inside it is rarely demonstrable, but nevertheless not completely improbable, as there is no reason to suppose that a wealthy private founder should wait long to decorate his church once the construction had been completed. On the contrary: a wealthy founder does everything to materialize his pretensions and to eternalize his name, aspirations which are thus invariably expressed in his constructions. On the other hand there are sometimes reasons for a gap between the construction of a church and its decoration, added later. As it was

15 B. Crostini, *L’iscrizione greca nella cupola della Cappella Palatina. Considerazioni filologiche*. La Cappella Palatina a Palermo. Ed. B. Brenk (MIRABILIA ITALIAE 17) 2010 pp. 187–202.

16 Among the Sicilian chronicles, only the *Annales Romualdi* contain a note that refers rather generally and non-specifically to King William I, who “*Cappellam s. Petri, que erat in palatio, mirabili musivii fecit pictura depingi*”. (see below).

17 B. Lavagnini, *L’epigramma e il committente*. *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 41 (1987) pp. 339–341.



Fig. 2 Palermo, Martorana. Cupola and drum (B)



Fig. 3 Palermo, Cappella Palatina. Cupola, Greek and Latin inscriptions of 1143 (B)

not the task of diplomas and chronicles to mention such facts, scholars have mostly depended on stylistic analysis to determine chronology. Both Demus and Kitzinger were convinced that the mosaic decoration of the Martorana was added several years after the completion of its architecture. Demus writes: "The comparatively small number of the mosaics makes it possible to assume that they were executed within a short time, a very few years only, between 1143, the date of the endowment, and 1151".¹⁸ Demus' proposal is based on two unproven premises, firstly "that the program of the cupola (of the Martorana, fig. 2) is an abridged version of the decoration of the Palatina cupola" (fig. 1) and secondly "that the Court chapel of the king would scarcely have been decorated after the model of the private foundation of a courtier".¹⁹ This interpretation of the mosaics and their dating seems to stem from a monarchist view. His theory appeared to be corroborated by the 1143 date of the mosaics of the cupola of the Cappella Palatina. Kitzinger accepted this argumentation in all his papers and books, and attempted to further strengthen the edifice constructed by Demus.²⁰ A comparison between the Cappella Palatina and the Martorana based on new digital possibilities and a fresh reading of the Greek documents, however, points to an interpretation that reverses their conclusions (as will be shown below).

S. Maria dell'Ammiraglio (La Martorana) in Palermo

In 1981 Augusta Acconcia Longo²¹ convincingly argued that the tomb of the mother of George of Antioch who died in 1140 as a nun must be located inside the church of S. Maria dell'Ammiraglio, because in 1870 a fragment of her tomb inscription had been found there, though it was later lost. It seems likely that the tiny monastery where George's mother Theodula lived and died was connected to the south side of the Martorana, although this has never been proven archaeologically. Sadly, Kitzinger never considered the implications of the burial of George's mother within the Martorana in 1140, data revealed by the tomb inscription. The epitaph says that Theodula prayed to the Virgin Mother of God. If we accept this evidence that Theodula was buried in the Martorana, the latter must have been consecrated before, or at the latest in 1140. Burials in non-consecrated churches were not allowed, since the requiem (liturgy) could only be celebrated in a consecrated church. Since Constantine's time the dedication ceremony was always connected with the ceremony of the Eucharist.



Fig. 4 Palermo, Martorana. Marble slab presumably from a tomb (B)

Somewhat later, the tombs of Admiral George and his wife Irene were installed in the Martorana. All three tombs were equipped with funerary inscriptions that were copied from the 12th century onwards up to recent times. A marble slab (fig. 4) found and still preserved in the Martorana seems to be part of one of the tombs.²² In 1625 fragments of Irene's funerary inscription were still visible on the floor of the Martorana, while George's inscription has completely disappeared. This group of funerary inscriptions was analysed by Bruno Lavagnini in an article he dedicated to Ernst Kitzinger in the latter's 1987 *Festschrift*.²³ This important article was a subtle exhortation to Kitzinger to read and account for the inscriptions. Instead, Kitzinger turned a blind eye to this article and to the Greek texts, because of his conviction that style is a much more reliable argument than written documents.

Moreover, there is further important evidence that speaks in favour of an early completion not only of the architecture but also of the mosaics of the Martorana. I am referring to two endowment diplomas of 1140 and 1143 in which both king Roger and George of Antioch are named as the donors, with the nuns of the "golden" church of S. Maria as the recipients. In the diploma of April 23, 1140, donations of landed property made by Admiral George on behalf of the King are spoken of. King Roger endowed the nuns of S. Maria with the fourth quarter of a vineyard, three quarters of which they had apparently received earlier; here the church is called: S. Maria Chryse.²⁴ Acconcia Longo showed that this church must be identical with S. Maria dell'Ammiraglio, because of the great unlikelihood that there were two golden churches dedicated to the Virgin in Palermo to whose nuns King Roger and Admiral George made donations. According to the diploma George must pay for the plot of land that was formerly royal property²⁵ and is now to be given to the nuns. The revenues from the

18 O. Demus, *The Mosaics* 1949 p. 82.

19 O. Demus, *The Mosaics* 1949 pp. 82–83; E. Kitzinger, *I mosaici* 1990 p. 124.

20 E. Kitzinger, *I mosaici* 1990 pp. 15–16.

21 A. Acconcia Longo, *Gli epitaffi giambici per Giorgio di Antiochia, per la madre e la moglie. Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken* 61 (1981) pp. 25–59; A. Acconcia Longo, *S. Maria Chryse e S. Maria dell'Ammiraglio a Palermo. Rivista di studi bizantini e neoellenici* 25 (1988) pp. 165–183; A. Acconcia Longo, *Considerazioni sulla chiesa di S. Maria dell'Ammiraglio e sulla cappella Palatina di Palermo. Néa Rhóme. Rivista di ricerche bizantinistiche* 4 (2007) pp. 267–293.

22 E. Kitzinger, *I mosaici* 1990 fig. A 21.

23 B. Lavagnini, *L'epigramma e il committente. Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 41 (1987) pp. 339–350.

24 A. Acconcia Longo, *S. Maria Chryse e S. Maria dell'Ammiraglio a Palermo. Rivista di studi bizantini e neoellenici* 25 (1988) pp. 165–183. *Tabularium regiae ac imperialis capellae collegiatae DIVI PETRI in regio Panormitano Palatio. Palermo* 1835 pp. 13–16 Nr. V

25 B. Lavagnini 1987 p. 339.



Fig. 5 Palermo, Martorana. King Roger crowned by Jesus Christ (B)



Fig. 6 Palermo, Martorana. Admiral George praying to the Virgin (B)

estates should serve for the livelihood of the clergy, and for the illumination of the church.

In the donation document of 1143 the construction of S. Maria dell'Ammiraglio is reported using the past tense, the Aorist: ἀνήγειρα.

ἐξ' αὐτῶν τῶν βάθρων ἀνήγειρα, καὶ ὅσῃν σπουδῇ καὶ προθυμίᾳ ἐνε δειξάμεν εἰς τὴν τούτου οἰκοδομὴν καὶ καλλοῖν καὶ ὠραιότητα αὐτὰ βοῶσι τὰ πράγματα.

This means that construction was finished before 1143. The person who says “I have built” is the Admiral George of Antioch. George was of the Greek-Orthodox faith, and came from Antioch in Northern Syria. Having been in the service of the Zirid princes of Al-Mahdiah in present-day Tunisia, he knew the Arabic language and was well acquainted with the art of the Zirids and Fatimids. As head of the Norman army of Roger II, he acquired great wealth. He was closely tied to his king, Roger, as is shown both by the donation document of 1143, and by the mosaics in the narthex of the Martorana where Roger is crowned by Jesus Christ (fig. 5) and Admiral George prays at the feet of the Virgin (fig. 6). In its own way each mosaic illustrates the close collaboration between King Roger and Admiral George with regard to the Martorana. The donation document states that George donated ten villeins (παροῖκοι) on behalf of the King to the church of St. Mary. These serfs were part of

the country estate of Minzellimèr that King Roger had given to Admiral George.²⁶

In the donation document of 1143 we read the following statement:

“I have erected the church from the ground up”, says Admiral George, and he continues: “how much zeal and enthusiasm I summoned for its entire construction, beauty and perfection is proclaimed loudly by the mere facts”.²⁷ Had the Martorana not yet been finished, George would not have spoken in 1143 of its beauty and perfection (καλλονὴν καὶ ὠραιότητα), nor would he have used the word βοῶσι that means “to proclaim loudly, shout”. Furthermore, George would not have employed such words for a church still lacking decoration. It is simply impossible to use the word ὠραιότητα for an undecorated flat wall! These words point unequivocally to the completion of the Martorana and its mosaics before 1143, and most probably also before 1140. Neither Demus nor Kitzinger acknowledged this text, because it clearly refutes the opinion of the two researchers on the chronology. Both worked with the preconceived idea that the Cappella Palatina was the earlier of the two projects, and that the Martorana copied the King's

26 There are still today the ruins of a 12th–13th century castle in Minzellimèr (Misilmeri). F. Rotolo, Matteo Carnilivari. *Revisione e Documenti*. Palermo 1985 pp. 18–29.

27 B. Lavagnini 1987 p. 339.

chapel.²⁸ The target of my argumentation is to show that neither of the two buildings copies the other. Although they were constructed and decorated with mosaics more or less contemporaneously, each building is an entity unto itself. The concept of the mosaic-program of the Martorana is quite different from the concept of the mosaics of the Cappella Palatina. This will be shown in Chapter IV.

The result of my analysis of the donation document of 1143 is that S. Maria dell'Amiraglio was obviously conceived from the beginning as the funerary church of Admiral George and his family. The tomb of George's mother in the Martorana, datable to 1140, proves that the church was complete in 1140 and dedicated slightly earlier. We cannot know if the mosaic decoration was finished by that date, but this seems to be likely. Kitzinger observed that the mosaics are not specifically mentioned in the 1143 charter, and he drew the conclusion that they may not have even been started by that date. Indeed, he states, with no corroborating evidence, that the mosaic decoration "was not undertaken until several years after 1143" because he wants to persuade the reader that the Martorana mosaics are copies of the mosaics of the Cappella Palatina. His thesis, however, is unconvincing. I would object for instance that it was not the task of an endowment charter to mention the decoration of the church with mosaics. Mosaics and frescoes are never mentioned in charters. Furthermore, I find wholly unlikely the idea that the highest-ranking and richest man in Sicily next to the king himself prayed and celebrated the Eucharist in an unfinished church filled with scaffolds. The scaffolds for the interior construction would have been used for the mosaics as well. Why should he not complete everything at once? I also find it rather improbable that a wealthy donor would wait several years decorating his burial church after the consecration. After all, George of Antioch was one of the wealthiest patrons of the Middle Ages. In the charter of 1143 he praises the completion of his church and its most beautiful decoration, and establishes that the clergy should incessantly send prayers to God for the prosperity and happy life of the great and holy King Roger. He also requests the intercession of the clergy for himself and for his children even after death. At the request of his deceased mother Theodula, the highly respected nun Marina should receive thirty Taria and two Kokkoi for clothing each year. Further, Admiral George endowed the church with liturgical objects of bronze and silver, and many books, as well as an associated inventory. The hypothesis that the king's chapel was started earlier than the Admiral's funerary church and by a different workshop, can be disproved on the basis of documents and through the analysis of the mosaics (see Chapter III). Thus, as we shall see, solid evidence for postponing the mosaic decoration to the late forties is entirely lacking.

It is likely that Admiral George was the first patron to use Greek mosaicists in Palermo because he was a native Greek

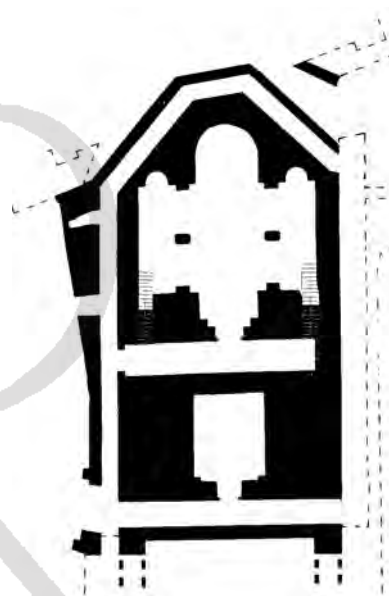


Fig. 7 Palermo, Cappella Palatina. Crypt. Drawing © by D. Sack, S. Platte, M. Thiel, J. Giese

from Antioch and was surely well acquainted with the technique from his childhood onwards. In light of his Eastern provenance George was surely better informed than was Roger about how and where to find the best craftsmen. The burial of George's mother Theodula in 1140 in the Martorana presupposes the dedication of the church before that date. The actual construction of the Martorana must have begun at least five or more years earlier than its dedication, that is circa 1132, the year that George was given the title *ammiratus ammiratorum* (admiral of admirals) by king Roger II.²⁹ The earlier mentioned document of 1143 praising the beauty and perfection of the church presupposes the conclusion of the mosaics before that date. As work on the mosaics must have taken at least five or more years, they must have been initiated by circa 1136. We shall see in the next paragraph that the dates of the construction and of the mosaic decoration in the Cappella Palatina nearly coincide with those of the Martorana. The decision to decorate the Martorana, the Palatina and Cefalù with wall mosaics was certainly taken contemporaneously by Admiral George and King Roger in the early thirties of the 12th century. Admiral George, as a native of an important capital in the Greek East, was undoubtedly better equipped than Roger to go about finding Greek mosaicists.

The Cappella Palatina

There is no document regarding the foundation of the Palatine Chapel, nor is it possible to establish the exact date of its foundation by archeological means. Dorothee Sack³⁰ and

28 O. Demus, *The mosaics* 1949 pp. 82–83 and E. Kitzinger, *I mosaici* 1990 p. 124.

29 H. Houben, *Roger II. von Sizilien. Herrscher zwischen Orient und Okzident*. Darmstadt 1997 pp. 152.

30 D. Sack, S. Platte, M. Thiel, J. Giese, *Bauforschung in der Unterkirche der Cappella Palatina in Palermo*. *Architectura* 37 (2007) pp.

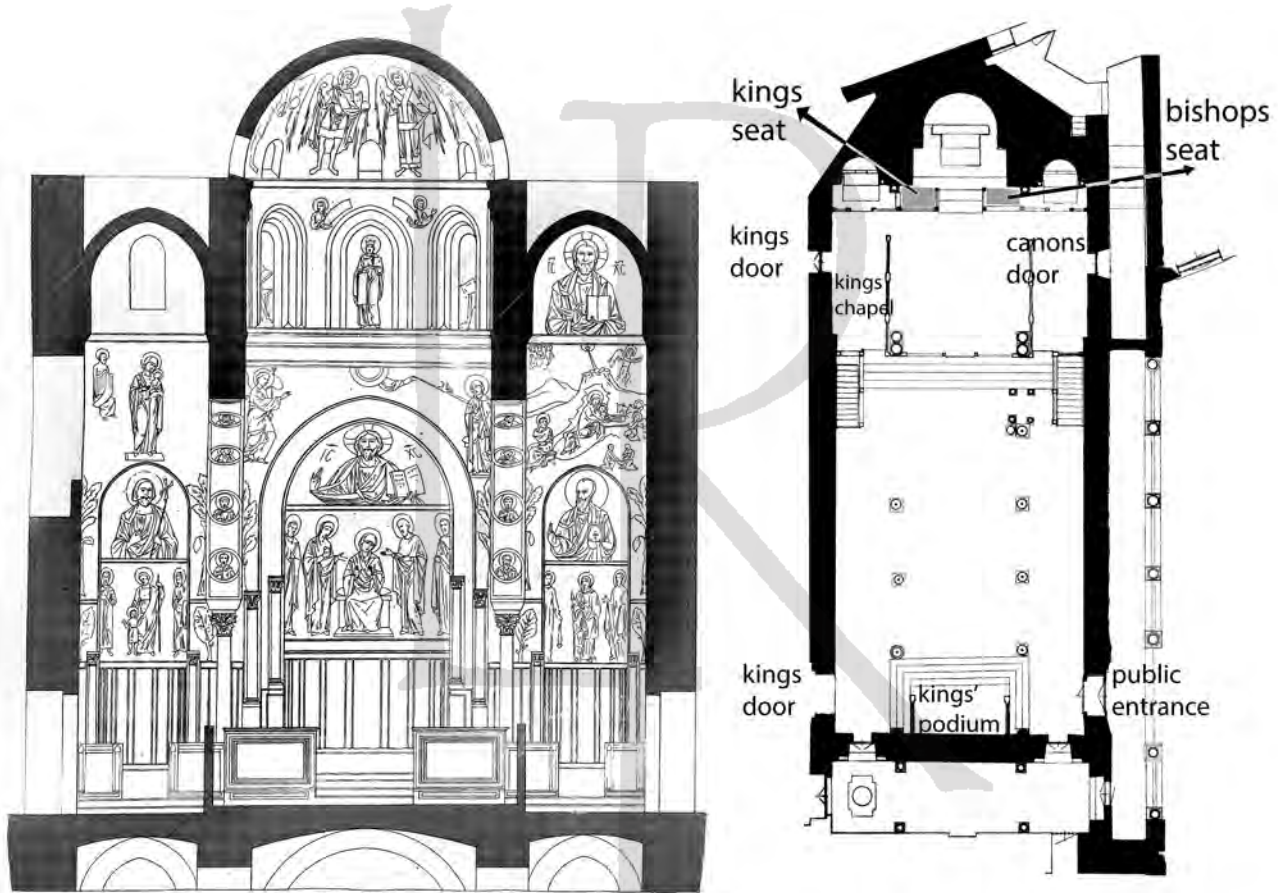


Fig. 8 Palermo, Cappella Palatina. Elevation of the presbytery after C. Monti and S. Prescia, and ground plan (B)

her collaborators were able to ascertain that the current outer walls of the crypt (fig. 7), each with a thickness of 1.85 m, belonged to the first chapel of the Norman palace, which could only have been built when the Norman monarch transferred his residence from Messina to Palermo, that is, after 1101. This building, constructed of large squared stones, presumably would have had three naves and had a presbytery with three apses with polygonal plans. The two doors on the north side were probably for the monarch's use, since the royal residential buildings (the Joharia) stood on the north side of the chapel. A third door is conserved on the southern wall of the crypt. This pattern of access was repeated in the present Palatine Chapel (fig. 8). It would seem that originally the crypt was not dedicated to Peter, but to the *Hodegetria*, the Mother of God. A fresco from the second half of the 12th or the early 13th century depicting the *Hodegetria*,³¹ originally located to the left of the central apse of the crypt, probably refers to

the original dedication. A number of scholars have seen a relationship between the new construction of the Palatine Chapel, built exactly above what is now the crypt, and a document of 1132³² in which the Archbishop Peter of Palermo, at the behest of Roger, elevates a chapel dedicated to the Apostle Peter *intra castellum superius panormitanum fundatam* to the status of a parish church. V. Zorič believed that "it is quite unlikely that the construction of this church as early as 1132 could be so advanced that it could be consecrated and consequently be elevated to a parish church."³³ On the other hand, Roger II was crowned king in 1130, and it does not seem likely that he would have remained inactive for two years. We know of some instances in which a church still in its initial stages, was dedicated. However, since the document addressed to Roger defines the chapel of St. Peter as *cappellam vestram*, it may have been the present basement level of the Cappella Palatina, that was originally dedicated to the Mother of God (the *Hodegetria*). H. Enzensberger rightly supposes that the *patrocinio* of

121–144. V. von Falkenhausen, *Die griechischen Gemeinden in Messina und Palermo (11.–13. Jahrhundert)*. Urban dynamics and transcultural communication in medieval Sicily. *Mittelmeerstudien* vol. 17. Paderborn 2017 p. 3.

31 It should be compared with the Maria Panachrantos in the central apse of Monreale; M. Naro, D. Abulafia, G. Chiaramonte, *Il duomo di Monreale. Lo splendore dei mosaici*. Milan 2009 (plate on p. 7) and with the mosaic fragment with the Madonna in Palazzo Abatellis, Palermo, approximately datable to the beginning of the 13th century.

32 *Tabularium regiae ac imperialis capellae collegiatae DIVI PETRI in regio Panormitano palatio Ferdinandi II. Regni utriusque Siciliae regis*. Palermo 1835 p. 7 Nr. II: *Petrus Panormitanus Archiepiscopus Palatinam Capellam in Paroeciam erigit*. A.1132.

33 V. Zorič, *Arx praeclara quam Palatium Regale appellant: le sue origini e la prima cappella della corte normanna. Contrade e chiese nella Palermo medievale* (Collana della Biblioteca dell'Officina di Studi Medievali 5) Palermo 2000 p. 54.

this underground church, of which neither the patron nor the date of construction is known, was changed, dedicating it to Peter after the coronation of Roger II as king.³⁴ The date 1132 cannot be absolutely excluded as the date of foundation of the present Palatine Chapel. In a donation document (*dotatio* of prebends) of 28 April 1140³⁵ the date of the consecration of the church, *dies dedicationis Ecclesiae*, is instead declared to be that day. It turns out that it is in fact the Palatine Chapel, since the dedication to the Apostle Peter takes place within the palace in Palermo *titulo beati Petri Apostolorum Principis intra nostrum regale palatium, quod est in Urbe Panormi* and furthermore, *Ecclesiam fabricari fecimus summa devotione*. What is intended with this phrase is the new construction of the Palatine Chapel recently begun above the underground church (fig. 7). The object of the donation is a church dedicated to Saint George, with eight *prebends*. Also assigned to the palace chapel are the rents of the mills of Palermo. If the Palatine Chapel was consecrated in 1140, it must have been begun at least five to seven years before, or more, and it is thus legitimate to suppose that the beginning of its construction dates to ca. 1132 or even earlier, closer to Roger's 1130 coronation. This assumption must of course remain a hypothesis. In 2009 Horst Enzensberger drew my attention to the possibility that in the Palatine Chapel there was a private chapel honoring Roger's first wife, Queen Elvira, who died in 1135. Two *prebends* are spoken of here: *quae cum sint huius Ecclesiae, ordinatae tamen sunt in Cappella Reginae, bonae memoriae, Elvira* ... This document does not, however, prove with absolute certainty the existence of Queen Elvira's private burial chapel within the Palatine Chapel, nor does any solid physical evidence contribute to that hypothesis. Furthermore, a burial of Elvira in the Cappella Palatina necessarily presupposes a consecrated church and we know from the same document that the Palatina was not consecrated until 28 April 1140. The crypt, however, may have been dedicated years before the church, and Elvira's tomb could have been installed here.³⁶ We know for certain that the crypt predates the Palatine Chapel, and that it was consecrated to the Virgin. If queen Elvira died in 1135, her burial must have occurred shortly thereafter; if the "*Cappella Reginae, bonae memoriae, Elvira*" was located in the crypt, this implies that the construction of the upper church must have been practically finished. The exact location of Elvira's tomb is, however, unknown.

³⁴ The document chiefly treats the donation to Roger of a funerary church situated *extra muros* to this church of S. Pietro, as a dependence and parish church.

³⁵ *Tabularium regiae ac imperialis capellae cit.*, p. 11 Nr. V a. 1140: *Rogerus Rex Palatinam Capellam D. Petri instituit cum canonicorum collegio, quibus pingues assignat praebendas*. J. Johns, *The Date of the Ceiling of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo. The Painted Ceilings of the Cappella Palatina* eds. E. J. Grube, J. Johns (Supplement I to *Islamic Art*). New York 2005 pp. 1–14.

³⁶ Kitzinger's proposal that the phrase "*die dedicationis ecclesiae*" could mean that the charter was issued on an anniversary of the dedication, not on the day of the ceremony itself, is unconvincing, and was rejected by Lavagnini. see below.

The next dated inscription is found in the mosaic frieze in Greek that circumscribes the base of the dome in the presbytery (figs. 1 and 3). The text reads

1. Ἄλλους μὲν ἄλλοι τῶν πάλαι βασιλέων
2. σεβασμίους ἡγείραν ἁγίους τόπους
3. ἐγὼ Ῥογέριος δὲ ῥῆξ σκηπτροκράτωρ
4. τῷ τῶν μαθητῶν προκρίτῳ τοῦ Δεσπότη
5. τῷ ποιμενάρχῃ καὶ κορυφαίῳ Πέτρῳ.
6. ὃ Χριστὸς ἐστήριξε τὴν ἐκκλησίαν.
7. ἦν αὐτὸς ἔσχε(ν) αἵματος χύσει ξένη
8. παντ' αὐτοῦς ...
9. ἰνδικτιώνος τρις δις ἀριθμουμένης
10. ἔτους παρατρέχοντος ἀκριβεῖ λόγῳ
11. τοῦ πεντηκοστοῦ πρὸς δὲ καὶ πρώτου μόνου
12. παραδραμούσης χιλιάδ(ων) ἐξάδο(ς).
13. σὺν τοῖ(ς) ἑκατὸν ἐξάκ(ις) μετρουμ(έ)νοις

"Other kings of old erected sanctuaries to other Saints; but I, Roger mighty ruling king, (dedicate this church) to the foremost of the Lord's disciples, the leader and the archpriest Peter, to whom Christ entrusted His church, which He Himself had consecrated by the sacrifice of His blood... The third indiction... the fifty-first year in the correct measurement after 6000 and 600 years had elapsed in an ever moving circle."³⁷

The monumental inscription of King Roger II at the base of the dome of the Cappella Palatina (figs. 1 and 3) unequivocally communicates that it was King Roger's goal to surpass all his predecessors with both his regal rhetoric and noble deeds.

When calculated, the date is clearly 1143. By this year the dome mosaics as well as most of the other mosaics and the painted ceiling, too, must have been finished. Given the patronage involved, the planning stages and the start of work on the wall mosaics must have occurred many years earlier. In all likelihood the mosaics in the three apses and the two chapels of the transept must have also been completed at that time (i. e., 1143) if not already in 1140. The mosaics of the nave walls of the Palatine Chapel must have also already been begun. Since the only date handed down, the date of the consecration, is 1140, the chronology of the phases of construction and decoration is largely hypothetical, but it is evident that the con-

³⁷ For the translation and analysis of this inscription, see B. Crostini, *L'iscrizione greca nella cupola della Cappella Palatina. Considerazioni filologiche*. La Cappella Palatina a Palermo. ed. B. Brenk (MIRABILIA ITALIAE 17) Modena 2010 pp. 187–202; J. Johns, *The Date of the Ceiling of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo. The Painted Ceilings of the Cappella Palatina* (Supplement I to *Islamic Art*), eds. E. Grube and J. Johns. New York 2005 p. 2; D. Lo Faso Pietrasanta di Serradifalco, *Del duomo di Monreale e di altre chiese sicule normanne: ragionamenti tre*. Palermo 1838 pp. 27, 74; N. Buscemi, *Notizie della Basilica di San Pietro detta la Cappella Regia*. Palermo 1840 p. 31, tav. VIII; O. Demus, *The Mosaics* 1949 p. 26 with note 11; I. Beck, *The First Mosaics of the Cappella Palatina*. *Byzantium* 40 (1970) p. 125; E. Kitzinger, *La Cappella Palatina di Palermo, 1992–2000*. vol. 1. 11–12; G. Cavallo, *F. Magistrale, Mezzogiorno normanno e scritture esposte. Epigrafia medievale greca e latina. Ideologia e funzione*. eds. G. Cavallo and C. Mango. Spoleto 1995 pp. 295–297.



Fig. 9 Palermo, Cappella Palatina. Trilingual inscription from the water clock (B)

struction and probably also the design of the program and the execution of the mosaics were begun much earlier than 1140.³⁸

Significantly, there is a second date that has been overlooked in the scholarship. Contemporaneously with the erection of the Palatine Chapel, Roger had a water clock made for it to ring the hours for the clergy. This large-scale mechanical device that was housed in an adjacent room of the Chapel had a trilingual inaugural inscription in Latin, Greek and Arabic, bearing the date 1142 (fig. 9). In the 19th century, the inscription was inserted into the portico of the southern porch.³⁹ The Latin inscription reads: HOC OPUS HOROLOGII PRECEPIT FIERI DOMINUS ET MAGNIFICUS REX ROGERIUS (followed by the date: 1142). The Greek inscription presents a variation in the title of the king, as follows: “The mighty prince Roger the King, to whom God gave the sceptre”.⁴⁰ Given that the title *Skeptrokrator* (σκηπτροκράτωρ) also appears in the Greek inscription of the dome, where it is counterposed to the title *Pantocrator*, it is possible to identify a reflection of the typically theocratic ideology of Roger, according to which Jesus Christ is the all-powerful ruler (*Pantocrator*) of the universe, but King Roger is the king who with his scepter rules over the kingdom of the Normans. In other words, King Roger views his earthly power as legitimized by the omnipotence of Jesus Christ.

38 Tabularium regiae ac imperialis capellae collegiatae divi Petri in regio Panormitano palatio. Palermo 1835 No. V p. 12 “Datum Panormi per manus Roberti Cancellarii die dedicationis Ecclesiae, Quarto Kalendas Maji, Indictionis Tertiae, Incarnationis Dominicae ann. MCXL”.

39 N. Buscemi 1840 p. 13 with plate; V. C. Pasca, Descrizione della imperiale e regal Cappella Palatina di Palermo. Palermo 1841 pp. 16–17; M. Amari, Epigrafi arabiche della R. Cappella. Orologio di Re Ruggero. La Cappella di S. Pietro cit., parte IV, capitolo 1; G. Di Marzo, Delle belle arti in Sicilia, p. 149 exactly describes the placement of the epigraph: “Dell’antico campanile rimangono avanzi della base nell’angolo esteriore del portico meridionale e dell’occidentale, dove è incastrata una lapide con iscrizione trilingue, che rammenta il famoso orologio fatto costruire nel 1142 dal re Ruggero”.

40 This English translation is based on Amari’s Italian translation: “il possente principe Ruggero re, al quale Iddio ha dato lo scettro”). Cf. Amari, Epigrafi arabiche della R. Cappella. Orologio di Re Ruggero, in La Cappella di S. Pietro cit., parte IV, capitolo 1.

With great competence and erudition Michele Amari has described the technique and diffusion of Arab water clocks. The presence of this sumptuous and precious water clock in the southern portico⁴¹ of the Palatine Chapel indicates that the decoration of the Chapel was already very far advanced or even completed. About the use of such clocks the Arabic scholar *Akfāni* says: “Their advantage consists in the knowledge of the hours of the services in church and of the determination of the rising of the stars...”.⁴² Some Arabic authors inform us about the installation process and the dimensions of a water clock. *The Book of the Balance of Wisdom* by Al-Khazini from the year 1122 tells us that a water clock must be conserved in a dark chamber “where no wind, no dust, no heat and no cold can reach it”, in order to avoid the defiling of the water. The room for such a clock measures 4.17 m by 1.5 m, and is 3.47 m high.⁴³ *The Book on the Construction of Clocks and their Use* by Ridwān ibn al-Sa’atī says that the room with a water clock should measure 4.83 meters squared and is 4.88 m high.⁴⁴ *The Book of Knowledge of Ingenious Mechanical Devices or a Compendium on the theory and Practice of the Mechanical Arts* by Ibn al-Razazz al-Jazari, written 1204–1206, says that the first clock: “was a screen of bronze or wood about 1.35 meters wide by 2.25 meters high”. The total height was 3.0 meters.⁴⁵ These indications clearly prove that the construction of a water clock at the Cappella Palatina required a special and large room that would probably have had to be carefully planned before the start of the chapel’s construction. The highly complicated mechanism of the clock would have been endangered had workmen been there to accidentally knock against it. Furthermore the water clock was installed in order to mark the prayer hours and liturgy for the clerics of the Palatina. Each hour a metal ball would fall into a metal basin, causing a sound similar to a church bell. From 1142 onwards the Palatine Chapel was in full function as a prayer house. If in 1142 the Chapel had still been an open construction site, Roger would not have considered it opportune to have a device as delicate as a water clock installed in the portico of the Chapel. The date of the water clock (1142) is perfectly adapted to the date of the central cupola (1143).

This sequence of dates is also appropriate for the date of the Chapel’s consecration (1140), as well as for the brief yet crucial description of the Palatine court preacher Philagath-

41 The placement of the water clock in the southern portico is not certain, but is highly likely for technical reasons. The instrument was very probably placed on the western side of the southern portico, before the western narthex had been built.

42 E. Wiedemann, Über die Uhren im Bereich der islamischen Kultur. Acta Nova. Abhandlungen der kaiserlichen Leopoldinisch-Carolinischen Deutschen Akademie der Naturforscher vol. C Nr. 5. Halle 1915 p. 9; the German Arabist Wiedemann pointed out that water clocks were used particularly during the night, whereas during the day astrolabes were used: Wiedemann, Über die Uhren 1915 p. 5.

43 D. R. Hill, Arabic Water Clocks. Aleppo 1981 pp. 49, 63.

44 D. R. Hill 1981 p. 74; E. Wiedemann, Über die Uhren 1915 p. 62, 72

45 D. R. Hill 1981 p. 92.