
CLAIRE VERNON, *From Byzantine to Norman Italy: Mediterranean Art and Architecture in Medieval Bari* (New Directions in Byzantine Studies). London: I. B. Tauris 2023. xii + 269 pp. 137 ill., 4 maps. – ISBN 978-1-7883-1506-7 (hb). £76.50 (hb), £20.87 (e-book).

• DANA KATZ, Institute of Archaeological Sciences, Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main / New Europe College-Institute for Advanced Study, Bucharest (katzdana@gmail.com)

Despite the title, VERNON's recent book explores the southern Italian ecclesiastical art and architectural production of coastal Bari and Canosa, located 20 km inland and farther to the north, then part of a joint see. The stated time frame of her study of ca. 1000–1130 encompasses the final period of Byzantine control to the foundation of the Norman kingdom. A clear, concise, and effective introduction delivers on the main themes of the study. VERNON informs us that she is considering 'Mediterranean connections in the art and architecture of these two cities' (p. 3). Beyond contributing to the scholarly discourse on Byzantine and Norman Italy, the author is surveying other, less trodden paths to explore the visual culture produced in the milieu of the First Crusade in a southern Italian archdiocese. The author rightly points out that a book solely devoted to the topic has yet to be written. A theme she frames throughout the monograph is the hard-earned sense of independence in Bari, highlighting local Lombard patronage and merchant-led initiatives. This civic identity withstood the greater powers of the Byzantines, and the Normans after them, who took Bari after a three-year-long siege in 1068–1071, repeatedly proving themselves to be a malevolent and disruptive force on the coastal city.

A major theme of the work is what she terms 'reforming art', or artistic production in the spirit of the Gregorian reform movement. Tackling the question head on in southern Italy, where the East met the West not long after the schism between the two churches, seems like an excellent proposition. One of the principal arguments is that the powerful Archbishop Elias was a key leader and proponent of the movement, and the newly established church of San Nicola reflected this reforming ideology. Commemorating the early Christian saint, VERNON points out how its architecture – specifically, the arrangement of the crypt and its floor – attempts to recreate, at

least partially, St. Nicholas's church in Myra in southern Turkey. However, the building of a Latin church on the site of the demolished Byzantine governing palace was not a simple statement on the transfer of rule to the Normans. Instead, San Nicola was part of a more complex process by which the local community sought to consolidate and maintain their independent civic identity, and where the merchant-driven initiative of relic theft in 1087 was key to its construction.

In the Introduction, VERNON states that Apulia can seem peripheral, especially in comparison to other centers of the time, namely Norman Sicily and the royal court in Palermo. As she points out, its art and architectural production does not fit models based on modern regions and as put forth in the iconic Jaca Books series *Italia Romanica*. Situated somewhere between what scholars have recognized as the 'Byzantine' and 'Romanesque', Apulian visual culture seems to defy categorization. Indeed, Bari cannot be considered a center in what is by now the international scholarly field of medieval Mediterranean studies that has taken off in the past two decades, and certainly not in comparison to veritable capitals like Cairo, Córdoba, or Constantinople. Nonetheless, the author attempts to insert Bari, and Canosa (albeit to a lesser degree), into the constellation of the above cities that are already standard in the field. What is at stake, and what the reader stands to gain, is how 'Mediterranean connectivity looks different from an Apulian perspective than it does from Sicily' (p. 6). Certainly, the advantages of moving away from royal or imperial courts are the possibilities inherent to the exploration of 'different kinds of communities, patrons, and artists' (p. 3). Under Byzantine rule, the earliest period in her study, she explores the highly fragmented political, cultural, and social reality in southern Italy at the time. Despite the peripheral place of both Bari and Canosa, but only in relation to larger centers, there were many connections and intersections in its visual culture with places all over the Mediterranean, although not entirely surprising as Apulia was so fundamentally connected to the sea.

Part 1 explores Byzantine Bari and Canosa in the decades after the turn of the first millennium until the Norman takeover in 1071, VERNON studies the remaining material culture, which includes sculpture, inscriptions, liturgical furniture and scrolls. Under Byzantine rule, the local communities in the archdiocese drew from other authoritative sources, namely Benedictine artistic commissions in Lombard territories. They created what she terms a hybrid culture, but one which nonetheless still had its own distinctive identity. In this section of the book, the author does not limit the discussion

to the Mediterranean, as she also considers connections between southern Italy and north of the Alps. In addition to Bari cathedral, Chapter 3 focuses on the Lombard nobleman Melus and his son Argyros's patronage of the so-called Star Mantle (*Sternenmantel*) kept in Bamberg's Diocesan Museum that she posits they gave to the German emperor Henry II in ca. 1020. More frequently attributed to Regensburg (making it an Ottonian artwork), a semicircle of blue silk of a more recent date on which embroidered figures placed as appliqué representing the cosmos were cut out from the original purple fabric. Melus appears by his nickname 'Ishmael' in the dedicatory inscription in gold thread on silk that both came from Constantinople, which as the author points out, declares the mantle an imperial work. In this way, the Lombard rebel leader and his son leveraged their connections when making a gift to the German emperor Henry II, thus consolidating political ties between them.¹

Part 2 investigates a period of great change during the transition to Norman rule at Bari. The church of San Nicola built on the site of the former Byzantine palace (known as the 'Court of the Catepan') was the foremost symbol of the shift. In this section, VERNON explores the expression of civic identity by the local Lombard community, which maintained a high degree of autonomy that came into play with the theft of the relics of St. Nicholas. The crypt was consecrated in late 1089, not long after the saint's remains were brought to Bari, with the upper church completed more than a century later. To this lower space, the author draws parallels with the earlier crypt at the Norman cathedral of Salerno built by Robert Guiscard. Two staircases installed on its north and south sides allowed for the massive circulation of pilgrims. Placed on the same axis as the main altar above, the positioning of the shrine at San Nicola thus echoes that of Myra. As with the Bamberg Star Mantle, VERNON draws connections here too with north of the Alps, specifically the hall crypts of Speyer cathedral and St. Cyriakus at Gernrode, as well as examples in Normandy (p. 67). Parallels with the north are also considered in Chapter 7, where comparisons are made between the towers of Bari cathedral and those of Speyer.

Nonetheless, the primary focus in this section of the book is on the Mediterranean, spanning the Adriatic to coastal Anatolia. VERNON charts larger

1. The author borrows the term 'silken diplomacy' from ANNA MUTHESIUS to make this argument. See EADEM, *Silk, Power and Diplomacy in Byzantium*. In: BEVERLEY GORDON — SUZANNE BAIZERMAN (eds.), *Textiles in Daily Life: Proceedings of the Third Biennial Symposium of the Textile Society of America*, September 24–26, 1992. St. Paul MN 1992, pp. 99–110.

artistic networks when considering the marble pavements of San Nicola. The first is in the crypt, dating to the time of Archbishop Elias (d. 1105), while the second floor located in the upper sanctuary of the basilica was probably completed by his successor, Eustasius. The author argues that the floors, mostly in *opus sectile*, but also mosaic, *opus interrasile*, and marble inlay, were localized and independent sites of artistic production. The figure of Elias looms large as a patron within this discussion. Instead of employing the workshops of Montecassino and Salerno (although still a possibility for the upper pavement), she hypothesizes that Elias actively pursued artists from Byzantium. Yet, it was not just the floors, but also the templon and the slightly later ciborium at San Nicola, that evoked and even mirrored the liturgical configuration of the saint's shrine at Myra. For VERNON, the aim of the above arrangement and such commissions was to summon up the early Christian church and its authority. These associations were enforced in the crypt capitals of San Nicola, some of which date to the sixth century and came from the eastern Mediterranean. Conceivably spoliated from the former Byzantine palace, with several more made in the eleventh century, they convey the idea of paradise through their carved foliage and imagery of fantastical animals. By the end of Part 2, VERNON effectively situates the Apulian coastal city as a distinctive place of production not directly dependent on other centers that have figured so largely in the scholarly literature on southern Italy.

In this section, the main protagonist is Elias without a doubt. Closely examined are his tomb and its inscription, as well as the episcopal throne, which the author reasons that Urban II commissioned on the occasion of the Council of Bari in 1098, contextualized with the archbishop's larger aims and interests. As VERNON points out, the materiality of the crypt and sanctuary pavements required immense quantities of stone, attesting to the agency of patrons who had to procure them. In Part 2, the author draws connective lines, placing Elias (and Eustasius, to an extent) on the same rank or caliber as Abbot Desiderius of Montecassino or Archbishop Alfano I of Salerno, arguing that the Bari archbishop shared a similar commitment to Gregorian reform ideals. Moreover, she contends that the design of the upper church evoked Constantinian basilicas (even though not to the same degree as the churches built by the above figures). By the mid-twelfth century, San Nicola became a model for churches all along the Adriatic coast and hinterland.

A Solomonic theme runs throughout Part 2, which as the author rightly points out, was commonplace in ecclesiastical commissions of the time.

As such, Chapter 6 studies the episcopal throne in the sanctuary of San Nicola, while the following two (Chapters 7 and 8) respectively consider the architecture of the church and its portals. For the throne, she contextualizes its commission against crusading rhetoric, even arguing that Urban II might have brought the marble with him to Bari, which was then worked on by a local sculptor. Overall, this example of liturgical furnishing was a far more ambitious project than the earlier one at Canosa, not only due to its materiality and facture, but also in terms of messaging. According to its inscription, the latter was concerned with preaching and pastoral ministry (pp. 47–51). The sanctuary of San Nicola in its medieval configuration recalled an early Christian *synthronon*, an overall arrangement that conjured up a judicial setting. VERNON draws here a comparison with the automaton throne in the Magnaura hall, which served as a law court in the Byzantine Great Palace as well. With the above framework in mind, she argues for the role of the Bari archbishop as a judge in the ecclesiastical realm, corresponding also to the eleventh-century papal reforms carried out in the spirit of the early church.

Sculpted from a single block of bright white spoliated marble, the Bari throne had a tangible connection with classical antiquity. Its imagery made direct reference to this past, namely the two lionesses attacking terrified men on its back. However, the three figures on the front have received the greatest attention from scholars. Two telamones are carved to seem like they are carrying the seat on either end. The throne's most enigmatic element is the central figure in a tunic, wearing pointy shoes, and a conical hat. Relying on the earlier interpretations of ANDRÉ GRABAR and ROWAN DORIN, and following the conventions of classical art, VERNON agrees that the supporting figures represented slaves. The distinctive dress of the man located between them identifies him as a Muslim, specifically a supervisor of the enslaved men beside him.² The author points to connections with Fatimid art, brought up in an earlier section in relation to the Canosa throne with its lattice-like armrests compared to window grills. The seat is supported by elephants with ornate saddlecloths and harnesses (Chapter 5, pp. 67–71), animals that can be directly associated with the Fatimid court and their processions in Cairo. For the thrones at Bari and Canosa, she draws parallels with the so-called Charlemagne chess set likely made

2. ROWAN DORIN, The Mystery of the Marble Man and His Hat: A Reconsideration of the Bari Episcopal Throne. *Florilegium* 25 (2008) pp. 29–52; A. GRABAR, Trônes épiscopaux du XI^{ème} et XII^{ème} siècles en Italie méridionale. *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* 16 (1954) pp. 7–52.

in either Amalfi or Salerno in the 1080s. The similarity in various motifs is part of a larger argument that artists worked in a variety of media, namely the Canosa sculptor Romuald creating in both stone and bronze.

The carved figural support of the Bari throne opens the discussion on slavery (pp. 91–95). As in the Byzantine empire, slaves were an immensely valuable commodity of the Islamic world and part of luxury trade. VERNON briefly notes there is far more documentary evidence for Bari than other Italian cities. Certainly, slavery was central to its economy when it was an independent emirate (847–871), which the author briefly mentions in the Introduction. However, the focus of much of VERNON's book is on the negotiations between local elites, the Normans, and the papacy that seems distant from these much earlier ninth-century contexts. Nonetheless, the presence of Muslims in Bari would not have been negligible at the turn of the eleventh century. As an Italian coastal city, contact was maintained through trade and piracy. At any rate, legal documents record that slaves would have been mostly Slavic, which does not accord with the imagery of the throne itself. VERNON contends that the telamons signal an 'Other'. In this case, the early date of the Bari throne is considered in relation to the First Crusade, specifically Urban II's motivating rhetoric of rescuing Christians from the predicament of slavery. Both GRABAR and DORIN have written about the triumphal nature of the iconography at the base of the throne. The author takes up these earlier arguments, stating that its placement in the sanctuary of San Nicola on a mosaic floor with pseudo-Arabic made it a victory monument. By referring to Roman examples, she thus reads the episcopal throne in the context of contemporary slavery through a classical lens.

The final section, Part 3, turns inland to Canosa cathedral and the diminutive chapel attached to its south transept dedicated to Guiscard's son, Bohemond. The sepulcher of the crusading prince was covered in spoliated Proconnesian marble from the nearby temple of Giove Toro, which the author argues was commissioned by his wife Constance of France. VERNON explores the mausoleum's architecture, patronage, and a description of its likely interior decoration, altar, and tomb no longer extant (Chapter 11). The bronze doors of the chapel (Chapter 12), made in the lost-wax technique for the first time in southern Italy since antiquity and their inscriptions, are contextualized with the rhetoric of the First Crusade (Chapter 13). Due to its irregular shape, VERNON uncovers that the left door cast in a single piece probably was the first one, an experiment gone slightly awry (pp. 182–185). Signed by the bell maker Roger of Melfi on the right

door, there is also remarkable sleuthing by the author on his possible biography as a Norman of Bohemond's generation. On the medallions of the door, she points to the inclusion of Arabic (and not Pseudo-Arabic as on the sanctuary floors of San Nicola) with the word *yumn*, or happiness, drawing parallels to portable objects from the Islamic world where such a blessing frequently appeared.³ Altogether, VERNON cohesively considers the entire ensemble of Bohemond's tomb, making it her book's most significant contribution.

The choice of Canosa for Bohemond of Antioch's burial by his widow Constance apparently was due to the connection forged between the cathedral and the imperial burial church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople on which the southern Italian church was modeled. The daughter of Philip I of France, Constance had an illustrious pedigree in her own right, and female patronage takes the center stage in Part 3 of the book. Even though a handful of royal Norman women are known for their artistic commissions, or at least strong association, they are most often overlooked, thus making this discussion important. However, the author is careful to point out that Bohemond's cousin, Duke William of Apulia, probably paid for the vast amounts of marble and other opulent materials, in addition to specialized craftsmen. Constance was not likely to have had sufficient funds after her husband's death. Nonetheless, VERNON makes a connection with the marble tomb of Bohemond's mother, Alberada of Buonalbergo, in the abbey church of Santissima Trinità in Venosa, the Norman dynastic burial place, stating that her widowed daughter-in-law might have commissioned it as well. For Constance at the time, it would have been of utmost importance to secure the inheritance of her infant son, who as the heir of Bohemond, Prince of Antioch, also had a claim over Apulia.

Several final caveats are in order. Even though one of the book's focal points is architecture, the text does not always provide a sufficient description or reconstruction of the spatial dimension. This is particularly the case for the cathedral of Canosa (that of Bari in its present form postdates the period under discussion in the monograph). The exception is the crypt of San Nicola, which is perhaps not too surprising as the discussion could build on the earlier extensive scholarly exploration of pilgrimage spaces. There are few illustrations in the book overall, and the included ground plans are borrowed from older works in several instances. Still, the discussion shines

3. After ENNIO G. NAPOLITANO, *Le iscrizioni arabe della porta del mausoleo di Boemondo a Canosa*. Spolia: Journal of Medieval Studies 13/3 (2017) pp. 1–14.

for the mausoleum of Bohemond in Part 3. The author's argument that the satellite chapel at Canosa was meant to represent Christ's empty tomb in the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem (as well as Constantine's burial place at the Holy Apostles) certainly constitutes an original interpretation. Moving away from questions of who might have been the architect of the structure, she focuses throughout on Mediterranean connections. Consequently, determining the authorship of an artwork is not of utmost importance, nor can it be answered with any degree of certainty.

Just a few smaller editorial points: the use of italics in the book can be uneven. For instance, 'via Traiana' (p. 42) appears later as *via traina* (italicized and not capitalized, p. 175). In the same section, Part 3, for Bohemond's mausoleum, it was clad with 'preconnesian' instead of 'Proconnesian' marble (p. 160). The inscriptions on the door are noted as comprising the word *yumm* in Arabic, which should be *yumn* (p. 186). In one instance, the name of the Italian scholar MARIA STELLA CALÒ MARIANI is misspelled as Callò Mariani (p. 171).

In terms of larger themes and their argumentation, Elias and his patronage are presented as fundamentally tied to the Gregorian reform movement and the rhetoric of the First Crusade takes center stage in the Introduction. However, both only resurface again in Part 2 when considering the circumstances surrounding the consecration of San Nicola, its portals, crypt, and the archbishop's tomb. More solid is the discussion of the episcopal throne within a crusading context with reference to slavery, as well as the Solomonic elements present overall in the Barese church. A key reason for which arguments can become dispersed is that the organization of the book, also according to artistic media, necessitates jumping between sections if the reader wishes to fully investigate a single monument. Examples for the above include the consideration of the episcopal throne of Canosa and its connection to the one at Bari, and the crypt of San Nicola explored in Parts 1 and 2. In a number of instances, the rationale for such an arrangement is understandable. Some of these sites and artworks were made in several phases. The brief overview provided at the beginning of each of the book's three parts could have been deployed more skillfully to this end. Nonetheless, and perhaps unintentionally, the city maps that VERNON created mimic the ways people conceived of places in the pre-modern period (pp. 11, 43). They are surprisingly effective in their schematic representation, especially for urban cores, and the relationships between specific buildings and main thoroughfares, even if many readers these days can readily consult open-source maps. In closing, the author is successful in in-

corporating a wide range of media at the turn of the eleventh century. The book presents a cohesive picture of a southern Italian archdiocese located between the Byzantine world, also its past, the contemporary Fatimids, and the Normans, who were still in the future, at least mostly.

Keywords

Southern Italian art and architecture; Gregorian reform; First Crusade; Byzantine Italy; Norman Apulia; San Nicola of Bari; episcopal thrones; Bohemond of Antioch