

Architecture, materials and languages. From marble to stone and viceversa (Sicily 15th-16th centuries)*

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Resumen

Entre la segunda mitad del Cuatrocientos y las primeras décadas del Quinientos, la arquitectura en Sicilia ofrece un caso de coexistencia de dos ‘mundos’ ligados a técnicas y lenguajes relacionados con ámbitos culturales diferentes: Tardogótico y Renacimiento, según las etiquetas de la historiografía tradicional. Este artículo propone una aproximación no convencional que parte de una reflexión sobre los materiales y las prerrogativas profesionales de los representantes de las dos culturas de proyecto como campo de observación para las cambiantes relaciones de fuerza entre las dos. Si en un primer momento la piedra es el campo del Tardogótico y el mármol blanco el del Clasicismo, y las dos realidades conviven, progresivamente —gracias a la naturalización de las dinastías de escultores ‘marmorari’— los ambientes se interrelacionan y se hibridan, hasta la superación de los confines impuestos por los materiales usados y la llegada de los mármoles policromos locales que prelude la afirmación de un nuevo lenguaje a finales del siglo XVI.

Palabras clave

Mármol, Piedra, Sicilia, Renacimiento.

Abstract

Between the second half of the 15th century and the early decades of the 16th century architecture in Sicily offers a case of coexistence of two ‘worlds’ related to techniques and languages linked to different cultural contexts: late Gothic and Renaissance according to the labels of traditional historiography. This paper proposes an unconventional approach that starts from a reflection on materials and professional prerogatives of the two groups holders of different project cultures, as a field of observation for the changing balance of power between them. If initially the stone is the field of the Late Gothic and the white marble that of Classicism and the two realities coexist, then —also thanks to the naturalization of the dynasties of sculptors ‘marmorari’— the two areas intertwine and hybridize, until the completion of the boundaries imposed by the materials used and the advent of local polychrome marble which is a prelude to the affirmation of a new language at the end of the 16th century.

Key words

Marble, Stone, Sicily, Renaissance.

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A significant point of departure for reflecting on the ways and times of arrival and spread of Renaissance in Sicilian architecture can be traced in the diaspora of master masons and sculptors from the Neapolitan Castelnuovo, following the death of Alfonso the Magnanimous in 1458 [fig. 1]. In fact, right from the Neapolitan site arrive in the island artistic personalities, first of all sculptors like Francesco Laurana and Domenico Gagini —recently, the name Luciano Laurana also appeared in some documents—,¹ whose work gives a significant impulse to the diffusion of “all’antica” language also in the Sicilian context.²

As well as is observed in the building site for the reconfiguration of the Neapolitan royal palace/fortress at the time of king Alfonso, this language makes its entry onto the Sicilian scene in a well-defined scope. These are architectural-sculptural elements modeled in white Carrara marble, which are set within an architectural context for the rest still dominated by stone construction built with technics and forms proper of the so called “Mediterranean Gothic”.³

In the first instance, therefore, exists a clear identification among language, material and professional skills within each of the two groups holding two different design cultures. Decorative “all’antica” repertoires and the classicist language of architectural orders is the prerogative of the so-called *marmorari*, sculptors specialized in working white marble imported from Carrara, included in the construction site of architecture since the sixties of fifteenth century, but with specific commissions. Stone

¹ The documents are not related to any artistic commission but attest to the architect’s presence in 1461 in Palermo, the native city of his wife Caterina de Foliatis, granddaughter of the painter Gaspare Da Pesaro, probably coming from Naples; the documents have just been published in SCIBILIA, P., “1461: Luciano Laurana a Palermo”, *Lexicon. Storie e architettura in Sicilia e nel Mediterraneo*, 26-27, 2018, pp. 119-123.

² Still fundamental as a general overview on 15th and 16th century sculpture in Sicily, including a rich corpus of documents, is DI MARZO, G., *I Gagini e la scultura in Sicilia nei secoli XV e XVI*, Palermo, Edizioni librerie siciliane, 1880-83; with a specific focus on Gagini family see also KRUF, H. W., *Domenico Gagini und seine Werkstatt*, Munchen, Bruckmann, 1972, and KRUF, H. W., *Antonello Gagini und seine sohne*, Munchen, Bruckmann, 1980; for a more recent review of the activity of Domenico Gagini in Sicily see especially MIGLIORATO, A., “Domenico Gagini e l’origine del Rinascimento nella scultura siciliana”, in Musolino, G. (ed.), *Palazzo Ciampoli fra arte e storia*, (Exhibition catalogue), Taormina, December 2015-March 2016, Soveria Mannelli (CZ), Rubbettino, 2016, pp. 491-521. The dome, that was depicted by Domenico Gagini in the mosaics of San Pietro chapel in the old royal palace of Palermo in 1462 resembling that of Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence, can be considered a true art manifesto - almost a tribute to this master Brunelleschi; the connection between this image and the intervention to restore the mosaics by Domenico Gagini as well as the date have been confirmed by a document published in DE MARCO SPATA, B., *Un documento inedito di Domenico Gagini sui restauri musivi della Cappella Palatina di Palermo (1460-62)*, Palermo, 2016, pp. 5-15, available at <https://www.academia.edu>.

³ According to a historiographic point of view outlined in MIRA, E. and ZARAGOZÁ CATALÁN, A. (eds.), *Una arquitectura gótica mediterránea*, (Exhibition catalogue), Valencia, Generalitat Valenciana, 2003, vol. 2.



Fig. 1. Naples. Castelnuovo.

and to a lesser extent also the brick are the raw materials through which goes on simultaneously the modern architectural construction, in line with similar experiences observed in the territories of the Aragonese Spain, by the *fabricatores* (master masons with strong technical expertise), the dominant professional figure in the architectural site in Sicily until the first decades of the sixteenth century.⁴

The presence in the group of marble workers operating in Palermo of a substantial number of Tuscans and Lombards makes clear the origin of this craft from the central and northern regions of mainland Italy.⁵ Moreover, the existence of guilds of marble workers is documented for

⁴ For a more specific study on these professionals see: GAROFALO, E., *Le arti del costruire. Corporazioni edili, mestieri e regole nel Mediterraneo aragonese*, Palermo, Caracol, 2010; GAROFALO, E., "Mestieri e competenze nel cantiere di architettura in Sicilia tra Trecento e primo Cinquecento", *Lexicon. Storie e architettura in Sicilia e nel Mediterraneo*, 22-23, 2016, pp. 41-52.

⁵ For a review of the masters coming from Carrara and Lombardy respectively in the 15th and the first half of the 16th century see: ARICÒ, N., "La diaspora dei carraresi in un censimento del tempo di Alberico I. Sulla diffusione dei linguaggi decorativi nell'architettura del Cinquecento", *Rassegna di Architettura e Urbanistica*, 94, 1998, pp. 7-16; MELI, F., "Costruttori e lapicidi del Lario e del Ceresio nella seconda metà del Quattrocento in Palermo", *Arte e Artisti dei laghi lombardi, Rivista Archeologica dell'Antica Provincia e Diocesi di Como*, 1959, pp. 207-243.



Fig. 2. Palermo. Church of S. Francesco d'Assisi, arch of Mastrantonio chapel by Francesco Laurana and Pietro De Bonitate (or da Bonate).

example in Rome and Carrara,⁶ and the denomination *marmoraro* also appears in documents from Campania, being included among the other as an independent profession in the relative index of his valuable work by Filangieri.⁷

Although we do not consider correct to emphasize the contrast between marble workers and *fabricatores*, the existence of a certain initial antagonism or at least the need for a definition of the respective roles and operational fields is demonstrated in Palermo from *privilegium pro marmorariis et fabricatoribus* in 1487.⁸ The document approved chapters of a corporate statute that on one hand brings together into a single association, representatives of the two professions, while at the same time it marks the distinction

between them, even in regard to the professional competences.

Expressive of a desire to draw boundaries appears to us in this regard the presence in the chapters of a basic but clear distinction of the activities pertaining to the professional categories of marble workers and *fabricatores*, respectively “teniri putiga” e “murari”. The two expressions in our view intended to circumscribe the action of the marble workers to carving and sculptural activity, leaving only to *fabricatores* the architectural sphere.

This distinction of the spheres of action and the biunivocal correspondence which associates to the binomial material/craft a precise language is in fact reflected in some examples dating between the second half of the fifteenth century and the first decade of the sixteenth century. An intriguing intertwining is what emerges, for instance, from a contract

⁶ KLAPISH-ZUBER, C., *Les maîtres du marbre. Carrare 1300-1600*, Paris, S.E.V.P.E.N, 1969; LEONARDO, M., “Gli statuti dell’Università dei marmorari a Roma: scultori e scalpellini (1406-1756)”, *Studi Romani*, XLV, 1997, 3-4, pp. 269-300.

⁷ FILANGIERI, G., *Documenti per la storia, le arti e le industrie delle provincie napoletane raccolti e pubblicati per cura di Gaetano Filangieri*, vol. 6, Napoli, Tipografia dell’Accademia Reale delle Scienze, 1883-1891, V, pp. 576-577.

⁸ For an essential transcription of the document and the related bibliography see GAROFALO, E., *Le arti del costruire...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 233-243.



Fig. 3. Palermo. Fimia Palace, ribbed vault with five key-stones in the atrium.



Fig. 4. Palermo. Fimia Palace, main façade.

dating from 1468. For the completion of the Mastrantonio chapel in the church of San Francesco d'Assisi in Palermo, with an arch at the entrance of the chapel composed by historiated panels, being one of the earliest and finest Renaissance works of the island [fig. 2], the marble workers Pietro De Bonitate (or da Bonate) and Francesco Laurana undertake to do key-stone of the vault of the chapel itself in white marble (*a fari la chiavi dammusii dicte cappelle di marmura*).⁹

A clearer definition of the areas of action shows the Fimia palace in Palermo, of uncertain dating but included in the span of time specified, that, according to late Gothic taste and construction technic, shows a ribbed vault with five key-stones covering the atrium [fig. 3] and a stone façade combined with windows decorated with “all’antica” motives and sculpted in white marble [fig. 4].

If the windows were attributed to the Tuscan marble workers Giuliano Mancino and Bartolomeo Berrettaro,¹⁰ for the vault we could suppose ins-

⁹ For an essential transcription of the document and the related bibliography see the record by Antonella Armetta at http://www.cosmedweb.org/pdf_schede/Palermo-SanFrancescodAssisiCap-pellaMastrantonio-1468.pdf.

¹⁰ DI MARZO, G., *I Gagini e la scultura in Sicilia...*, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 151-152.



Fig. 5. Syracuse. Church of S. Maria dei Miracoli, detail of a niche on the façade.

thead the involvement of the *fabricator* of Majorcan origin Joan de Casada, author in 1492 of a similar vault for the atrium of the bishop's palace in Palermo, today no more visible, commissioned by the bishop Giovanni Paternò.¹¹

In a contract for the realization of windows and a portal in the house of Nicolao de Castellutis in Palermo, in 1473, the ultimate change in material from stone to white marble also seems to imply a change in the master in charge of the work.¹² Another case in some ways even more expressive of the biunivocal correspondence material/language and of the nonchalant paratactical composition of different languages that characterizes the Sicilian architecture of the early sixteenth century, can be traced in Syracuse in the façade of the church of Santa Maria dei Miracoli, where an iper-flamboyant niche carved in stone [fig. 5] is flanked by a classical white marble portal, which bears the date 1501 engraved [fig. 6].

However, this kind of balance and a clear delimitation of boundaries between the two professions had to have a short duration, if in Palermo

¹¹ The document was published for the first time in MELI, F., *Matteo Carnilivari e l'architettura del Quattro e Cinquecento in Palermo*, Roma, Palobi, 1958, doc. 61, pp. 256-257.

¹² NOBILE, M. R., D'ALESSANDRO, G. and SCADUTO, F., "Costruire a Palermo. La difficile genesi del palazzo privato nell'età di Carlo V", *Lexicon. Storie e architettura in Sicilia*, o. n. s., 2000, pp. 11-38, spec. p. 13.

as early as 1508 the two professional groups are no longer collected in a unique association, having also different places of worship.¹³ This is probably attributable to a “trespassing” of marble workers and the resistance opposed by a lobby that saw with fear the advance and success of sculptors also in architecture. Watershed work is perhaps the Tribune reconfiguration in the Palermo cathedral and pivotal figure is certainly Antonello Gagini [fig. 7],¹⁴ member of the second generation of a family saga that from its forefather Domenico (Antonello’s father, originally from Bissone) had a reference figure for the start of “rise of the marble workers” in Sicily.

Since 1507 Antonello Gagini is engaged in the construction of a monumental marble *cona*, with three rows of niches, 40 in total, framed by columns and populated by statues of saints (dismembered in late-eighteenth-century reconfiguration of the cathedral),¹⁵ which covered the interior surfaces of the main apse [fig. 8]. The client is the same bishop Giovanni Paternò [fig. 9] who a few years earlier had commissioned the *fabricator* Casada the construction of a ribbed vault with five key-stones—already mentioned before—for the atrium of the episcopal palace.¹⁶ This is an eloquent demonstration of bilingualism even of the most distinguished patrons, that, far from making net field choices, take instead the best available on the market without any prejudice. Moreover, the contract for the realization of the *cona* specifies that the apsidal vault above it would



Fig. 6. Syracuse. Church of S. Maria dei Miracoli, detail of the portal on the façade.

¹³ PATERA, B., “Marmorari e muratori” nel Privilegium del 1487”, in *I Mestieri. Organizzazione, tecniche, linguaggi*, Palermo 1984, pp. 199-122, spec. pp. 199-201, and p. 221.

¹⁴ On the role played by Antonello Gagini in the increasing of the sphere of activity of marble sculptors in Palermo see in particular NOBILE, M. R., *Antonello Gagini architetto*, Palermo, Flaccovio, 2010.

¹⁵ Celebrated by historians since the 16th century (Tomaso Fazello), the contract for its construction was published in DI MARZO, G., *I Gagini e la scultura in Sicilia...*, *op. cit.*, II, LVI; for a recent analysis of the *cona* in the context of Antonello’s architectural works and a review of the previous bibliography see NOBILE, M. R., *Antonello Gagini...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-32.

¹⁶ See note 11.



Fig. 7. Portrait of Antonello Gagini, drawn according to that in a lost low relief in the marble ancona of the Palermo cathedral. Engraving, 19th century (from GALLO, A., *Elogio storico di Antonio Gagini, scultore ed architetto palermitano, Palermo 1821*).

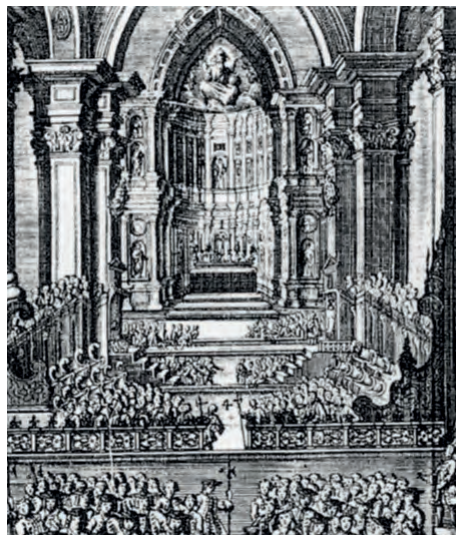


Fig. 8. Engraving depicting the interior of the Palermo cathedral, detail of the Tribune reconfiguration by Antonello Gagini (from SCHIAVO, D., *Descrizione della solenne acclamazione...*, Palermo 1760).



Fig. 9. Sarcophagus of the bishop Giovanni Paternò in the crypt of the Palermo cathedral (Javier Ibáñez Fernández).

have been decorated with a mosaic, depicting God the father and a hierarchy of angels,¹⁷ thus also including a more “traditional” technical and artistic subject. From a short biography we know of some other commissions by the same bishop,¹⁸ including fountains and portals in white marble decorated with the client’s coat of arms, demonstrating once more his appreciation for this kind of work, presumably shaped according to classical models. Between 1499 and 1507, he also commissioned works in the monastery of S. Maria degli Angeli in Baida, probably including, in addition to classizing white marble portals [fig. 10], the refined composition of the portal flanked by two windows at the entrance of the chapter hall [fig. 11], which again pertains to the repertoire of the Mediterranean gothic. In fact, an attribution to the aforementioned master-mason Joan de Casada has been hypothesized for this design, in which the springing of a ribbed vault corresponds with the key of the portal’s pointed arch in a manner very similar to that in the cloister of the Trinity monastery in Valencia.¹⁹

The work by Antonello for the cathedral of Palermo, who proceeded slowly amid difficulties and oppositions (completed by his sons only in the seventies), could have triggered disagreements and rivalries with construction specialists, considering its architectural and not



Fig. 10. Baida (near Palermo). Monastery of S. Maria degli Angeli, detail of a portal with the coat of arms of the bishop Giovanni Paternò.

¹⁷ DI MARZO, G., *I Gagini e la scultura in Sicilia...*, *op. cit.*, II, LVI.

¹⁸ These are: interventions in the episcopal palace, where he added a garden, marble fountains and portals at the ground level; restoration of the church in the garden of Scibene; the foundation of the monastery of Santa Maria del Popolo in Palermo, in a site later occupied by Discalced Augustinian; a marble tabernacle for the Holy Sacrament chapel in the cathedral; restoration works in the monastery of S. Maria degli Angeli in Baida, near Palermo, and the construction of the a chapel dedicated to S. Giovanni. The biographical file of the bishop Giovanni Paternò is included in the manuscript: Biblioteca Comunale di Palermo [B. C. P.], Qq D 5, MONGITORE, A., *Istoria cronologica degli arcivescovi della Metropolitana chiesa di Palermo scritta da D. Antonino Mongitore, Canonico di detta chiesa, Giudice sinodale, conservatore, e qualificatore del S. Ufficio, Parte Prima*, ms., cc. 457-468.

¹⁹ SCADUTO, F., “I collaboratori. Storie e biografia”, in Nobile, M. R. (ed.), *Matteo Carnilivari Pere Compte 1506-2006, due maestri del gotico nel Mediterraneo*, Palermo, Caracol, 2006, pp. 97-108, spec. p. 101.



Fig. 11. Baida (near Palermo). Monastery of S. Maria degli Angeli, detail of the entrance to the chapter hall in the cloister.



Fig. 12. Palermo. Church of Portosalvo, view of the nave (Javier Ibáñez Fernández).

simply sculptural character and the importance of the building in which it had to be placed. That a more prominent role in architecture fell within the aspirations of Antonello, in fact, can be inferred from the role of designer of the church of Santa Maria Portosalvo [fig. 12] in the city of Palermo that he gained a few years later. It's precisely this building that allows us to observe how in the twenties of the sixteenth century the clear distinction of roles, including working materials, between marble workers and fabricators has now faded away and how elements and themes of the classical vocabulary have been translated into stone. Upon the death of Antonello in 1536, however, the leadership of the construction passed to one of the most successful *fabricatores* working in Palermo, Antonio Scalone, who gives a turn to the construction site towards the established building tradition of gothic origin in the construction of arches and vaults.²⁰

The combination of the two architectural cultures in this case arises from the alternation at the head of the building site of masters bearing each just one of those cultures, while, in parallel, in other cases we find the affirmation of a "bilingualism" in the work of the same master, giving rise to other ways of hybridization of languages. This can be noticed for instance in two interesting domed chapels dating by the thirties of the sixteenth century, in Modica and in Comiso,²¹ among the few fragments of the first early modern architecture survived to the 1693 earthquake in south-eastern Sicily. In the Confrati chapel in Modica hybridization concerns in particular the entrance arch, composed by a sequence of slightly pointed concentric arches with sticks (thin columns) and continuous capitals, according to a late Gothic scheme, but decorated with minutes "all'antica"



Fig. 13. Modica. Confrati chapel in the church of S. Maria di Betlem in Modica, detail of the entrance arch.

²⁰ NOBILE, M. R., *Chiese colonnari in Sicilia (XVI secolo)*, Palermo, Caracol, 2009, pp. 21-25.

²¹ For the most recent contribution on the two chapels see NOBILE, M. R., *Architettura e costruzione in Italia meridionale (XVI-XVII secolo)*, Palermo, Caracol, 2016, pp. 19-23.

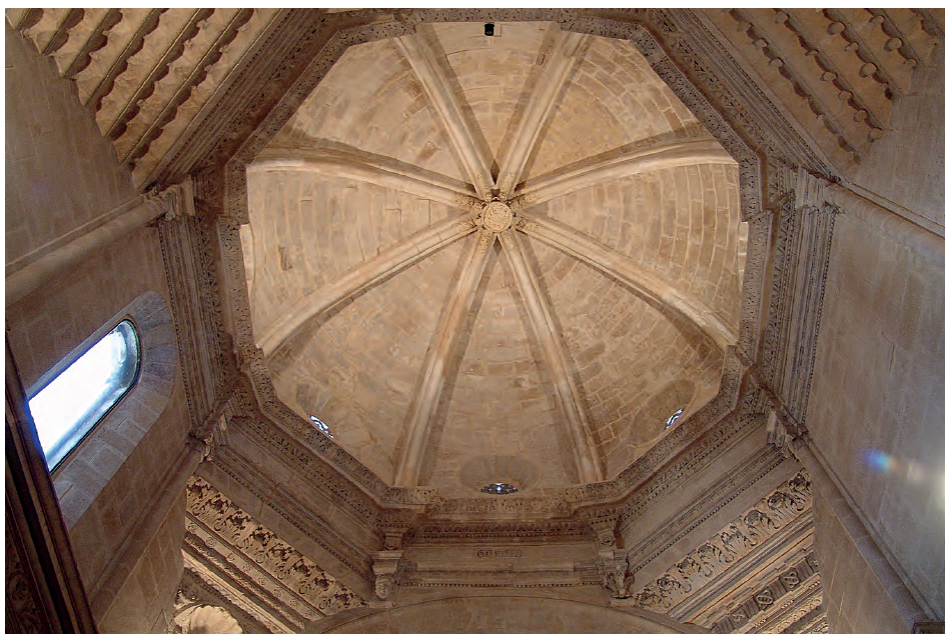


Fig. 14. Comiso. Naselli chapel in the church of S. Francesco in Comiso, details of the dome, from the intrados.



Fig. 15. Enna. Duomo, sculptural detail of the first "column" on the left, maybe a selfportrait by Giandomenico Gagini.

motifs carved in stone [fig. 13]. The Naselli Chapel in San Francesco in Comiso shows instead molded ribs converging in a central key in the intrados of the dome, set on a classicist cornice and joined below by squinches decorated with minute sequences of "all'antica" motifs, all that carved in stone [fig. 14].

Around the thirties of the sixteenth century, so, even if the use of white marble for the creation of portals, columns and other architectural elements continues, the transition to the stone is accomplished becoming increasingly widespread in the following decades. The reasons for this passage are in our view primarily tied to economic considerations, also depending on the local availability of stone for carving, and the desire to extend the use of the classical language of the entire building.

If that justification is evidenced by the aforementioned church of Portosalvo by Antonello Gagini, is still through the activity of another member of the same saga, Giandomenico the eldest son of Antonello [fig. 15],²² that the first proposed explanation finds interesting confirmations.

After having undertook his career as a sculptor alongside his father, perhaps due to disagreements arose with his brothers, born from the second marriage of Antonello, Giandomenico Gagini leave Palermo and the western side of the island (where the brothers continue to operate), getting commissions in smaller and lesser known centers of the inner and eastern side of Sicily. Precisely in these centers he will carry out interesting sculptural and architectural works using local stones: the amazing gray alabaster of ungrammatical but fascinating “columns” of the Duomo of Enna (1560-1562) [figs. 16-19];²³ another gray stone in a sequence of arches of chapels, subsequently transferred under the side porch of the cathedral of Nicosia [fig. 20], and probably a more conventional limestone suitable for carving in the portal of the civic loggia in Caltagirone. Here his descendants will continue to work, authors of other interesting Renaissance stone portals [figs. 21-22].²⁴

To the passage of classical language from the white marble to stone corresponds certainly an enlargement of the boundaries of the profession, also thanks to the naturalization of the dynasties of sculptors “marmorari” which also become related through marriage with members of the *fabricatores* world, all contributing to making more porous the boundaries between professions.

Going back to Palermo, another field in which is observed the gradual affirmation of models from the Italian peninsula “imposed by the construction site” and the technical skills of the master builders who dominate the architectural scene since the forties of the sixteenth century, is that of the vaults.²⁵ Here, too, we identify a pivotal construction site, that of the church of Santa Maria dei Miracoli (around 1547) where if on one hand it continues the structural research present

²² Marco Nobile recently proposed the identification of a man’s face sculpted in a pillar made by Giandomenico Gagini in the duomo of Enna as a selfportrait of the artist. NOBILE, M. R., “Strumenti simbolici di distinzione e di affermazione professionale nell’architettura del Cinquecento in Italia meridionale (Puglia, Sicilia, Sardegna)”, *Annali di architettura*, 30, 2018, pp. 71-80, spec. p. 78.

²³ On the 16th century reconfiguration of the duomo of Enna and the professional activity of Giandomenico Gagini see GAROFALO, E., *La rinascita cinquecentesca del duomo di Enna*, Palermo, Caracol, 2007.

²⁴ On Gagini’s activity in Caltagirone see in particular RAGONA, A., *Il Tempio di S. Giacomo in Caltagirone*, Catania, Tringale, 1992, pp. 40-45.

²⁵ For a study of the construction of vaults in southern Italy and the changes in techniques and models between the end of 15th and the 16th centuries see GAROFALO, E., *Crociere e lunette in Sicilia e in Italia meridionale nel XVI secolo*, Palermo, Caracol, 2016.



Figs. 16-19. Enna. Duomo, details of the two 'columns' sculpted by Giandomenico Gagini (around 1560-1562).



Fig. 20. Nicosia. Cathedral, detail of the arches relocated under the side porch, attributed to Giandomenico Gagini.



Figs. 21-22. Caltagirone. Chiesa di S. Giacomo: portal by Antonuzzo Gagini, 1583; portal on the south facade by Giandomenico Gagini, 1610 (from RAGONA, A., Il Tempio di S. Giacomo in Caltagirone, Catania, Tringale, 1992).



Fig. 23. Palermo. Church of S. Maria dei Miracoli, view of the vaulting system.

in the aforementioned church of Portosalvo, with columnar supports and small pillars set on the top of the capitals (*sovrassesti*) to raise the springing of arches, imparting this way verticality and slenderness to load carrying structures, on the other hand the vaulting system changes [fig. 23]. This is in fact the first case of generalized use in a church pavilion vaults with lunettes at the springing, a type of vault born in the Italian Renaissance courts of the fifteenth century and commonly used in the central and northern regions of the peninsula also in the following century, introduced in the Sicilian building site by Tuscans and Lombards master masons, experiencing a clear affirmation in the second half of the sixteenth century.



Fig. 24. Palermo. Villa Gonzaga (now the church of Santa Maria di Monserrato or delle Croci), detail of one of the original vaults.

The use of this type of vault, in addition to generate a different formal effect, implied a change in the construction technique, compared to the ribbed vault which represented up to the previous decade the most widely practiced solution. Although then the success of the model can also be the result of emulation of examples related to an illustrious client, such as the vaults in Palermo residences of the Viceroy Ferrante Gonzaga (around 1536-1542) [fig. 24], designed by his court architect the Tuscan Domenico Giunti,²⁶ the type of technical culture and the possession of a specific know-how on the part of the masters who impose themselves on the local labor market in my opinion is a key factor in understanding the phenomenon.

²⁶ The villa was at a later time transformed into a church, but in some rooms the original pavilion vaults with lunettes still remain. For a virtual reconstruction of the original configuration of Gonzaga's villa see CANINO, A. E., *Frammenti del Rinascimento in Sicilia. La villa di Ferrante Gonzaga a Palermo: storia e ipotesi ricostruttiva*, tesi di laurea, Università degli Studi di Palermo, Facoltà di Architettura, relatore prof. S. Piazza, correlatore prof. F. Agnello, a.a. 2010-2011. Some hypothesis were already been exposed in PIAZZA, S., *Le Ville di Palermo. Le dimore extraurbane dei Baroni del Regno di Sicilia (1412-1812)*, Roma, Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 2011, pp. 25-26. For a general overview of the architectural commissions by Ferrante Gonzaga during this appointment as viceroy of Sicily see GAROFALO, E., "L'impeto de l'animo al vincere e l'ardore de la mente a la gloria'. Il governo di Ferrante Gonzaga (1535-1546), tra opere pubbliche e committenza privata", in Piazza, S. (ed.), *La Sicilia dei viceré nell'età degli Asburgo. La difesa dell'isola, le città capitali, la celebrazione della monarchia 1516-1700*, Palermo, Caracol, 2016, pp. 61-86.



Fig. 25. Randazzo (Messina).
Church of S. Maria, view of the naves.

Starting from the two main cities of the island, Palermo and Messina, especially in the second half of the sixteenth century, a new phenomenon establishes itself, contributing to a further decline of the appreciation for stone cutting building and its artistic and technical culture (except for some strongholds in south-eastern Sicily). That is the interest for colored stones and marbles around which starts an on-site research that will prove to be fruitful, offering Sicily in this field too remarkable richness and variety.²⁷

This interest results in applications that show a clear dependence on Tuscan models for some cases and Lombard for others, explainable in the first instance once again

with the background (the origin, but also training experiences or artistic encounters) of the authors responsible for their ideation, while obviously encountering the taste and expectations of clients increasingly oriented towards Italian models.

It is in particular the Florentine use, remembrance of a Brunelleschi's mode, to counterpose a gray stone architectural frame to neutral fields of whitewashed walls, as shown in the Etna context by the mother churches of Randazzo [fig. 25] and Trecastagni [fig. 26] by the Tuscan brothers Lorenzo and Andrea Calamech (eighties of 16th century),²⁸ but also near Palermo, as recently discovered for the abbey church in the Benedictine complex of San Martino delle Scale (1561-1602) [fig. 27].²⁹

²⁷ The search for local materials was also intended to establish the local production of monolithic columns; on this fascinating topic see in particular SUTERA, D., *Una pietra per l'architettura e la città. L'uso del grigio di Billiemi nella Sicilia d'età moderna e contemporanea*, Palermo, Caracol, 2015, spec. pp. 13-23.

²⁸ On the spread of this design solution in the Etna region see GAROFALO, E., "Le lave. Gli usi ornamentali nell'architettura storica in Sicilia", *Lexicon. Storie e architettura in Sicilia e nel Mediterraneo*, 14-15, 2012, pp. 70-88; on the church of Randazzo see PASSALACQUA, F., *La Basilica di Santa Maria Assunta di Randazzo (XIII-XIX secolo)*, Palermo, Caracol, 2017, pp. 41-78.

²⁹ SILVIA, S., *La chiesa nuova del complesso abbaziale di San Martino delle Scale: progetto, cantiere, modelli*, tesi di laurea, Università degli Studi di Palermo, Dipartimento di Architettura, relatore prof. E. Garofalo, correlatore prof. F. Agnello, a.a. 2015-2016, pp. 74-76.

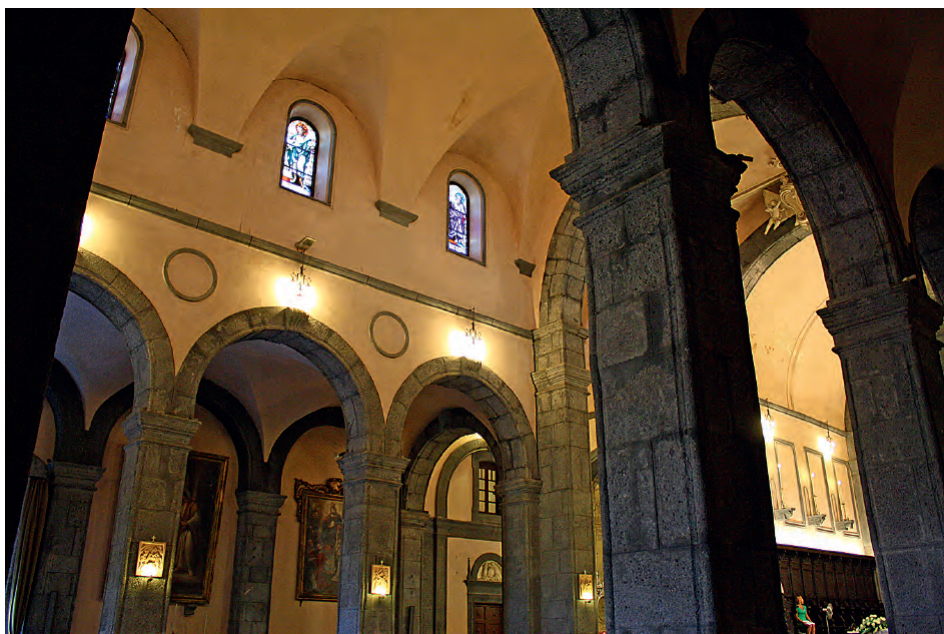


Fig. 26. Trecastagni (Catania). Mother church, view of the naves.

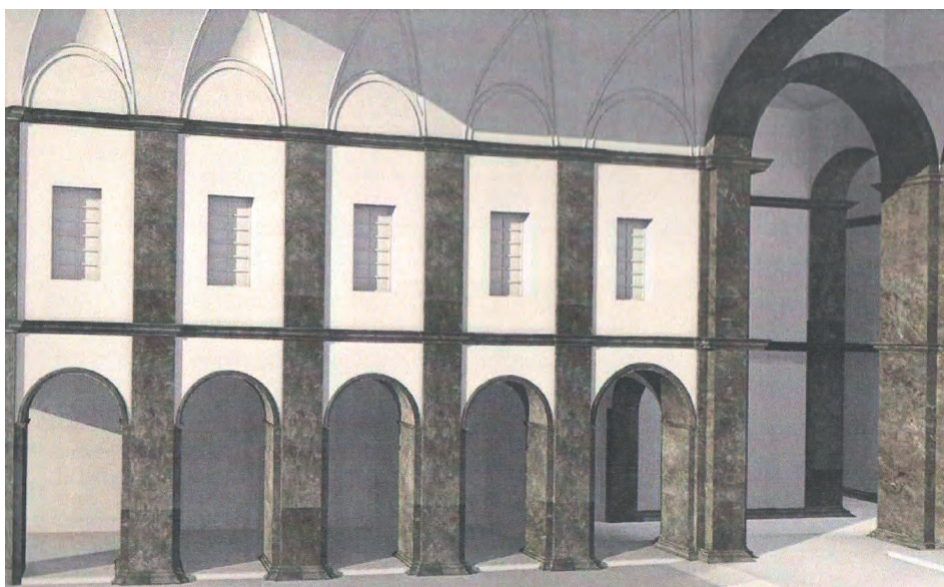


Fig. 27. Axonometric longitudinal section of the church of the monastery of San Martino delle Scale (near Palermo); hypothetical reconstruction of the original coloring of the nave (drawing by Simona Silvia).



Fig. 28. Messina. Cathedral, detail of the façade with the multi-colored coating on the first order.

Other episodes instead rely the final image of the work to multi-colored coatings, with chromatic motifs and compositions relatable to the work of Amadeo or other interpreters of the Lombard Renaissance, in some cases, or ascertained from Tuscany in others. An example of both modes is provided by the cathedral of Messina, respectively, in the coating of the first order of the façade (still in combination with late Gothic portals) [fig. 28] probably around 1518 when the head master mason of the cathedral was the sculptor Antonello Freri, alias Antonio Buctuni,³⁰ and within the same church in the so-called apostolate [fig. 29] of the Tuscan Giovannangelo Montorsoli.³¹



Fig. 29. Messina. Cathedral, view of the Apostolato (reconstruction of the original one by Giovannangelo Montorsoli).

³⁰ NOBILE, M. R., "Strumenti simbolici...", *op. cit.*, p. 80, note 37.

³¹ On the activity of Montorsoli in Sicilia see in particular ARICÒ, N., *Architettura del tardo Rinascimento in Sicilia. Giovannangelo Montorsoli a Messina (1547-57)*, Firenze, Olschki, 2013.

The interpretation proposed in this contribution, of course, does not summarize the full range of design themes and ways of affirmation of the Renaissance artistic culture in the architecture of Sicily at the beginning of the early modern period, but we hope it will help to shed more light on the complex dynamics underlying to this claim.

