

CONVIVIUM

Exchanges and Interactions in the Arts of Medieval
Europe, Byzantium, and the Mediterranean
Seminarium Kondakovianum, Series Nova



UNIVERSITÉ DE LAUSANNE
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CONVIVIUM V/1/2018

Exchanges and Interactions in the Arts of Medieval
Europe, Byzantium, and the Mediterranean

Seminarium Kondakovianum, Series Nova

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South:
Transcultural
Perspectives
500–1500**

edited by **Elisabetta Scirocco & Gerhard Wolf**
with the collaboration of **Karolina Foletti**

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The Italian South: Transcultural Perspectives

Elisabetta Scirocco & Gerhard Wolf

From its very beginning *Convivium* has been interested in dedicating a monographic issue to Southern Italy, an obvious and highly pertinent field of enquiry for the exchanges and interactions in the arts and cultures of the medieval Mediterranean that form the core focus of this journal. From Late Antiquity to the early modern period the Italian south was characterized by important political, devotional, and commercial routes crossing the Mediterranean; uninterrupted settlement, passage, and conquest; and the overlapping, coexistence and fluidity of cultural and religious identities. For these reasons, Southern Italy has long since become an observatory for testing theoretical and methodological approaches dealing with cultural encounters and interactions: it seems to offer a small-scale globalized environment in which it is possible to observe transcultural phenomena and processes of negotiation, transmission, and appropriation. From an epistemological point of view and exactly for the same reasons, “Southern Italian” often functions as an easy label for objects or artistic products that do not easily fit into the established taxonomies of medieval art. For the occasion of this volume we have consciously adopted the term “Italian South”, an allusion to the postcolonial notion of “Global South”, not in any way essentialising the southern part of the Italian peninsula, but pointing to some of the historiographical constructs related to the political, social, and cultural dynamics of this area from the nineteenth to the early twenty-first century.

1/ Scalinata Normanna.
Piccole Dolomiti Lucane,
Castelmezzano (PT) /
January 2018 / from the
serie *Forme di Paesaggio*
© Antonio Di Cecco

With these considerations as our foundation, we launched a call for papers to gain a wider perspective on studies in progress concerning the Italian South and the methodologies being employed. The excellent responses allowed some preliminary observations.

The first is that Southern Italy is attracting increasing interest from the international academic community; the second is that this research focuses on themes, areas, and some chronotopoi that are to be expected: Norman Sicily, the *longue durée* of Byzantine culture in Apulia, the commissions and artistic exchanges triggered by the court of Naples under the Angevin and then the Aragonese rule. A third and related outcome of this call is the evidence of “opaque zones” in the geographical, historical, and artistic map of the South that remain to be explored, or research to be realized that deals with trajectories and mobility such as the crusades, the migration of artists, objects, forms, and models, rather than with specific places. Yet even when the contributions refer to the themes and chronotopoi of the traditions mentioned above, they explore new paths and offer alternative readings.

We therefore enthusiastically accepted as many of the proposals as possible for this monographic issue, subjecting them one by one to a rigorous double-blind peer review and making a joint effort with the editorial staff to bring this volume to light within the scheduled time. For this reason, and for having worked tirelessly to accomplish this publication in less than one year, we are deeply grateful to the authors who contributed their studies to *Convivium*; to the scholars who gave their expertise as peer reviewers; to Karolina Foletti, the kind and firm executive editor of this issue; to Berta Marešová for her excellent work with graphics and typesetting; and, last but not least, to Ivan Foletti, chief editor of the journal, for supporting our project with patience and enthusiasm.

We open this issue with two images by the photographer Antonio di Cecco first to underline how much *Convivium* considers itself a contemporary voice, reflecting the present and the future of the past, from multiple points of view including those of contemporary artists. More specifically in relation to this volume, these images are part of its topics and concerns. They belong to a project dedicated to Italian landscapes (*Forme di paesaggio*) which Di Cecco began in Basilicata in 2018. The region, set between seas and cultures, is a little-studied part of the Italian South, the landscape called the “piccole Dolomiti”, echoing the homonymous North Italian mountains. What Di Cecco shows is the interplay of human and non-human shaped aspects of the landscape. The photographs might be considered a formal exercise, exposing geometries and architecture, as well as the forms and surfaces of rocks and stones in the modeled light, caught by his camera. The detail presenting a mountain-rock with the line of steps carved into it, leading up to the top, displays the perspective of human labor transforming a natural site into a place of ascent and circumspection. It could lead to a mountain sanctuary or monastery or be seen as a stairway to heaven. In reality, these rocky hills are inserted into a chain of fortifications that date from the Norman-Swabian dominion of Southern Italy, the fortress of Castelmezzano situated in the middle of others dotting the shores of both coasts. The eye and the modes of imaging of the photographer transform the site and open it to new readings, as the second image shows the rock as part of an environment in which the houses (many of them modern buildings) of Castelmezzano are embedded in or set against it. Hardly any human being can be seen in the image, which evokes a poetics of emptiness in a midday atmosphere. We have selected these images precisely as a voice in their own right, without forcing them to serve as an allegorical device pointing to the essays of this volume. However, the images show a landscape which carries signs of and



is profoundly connected to the transcultural dynamics of this geographical and historical area, concealing and exposing them at the same time (with their deceptive timelessness). With this we turn to the presence of highly diverse political, social, and religious entities over the centuries of the Middle Ages, and to the multi-layered connectivities that can be traced in the Italian South itself, across the Mediterranean, and beyond.

2/ Castelmezzano (PT) /
January 2018/ from the
serie *Forme di Paesaggio*
© Antonio Di Cecco

For this volume, we have invited contributions from Art History and related disciplines, with special attention to sites, monuments, landscapes, images, and objects, as well as to the visual and aesthetic spheres in general. We were primarily interested in exploring horizontal and vertical dynamics, in terms of time (synchronicity/diachronicity) and space or scale (global/Mediterranean/regional/local). The themes explored include: Artistic contacts and interactions within the Italian South, in a transregional perspective, and their role in broader Mediterranean and trans-Mediterranean networks and infrastructures; centripetal and centrifugal paths of exchange, transmission, and appropriation; migration of objects, images, and techniques across cultures, spaces, environments, materials and media: for example in relation to practices of reuse and interpretation; sites, places, and spaces of cultural interactions, such as cities and courts; religious and interreligious practices in sacred space and ritual contexts; local persistences and reinterpretations of the Greco-Roman past in various political, religious, and/or cultural settings; the fascination with the (medieval) Italian South, from the eighteenth century to the present; and the notion of “Southern Italian”, as it relates to the study of medieval art, and its historiographical implications.

The complexity of arguments that can be put under the label “Transcultural” is reflected in the different ways in which this concept has been interpreted and approached by the

authors of this volume. Summarizing the contents and the major achievements of their contributions is beyond the scope of this brief introduction. The plurality of voices and approaches forms a sequence of articles that “guides” the reader on a journey through the Italian South and along the trajectories generated from it and towards it. It begins in Sicily, immediately after the fall of Muslim Palermo at the hands of the Normans, in the midst of coping with different religious traditions, spaces, and languages, continuing through the change of dynasty with the Hohenstaufen, with side glances to the crusades and a round trip to and from the coast of Salerno. From there it moves to the Adriatic shore, from Termoli through the Terra di Bari to the Salento, exploring the long persisting impact of antique models and different forms of cultural and artistic identities in these former Byzantine territories. Questions of patronage take us from Galatina under the Orsini del Balzo to the Angevin court in Naples, the new capital of the South, where we stop only momentarily. For rather than consider Naples as a site of self-sufficient production, we immediately encounter objects from elsewhere and networks of translocation that invite us to see the city and the art within it from new perspectives. First Bologna, where we follow the route of a fourteenth-century illuminated codex, then we take two diverging and equally stimulating paths, focused on the mobility of artists, works, and forms at the time of the crown of Aragon: the Adriatic coast of Dubrovnik and the Mediterranean routes of painting, that allow us to include the island of Sardinia and its relations with the Iberian peninsula as well as with Flanders in the fifteenth century. Finally, the ideological reception and use of the multicultural milieu and the architecture of Norman Sicily in France and Germany between the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries sheds light on the problematics and at the same time productivity of this topic in terms of historiography and artistic reception. Thus, our trip arrives at the center of Europe to bring us back to the South, exactly the point in which our journey began, ready to start again on new possible paths, for example considering artistic practices in relation to material culture and socio-anthropological concerns, landscape-archeology, or monumental heritage and environments from an eco-historical point of view.

This itinerary, built on the basis of the papers received and selected, is only a small demonstration of the dense fabric that links different artistic and cultural phenomena over a wide chronological period. Of course, as with every route taken, the direction can be reversed and the stops can vary. From our side, this is a provocation, an invitation to the readers to break this pattern and to pursue the countless other possible intellectual journeys within and around the Italian South. We are confident that the reader will find other connections within the dense web of threads that, on several levels, open new view points on other territories and issues.

For this reason and in conclusion, we are pleased to announce here the intention to publish a *Supplementum of Convivium* dedicated to further conceptual and methodological issues raised by the study of the Italian South, with an awareness of the potential inexhaustibility of the topics and of the complexity of its historic landscapes.

