



## **Sicily: Heritage of the World**

Edited by Dirk Booms  
and Peter John Higgs

# **Sicily: Heritage of the World**

Edited by Dirk Booms and Peter Higgs

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Edited by Dirk Booms and Peter Higgs

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Front cover: Mount Etna, source of the island's agricultural fertility, towers over Lago Pergusa, in antiquity thought to be one of the entrances to the underworld

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# Chapter 16

## Gothic Revival Architecture and Decoration between Bourbon Absolutism and Sicilian Nationalism in Palermo in the Early 19th Century

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By the mid-19th century the history of medieval Sicily was well known in Europe, due in part to the many Grand Tour travellers who no longer simply paid attention to the classical antiquities of Rome, Pompeii and Magna Grecia.

Following the writings and interests of Karl Friedrich Schinkel, who visited Sicily in 1804,<sup>1</sup> and Jacques J. Hittorff and Ludwig Zanth (1822–4), there came to Palermo Jean F. d'Ostervald (1822–6), Girault de Prangey (1834), Henry Gally Knight (1836) and many others, in whose writings not just classical antiquity, but also the great Norman buildings of Palermo featured: the Cuba, the castle of Maremolce, the Cloister of Monreale, the church of San Giovanni degli Eremiti and the cathedral.<sup>2</sup> In 1836 French architect Eugène Viollet-le-Duc (1814–1879) also arrived in Palermo, and admired the restoration works of the cathedral and the Royal Palace. We can only speculate on the influence these might have had on him.<sup>3</sup>

However, interest in a Gothic revival had emerged earlier in Palermo, even before the start of the 19th century, and thus much earlier than in the rest of Italy, especially in the field of architecture.<sup>4</sup>

To what should we attribute this almost unforeseen look to the past? It is not sufficient to simply proclaim that it came about because of the striking presence of medieval buildings on the island and in its capital, as other medieval monuments obviously also survived throughout Italy, and not everywhere did an explosion of interest in this stylistic language occur with the same force during the same period.<sup>5</sup>

There must be another reason, which should be examined within the cultural context that developed specifically in Palermo, which was the result of contacts between personalities of the highest cultural level and was further encouraged by a fortuitous and unmistakable opportunity. All this certainly falls within the cultural context of Europe and is linked with the influence that came from the British Gothic revival.<sup>6</sup>

### The restoration and valuation of the cathedral

The opportunity that triggered the revival of interest in the Norman past came about, paradoxically, during the damaging restorations of the most important and sacred monument in Palermo: the cathedral. Indeed, in 1781 drastic renovation and modernisation works began at the Norman church, which included the removal of almost all the internal decorations from the medieval and renaissance periods.<sup>7</sup> Only one piece of the extensive mosaic programme survives: the mosaic of the *Madonna as Advocate for the Human Race*, which in the middle of the 19th century was placed in the Kings Cemetery of the cathedral.<sup>8</sup>

The paradox, then, was that on the inside a very modern and elegant church was created (**Fig. 1**), whereas on the outside it was decided to maintain the original look, apart from the addition of a large dome (1789–94),<sup>9</sup> and smaller domes for the new side chapels. In fact the patron of the 'restaurazione', Archbishop Serafino Filangieri (1762–76), in 1766 wrote to Marquis Bernardo Tanucci, 'Segretario di Casa Reale per gli Affari di Sicilia', to propose either the restoration of only some parts or 'sin da fondamenti e con più appropriato disegno far le nuove elevazioni', by evaluating, in the latter case, 'la conservazione dell'esteriore



Figure 1 Interior of Palermo Cathedral (photo: author)

antico ornato gotico’, and in 1767 asked for the involvement of the famous architect Ferdinando Fuga (1699–1782).<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the directors of the works, among whom was the famous Giuseppe Venanzio Marvuglia (1729–1814),<sup>11</sup> the greatest Sicilian architect during the transition from late baroque to neoclassicism, literally moved forward the entire 15th-century portico through anastylosis and disguised the new southern façade of the transept with a vague neo-Gothic style.<sup>12</sup> The works, which concluded in 1801, were perhaps the first example of their kind in Palermo (**Fig. 2**).

In 1802, very soon after the restoration works had been completed, there followed an explicit request from the Bourbon king, Ferdinand IV, that Marvuglia should install the neo-Gothic cladding on the dome, as it was the only clashing element that remained.<sup>13</sup>

Actually, Marvuglia, with the help of his son Alessandro Emmanuele (1771–1845),<sup>14</sup> had designed what was for the time quite an avant-garde model, a pastiche of Norman, 14th- and 15th-century features, but this was never executed (**Fig. 3**).<sup>15</sup>

The direct involvement of the king in defence of the medieval style of the cathedral, which was then still termed ‘barbarian’, demonstrates a key intervention, which was not an isolated occurrence and one that I will attempt to explain in due course.

It is necessary to ask what had changed since the royal decision had been made to modernise the old cathedral with the late baroque big dome. Why had it been decided to destroy a medieval and renaissance monument, only to now,

instead, want to disguise its dome because of remaining Gothic traces? At first, the early interest in Gothic (ancient) architecture was probably not so important (at least for the Bourbon government). In fact, in 1779 the cathedral’s Chapter of Canons had asked to change Fuga’s project because the church in that way ‘resta parte col disegno Gotico e parte col disegno Romano e viene irregolare’; in the same year, however, the king decided to maintain the first design.<sup>16</sup> We do not know if Fuga wanted to preserve the Gothic style inside or outside (the latter had been suggested by Archbishop Filangieri), but it seems that the cathedral’s Deputation did not like the idea.<sup>17</sup> Help came through a famous traveller. Henry Swinburne arrived in Palermo at the end of 1777 and wrote about the cathedral that the ‘Gothic edifice built in 1185 by Archbishop Walter’ was threatened with ruin and that its architecture was ‘not the most pleasing of that style’. He continued: ‘The whole pile is in a tottering condition, and calls for speedy assistance; a plan for rebuilding a great part of it has been given in by M. Fuga, the King’s architect, who proposes to raise a cupola, and refit it entirely in the modern taste.’<sup>18</sup>

One important question should be addressed, namely, what did the Deputation propose in opposition to Fuga’s project? Unfortunately, we do not know, because the cathedral’s Maramma Archive was destroyed in 1860 and no other documents remain. Was the contrast between old and modern taste that was referred to located on the inside or the outside of the church? In my opinion, it refers to the southern



Figure 2 Palermo Cathedral: southern façade (photo: author)

façade, because the interior had not retained its original medieval appearance due to the many changes made in the Renaissance and baroque periods.<sup>19</sup> In fact, in 1766 Archbishop Filangieri had asked for the external Gothic appearance to be conserved, but did not mention the interior at all. Therefore I would like to propose a new hypothesis. It was always thought that the modern dome was the essential element of the cathedral restoration project, but while this was certainly true for Filangieri and Fuga, it was not true for

the Deputation, who did not want the dome at all. The Deputation thought that it was the most discordant element of the entire cathedral, and it was immediately branded as such by all critics, chroniclers and travellers.<sup>20</sup> The Deputation's new proposal was radically different from that of Fuga. I believe that Marvuglia, Salvatore Attinelli and probably the noble Alessandro Vanni of San Vincenzo, who was a member of the Deputation and whose design had been discarded by Filangieri, wanted to implement only simple repairs to the old cathedral structures, without any innovations. If the initial problem was the state of degradation and the danger to the church, then great economic savings could have been achieved without destroying the old church and without heavy internal and, above all, external changes.

Nevertheless, the king decided in 1779 to approve Fuga's project again, and it was implemented with great care, as outlined in surviving documents.<sup>21</sup> Afterwards, evidently, Ferdinand IV changed his mind, probably because of the pre-Romantic predilections that had reached Palermo, his councillors and himself.

#### Early Bourbon interest in the royal Norman past

We should also keep in mind the interest stimulated by the opening in 1781 of the marble tombs of the Norman and Hohenstaufen rulers, which had remained closed for at least two centuries.<sup>22</sup>

The opening of the tombs was carefully recorded by the chroniclers of the period, starting with the famous



Figure 3 Giuseppe Venanzio and Alessandro Emmanuele Marvuglia, wooden model for the neo-Gothic cladding of the dome of Palermo Cathedral, c. 1802, Palermo Diocesano Museum (photo: author)



publication by Francesco Daniele in 1784, dedicated to King Ferdinand IV, which detailed the observations of the canon of the cathedral, Rosario Gregorio.<sup>23</sup> All this probably came as a revelation, but also represented a memory that was never really forgotten: that Palermo and the cathedral had belonged to an ancient lost kingdom, which was still recorded in an inscription inside the medieval porch of the cathedral, ‘Prima Sedes, Corona Regis et Regni Caput’ – the first seat, the crown of the king, and the capital of the kingdom.<sup>24</sup> The inscription indicated the founding roots of the Sicilian nation, as well as royal legitimacy.<sup>25</sup> In addition, another inscription, placed underneath it, recorded all the kings who had been crowned there, from Roger to Charles of Bourbon (Charles III of Spain), father of Ferdinand IV (Fig. 4).

In 1784 Rosario Gregorio became the editor of the *Notiziario del Regno*, the official journal of culture for the royal government,<sup>26</sup> and in 1788 was made Lecturer in Sicilian Feudal and Public Law at the Regia Accademia degli Studi, which became the Royal University of Palermo in 1805.<sup>27</sup> In his academic role, Gregorio supported the absolutist politics of the Bourbon kings, for example by contesting that the ‘Great Count Roger’ had been a *primus inter pares*, a discourse that was sustained by the Sicilian barons, because it reinforced – historically and legally – the traditional privileges of the aristocracy and justified limiting the centralised power of the Bourbons of Naples, kings of Sicily since 1734 with the accession of Charles of Bourbon.<sup>28</sup>

In 1790 Gregorio published *Rerum arabicarum quae ad historiam siculam spectant ampla collectio*, the first scientific study about Arab culture in Sicily, and it was Gregorio who in 1802 instructed the painter Mariano Rossi (1731–1807) on the iconography for the new frescoes for Palermo Cathedral, including *The Assumption of the Virgin* (patron saint of the cathedral) and *Robert and Roger Return the Church of Palermo to the Bishop Nicodemus*.<sup>29</sup> Probably, in Gregorio’s mind, the latter image contained a political message that interpreted the conquest of Sicily as a mission of liberation, to restore Sicily to Christianity (Fig. 5).

This is precisely how also, some decades ago, the mosaic of *Christ entering Jerusalem*, placed in the presbytery of the Cappella Palatina in the Norman palace, was interpreted.<sup>30</sup> Whether correct or not, we know for certain that the Bourbons, during their visits to Palermo, watched the liturgy in the chapel from a small stage placed directly in front of that mosaic.

With Rossi’s frescoes of 1802 (the same date as the neo-Gothic project for the dome), the cathedral again became the temple of the dynasty of the Sicilian kings and a symbol of legitimacy, recognised by royal authority. However, all this did not come to maturity immediately. In fact, in 1785 the architects Marvuglia and Attinelli wrote that it was necessary to ‘situare e polire i mosolei dei serenissimi regnanti di Sicilia’,<sup>31</sup> but by 1798 there was still no clear idea about a prominent position for the royal tombs, and we might even say that their final placement in the first two chapels on the south nave was (and is) absolutely not adequate.<sup>32</sup>

### The first signs of a Gothic revival architecture

Meanwhile, there were many more sources of inspiration that led to the rediscovery of an architecture that was



Figure 4 Tombstones with the succession of the Kingdom of Sicily, southern portico of Palermo Cathedral (photo: author)

considered to be Arab, or at least to display its influence. Initially this phenomenon was about pure exoticism, not very different from *chinoiserie* or *Turquerie*, but in the course of the first part of the 19th century it grew to incorporate important cultural contributions, especially in light of the studies into the origins of Gothic architecture in Europe.<sup>33</sup>

France and Germany vied for the birthright of Gothic architecture as the manifestation of a national architecture. The Englishman Thomas Hope (1769–1831) also contributed to the discussion, citing as Gothic monuments in Sicily the cathedrals of Messina, Monreale and Palermo, although he incorrectly stated (perhaps as a result of the so-called restoration of the interior): ‘Palermo: la vecchia chiesa detta Madre Chiesa, che era gotica, ed ora fu demolita’.<sup>34</sup> It is certainly not a coincidence that Hope’s first publication in an Italian translation, in 1840, was part of the library of the Palermitan architect Emmanuele Palazzotto, to whom I shall shortly turn.<sup>35</sup>

It is known that archaeologist and historian Jean-Baptiste Seroux D’Agincourt (1730–1814) played a very important role in the rediscovery of medieval monuments, and it is interesting to note that he was linked to a French architect, Léon Dufourny (1754–1818).<sup>36</sup> Dufourny resided in Palermo for four years, until 1793, introducing the French taste for the



**Figure 5** Mariano Rossi, *Robert and Roger Return the Church of Palermo to the Bishop Nicodemus, 1802*, in the apse at Palermo Cathedral (photo: author)

neoclassical.<sup>37</sup> He designed, for example, the Gymnasium of the Botanical Gardens, which was eventually executed by one of his closest Palermitan friends, the above-mentioned Giuseppe Venanzio Marvuglia.

Dufourny was also interested in medieval architecture,<sup>38</sup> drafted designs for an Arab house in 1791 and probably put Seroux D'Agincourt in touch with the son of Giuseppe Venanzio, the young Alessandro Emmanuele, also an architect,<sup>39</sup> who, for the publication of Seroux's *Storia dell'Arte* (1808), provided drawings of the Norman palace of La Zisa.<sup>40</sup> In La Zisa, the French art historian claimed to recognise clear examples of Arab culture, just like Swinburne had. A copy of this volume, too, could be found in Emmanuele Palazzotto's library.<sup>41</sup>

From 1791 to 1797 the neo-Norman high altar of the Cappella Palatina, the church inside the Royal Palace, was built, probably commissioned by Mgr. Alfonso Airoidi (1729–1817), Ciantro della Cappella Palatina, Cappellano Maggiore del Regno,<sup>42</sup> 'Judge of the Monarchy', protector of Gregorio and highly respected by Dufourny.<sup>43</sup> Airoidi was one of the dignitaries present at the opening of the tombs, as well as the Prince of Torremuzza, Gabriele Lancillotto Castelli, 'Regio custode delle Antichità in Val di Mazara', who would become the patron for the volume by Daniele.<sup>44</sup>

Alessandro Emmanuele Marvuglia, who with his father

designed the re-cladding for the dome of the cathedral around 1802, was also the author (perhaps again with his father) of some of the earliest examples of neo-Gothic architecture in Palermo: the coffee house of the Villa Ventimiglia di Belmonte all'Acquasanta (1804), built by Salvatore Palazzotto (1751–1824), father of architect Emmanuele;<sup>45</sup> the spiral staircases of the Palazzina Reale alla Cinese (1805–6);<sup>46</sup> and the twin pavilions in the park of the Favorita (c. 1810–14),<sup>47</sup> inspired by the Torre de Oro of Seville but whose crown, in my opinion, imitates the apse of Palermo Cathedral (**Fig. 6**).

At this point, the revival was still a non-philological one and should rather be ranked on the same level as exoticism, and seen as a mere curiosity, as *divertissement*, while it is nevertheless interesting to note that, around 1810–15, the son of Ferdinand IV, the hereditary prince and viceroy Francis (later King Francis I), had a tower inside his Palermitan estate at Boccadifalco decorated in the Gothic style<sup>48</sup> by architect Gaetano Bernasconi (**Fig. 7**).<sup>49</sup> Evidently, Prince Francis, like the Neapolitan Archbishop Filangieri concerning the cathedral 30 years earlier (supported by King Ferdinand), preferred to rely on an esteemed Neapolitan architect who had his personal trust, such as Bernasconi, a student and co-worker of Carlo Vanvitelli.<sup>50</sup>

### An architecture for royal authority

There is no doubt that the prince wanted to make the ‘Milinciana’ tower at Boccadifalco look particularly ancient, but he also certainly wanted it to be representative of royal presence, perhaps just like a Norman castle. In this case, it would be the first time that the royal Bourbon family in Palermo used the medieval Sicilian style for an exemplary and identifying purpose, namely to support its own royal authority.

We should keep in mind that the royal family, due to the Francophile rebellions in Naples, resided in Palermo in exile between 1798 and 1802, and again from 1806 to 1815, under the protection of the English.<sup>51</sup> For the Bourbon court, of prime importance was without a doubt the parallel between the Norman absolute monarchy and the legitimate and authoritarian Bourbon rule, which was now threatened by the popular and aristocratic liberalist forces, who, instead, recognised in their Norman heritage a proper historic autonomy for the Kingdom of Sicily, distinct and separate from the Kingdom of Naples. In my opinion, both Bourbon absolutism and Sicilian nationalism used the Arab-Norman architecture as a mark of identity.<sup>52</sup>

This mental process must have taken concrete form after Ferdinand’s actions of 1815. The king had been received and treated with all necessary honours during his exile, creating for the Sicilians a hope and an illusion of finally having restored the Kingdom of Sicily, by his constant physical presence in Palermo.

Instead, that year, at the end of the French occupation, he immediately returned to Naples, abolished the Constitution that had been promulgated in 1812 under pressure from Lord William Bentinck (foreign Minister of Sicilian government), and thus, above all, fulfilled what appeared to be a complete betrayal of the expectations of the Sicilian nation.<sup>53</sup>

In 1816 the king, in order to strengthen his power on the island, which seemed to want to escape his rule, cancelled the formal existence of the Kingdom of Sicily, reuniting it with the Kingdom of Naples as the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, but retaining Naples as the capital. This was a real affront to Sicily that would have sanctioned a break, but which the sovereign sought to heal by issuing political messages through artistic commissions.

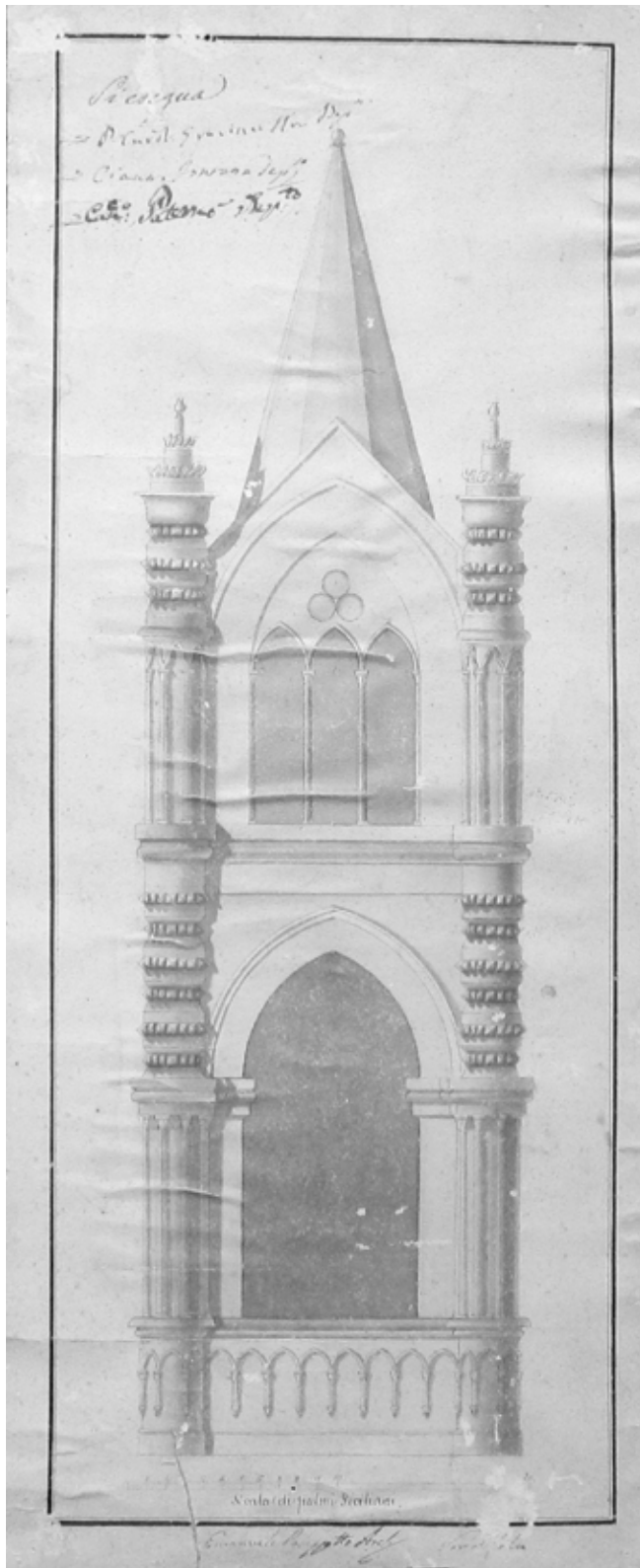
Hence, after the random neo-Gothic examples by Marvuglia, the revival took a much clearer direction in the third decade of the 1800s. The time was right and, following the earthquake of 1823, it was necessary to repair the great baroque bell tower of the cathedral, which had been built on the archbishop’s palace after 1726 by architect Giovanni Amico (1684–1754). As the cathedral was a church of royal patronage, every intervention had to be agreed between the king and the archbishop of Palermo, who at the time was Pietro Gravina, prince of Montevago (1749–1830). The archbishop issued a competition for the reconstruction of the tower in the Gothic style, which he called the ‘necessary’ style, and it was the architect Emmanuele Palazzotto (1798–1872), former student of Alessandro Emmanuele Marvuglia, who won the competition by taking inspiration from the 14th-century bell towers, and received in 1826 the approval of King



Figure 6 Pavilion in the Favorita park, Palermo, designed by Alessandro Emmanuele Marvuglia, before 1815 (photo: author)

Figure 7 The so-called ‘Milinciana’ tower at Boccadifalco, Palermo, designed by Gaetano Bernasconi, 1810–15 (photo: author)





**Figure 8** Emmanuele Palazzotto's neo-Gothic designs for the bell tower of Palermo Cathedral, 1826. Archivio Palazzotto, Palermo

Francis I of the Two Sicilies (**Fig. 8**).<sup>54</sup> The latter, as mentioned above, had commissioned the neo-Gothic-style tower at his Boccadifalco estate, which was built by Luigi Miranda and Salvatore Palazzotto,<sup>55</sup> father of Emmanuele.

Shortly afterwards, in 1827, Duke Ettore Pignatelli Aragona Cortes di Monteleone, descendant – as he claimed himself – of Frederick II of Hohenstaufen, acquired a plot of land by the sea near Acquisanta in



**Figure 9** Photograph from c. 1870 of Villa Domville, formerly Pignatelli Aragona Cortes Acquisanta, Palermo, designed by Ettore Pignatelli, Domenico Cavallaro and others, 1827–9. Archivio Palazzotto, Palermo

Palermo and by 1829 had built there a wooden chalet in the neo-Gothic style. It was designed by the architect Domenico Cavallaro Spadafora (1777–1837),<sup>56</sup> a collaborator of Domenico Lo Faso and Pietrasanta, Duke of Serradifalco (1783–1863) (**Fig. 9**).<sup>57</sup> The choice of style was surely not a coincidence. In fact, in the same year the German architect Friedrich Maximilian Hessemer (1800–1865) arrived in Palermo and was invited to the house of the Duke of Serradifalco where he was surprised, as he himself wrote in his diaries, that they discussed Gothic architecture so excitedly, as though it was a matter of life or death.<sup>58</sup> This indicates that, by that time, the interest in medieval, Norman-Hohenstaufen architecture had spread through the cultured society of Palermo and had become almost a political manifesto.

Again due to the earthquake of 1823, the parish church of S. Antonio Abate, the church of the Senate of Palermo, had been seriously damaged. Therefore, in 1833 the architect of the Senate, Nicolò Raineri (c. 1785–1854), restored it, transforming it into a neo-Gothic church.<sup>59</sup> Its façade was said by Agostino Gallo, a well-known intellectual from Palermo, to be in an Arab-Norman style.<sup>60</sup> Most likely, the intention was to validate the historic tradition of an independent administration for the city, which had existed since the origins of the kingdom, and thus to emphasise independence and autonomy from Bourbon rule.

However, from the other side and in the opposite direction, that is, to emphasise the central power of the Norman kingdom and of the current rulers, the Bourbons sponsored new building works in the main institutional building of the city, the Royal Palace, which was restored in a short time.

Thus, around 1830, under the reign of Ferdinand II of the Two Sicilies, but perhaps already under his predecessor and father, Francis I, new paintings were commissioned for one of the most important rooms of the Royal Palace, the Room of the Sheep, so called because it contained two famous Hellenistic bronze statues of rams, one of which survives in the Museo Salinas in Palermo. The themes chosen were *The*

*Return of the Bishop's Throne to Nicodemus, Muslims Giving Gifts to Roger and Robert and The Entrance of Roger and Robert into Palermo.*<sup>61</sup> The last picture had been copied, in my opinion, from the mosaic of Christ entering Jerusalem at the Cappella Palatina (**Fig. 10**).

As monarchical propaganda the paintings were clearly attempting to link the new iconography of the cathedral's apse to the Royal Palace and thus the Norman dynasty to the Bourbon dynasty. Indeed, even in 1832 in *Discorso sulle sagre insegne de' Re di Sicilia* (Discourse on the sacred emblems of the Kings of Sicily), published in Naples, King Ferdinand II was represented dressed as Roger II in the mosaics of the Martorana church.<sup>62</sup> Like Roger II, Ferdinand was presented as the *Defensor Fidei*, defender of the faith, of the Church and of Pope Gregory XVI, with whom he had a strong alliance against the revolutionary Italians.<sup>63</sup>

Moreover, Ferdinand II supported and often visited the restoration works at the cathedral of Monreale, which had been seriously damaged by fire in 1811. The works concluded in 1846 with the reburial of the remains of William I and William II in sarcophagi that were either restored or rebuilt after the devastating disaster.<sup>64</sup>

In 1833 the royal pulpit in the Cappella Palatina was restored in a Gothic style, to represent, as the historian Giovanni Evangelista di Blasi wrote in 1842, 'the ideas of grandeur and of munificence, not only of the founder of Sicilian monarchy, but also of his royal successors'.<sup>65</sup>

This idea of a connection with a past so far away was communicated by a vast programme of restorations to the Royal Palace, which started around 1834–5, at the same time as the completion of the bell tower of the cathedral. The works included the Gothic refurbishment of the tower of Santa Ninfa and of the south-western façades, by the architect Nicolò Puglia (c. 1772–1865), former student of Giuseppe Venanzio Marvuglia, the designer of the royal pulpit,<sup>66</sup> and continued into the early 1840s.

The same architect planned two imposing royal cenotaphs in neo-Gothic style to commemorate the deaths of the Bourbon Kings Ferdinand IV in 1825, and Francis I in 1830, the latter situated inside the Cappella Palatina.<sup>67</sup> This demonstrated a very precise linguistic and political orientation – the Gothic style as equivalent to royal power – and, indeed, these installations were among the very few notable examples of funerary architecture of a medieval style in Palermo.

### The consolidation and spread of the new style

As well as the kings, members of the Palermitan aristocracy who were connected to the court, although they might have been quite liberal and conspiratorial behind closed doors, responded to these projects with a few small masterpieces of their own. In 1834 the new administrator of all the royal properties was the Marquis Carlo Enrico Forcella, son of Antonio Forcella, himself administrator of Francis's estate at Boccadifalco, with its neo-Gothic tower. The young Marquis carried out the restoration of the mosaics of the Cappella Palatina and oversaw the works at the Royal Palace, but at the same time also began building his own new splendid residence to replace the previous one, which had been built in the neoclassical style.<sup>68</sup> This refined intellectual intended to



**Figure 10** Giuseppe Patricolo, *Entrance of Roger and Robert into Palermo, 1830, Sala Gialla, Palazzo Reale di Palermo* (photo: author)

create a palatial residence that was influenced by the main royal palaces. Therefore, he proposed a sequence of medieval monuments: a large salon inspired by the Hall of the Ambassadors at the Alhambra in Granada; a neighbouring room with copies of the mosaics from the Fountain Room of the Norman palace of La Zisa in Palermo (**Fig. 11**); and a little salon where he imitated the ceiling of the so-called Room of Roger at the Royal Palace and into which he inserted his own personal coat of arms.<sup>69</sup> Palazzo Forcella achieved the aims of its founder and its rooms were admired by guests from the highest ranks: in 1844 by the Bourbons, Prince Karl of Prussia and King Ludwig I of Bavaria, and in 1845 by the emperor of Russia, Nicholas I.<sup>70</sup> Ludwig had already been impressed with the neo-Norman mosaics during a first visit in 1842, after which, in a letter to the Duke of Serradifalco, he mentioned Giovanni Battista Giochetti from Bolzano, who had been sent by him to Palermo and to the Marquis Forcella, 'Maestro di questo genere', to 'imparare l'arte del mosaicista . . .'.<sup>71</sup>

The works at Palazzo Forcella were carried out under the guidance of the architects Nicolò Puglia and Emmanuele

**Figure 11** Sala della Zisa, Palazzo Forcella, Palermo, designed by Palermo craftsmen, c. 1832–42 (photo: author)





Figure 12 Emmanuele Palazzotto's design of the facade of Palazzo Campofranco (detail), 1835. Archivio Palazzotto, Palermo



Figure 13 Carlo Giachery, Casa Florio (also known as 'I Quattro Pizzi'), Palermo, 1840–4 (photo: author)

Palazzotto;<sup>72</sup> the latter had also been appointed in 1835 by Prince Antonio Lucchesi Palli di Campofranco, Lieutenant General of the King in Sicily, to create a uniform façade for his residence, so that it would appear as an ancient palace, befitting his rank and station.

Palazzotto drew inspiration from the 15th-century Palazzo Abatellis, which had just been published in Paris on the cover of Hittorff and Zanth's *Architecture moderne de la Sicile*. It is interesting to note that, prior to this, the Prince of Campofranco had appointed a different architect to realise a façade in the Empire style,<sup>73</sup> but, evidently aware of the new and more modern taste for the neo-medieval, now chose the architect Palazzotto, who had distinguished himself through his neo-Gothic bell towers on the cathedral (**Fig. 12**).<sup>74</sup> By the end of 1835, the Duke of Serradifalco, who met had Viollet-le-Duc, had also constructed his own personal Gothic residence,<sup>75</sup> and in 1838 published a very successful volume titled *Del Duomo di Monreale e di altre chiese siculo normanne*.

The year before, in 1837, Alessandro Emmanuele Marvuglia had published an article in the official government newspaper with the title 'Bello Sentimentale dell'Architettura Gotica'. Here he seems to have anticipated the historicism of the second half of the century, admiring the villas of Pignatelli and Serradifalco and mentioning the names of the writers James Fenimore Cooper and Walter Scott, with clearly Romantic views.<sup>76</sup>

Not until 1840 did the rising star in the Sicilian economy, Vincenzo Florio, a humble but extremely rich bourgeois, decide to make an old building by the sea his main residence. He appointed Carlo Giachery (1812–1865),<sup>77</sup> professor at the University of Palermo, to the project, and once again the style that was the most representative of the time was chosen: the neo-Gothic (**Fig. 13**). The house became so famous that it was visited by the Bourbon kings and, in 1845, by Tsar Nicholas I, who had it copied and replicated at Peterhof.<sup>78</sup>

In short, Palermo became the model for neo-medieval architecture, and in that guise and for a short time almost regained the cultural, if not the political, centrality that it had lost since the legendary reign of the Normans.

## Notes

- 1 About travel in Sicily, see Peik 2006, 16–32.
- 2 About the Grand Tour in Sicily, see Palazzotto 2016, 301–15 (with previous bibliography).
- 3 Boscarino and Giuffrè 1994, 31.
- 4 See Boscarino and Giuffrè 1994, 17–37.
- 5 About the Gothic revival in mainland Italy, see Patetta 1975, 260–310; Bossaglia and Terraroli 1989.
- 6 After all, from 1798 Sicily could almost have been considered a British protectorate that allowed the exile of King Ferdinand IV from Naples because of the pro-French Revolution. See D'Alessandro and Giarrizzo 1992, 611–49.
- 7 About the restoration of Palermo Cathedral, see Boscarino 1993, 93–102; Giuffrè 1993, 255–64.
- 8 Andaloro 1993, 60–2; Andaloro 2006, 558–9; Booms and Higgs 2016, 202–3.
- 9 Giuffrè 1994, 192.
- 10 Trans.: 'making the new elevations from the foundations and with appropriate design'; 'evaluating the preservation of the ancient Gothic exterior ornament'; Basile 1926, docc. I, V, 121, 130. Ferdinando Fuga (1699–1782) was the author of the project implemented by Giuseppe Venanzio Marvuglia and Salvatore Attinelli (1736–1802); Basile 1926, doc. XV, 141; Zanca 1952, 295.
- 11 About G.V. Marvuglia, see Mauro 1993, 290–3 (with previous bibliography); Giuffrè 2004, 285–98; Pessolano and Buccaro 2004; Palazzotto 2007d, 71–80.
- 12 Di Marzo Ferro 1858, 636; Di Bartolo 1903, 26; Zanca 1952, 308–9; Bellafiore 1976, 116.
- 13 About the new cladding, see Giuffrè 2000.
- 14 Palazzotto 2007a, 438–46.
- 15 Palazzotto 2000c, 102–4.
- 16 Trans.: 'remains in part with a Gothic design and partly with a Roman design and it is irregular'; Basile 1926, doc. XI, 134.
- 17 Marco Nobile (Nobile 2002, 371–6) thinks that by the end of the 18th century the interior of the church had very little of the Norman remains due to the 16th- and 17th-century restorations.
- 18 Swinburne 1790, 300–1. Swinburne was very intrigued by Zisa, see 336–7.
- 19 Nobile 2002, 372.
- 20 For instance, Hittorff and Zanth wrote before 1835, after their visit to Palermo around 1822–4, that Marvuglia had tried in vain to

- oppose Fuga's project: 'Charles III [Ferdinand IV] en avait demandé les dessins à Ferdinando Fuga, alors un des architectes les plus célèbres de l'Italie, qui se rendit à cet effet à Palerme. Ce fut aussi conformément au projet de cet artiste que s'exécuta la grande coupole élevée au-dessus de la croix de l'église, et dont la forme et les colonnes corinthiennes présentent une disparate si choquante avec le caractère général de l'édifice. Lors de la discussion de ce projet, Marvuglia et plusieurs autres architectes palermitains s'opposèrent avec force, mais en vain, à son adoption'; Hittorff and Zanth 1835, 46.
- 21 Piazza 2001, 165.
- 22 Daniele 1784; Tomaselli 1994, 331–4; Andaloro 2002, 139–41; Bruno 2002, 173–86; Poeschke 2011, 49–52.
- 23 Di Marzo Ferro 1858, 633–4, n. 1. About the importance of Gregory and the description of the royal tombs, see his manuscripts in the Palermo Public Library: Rossi 1873, 295.
- 24 For the contents of the tombs, cf. Bruno 2002, 178–80.
- 25 Antonio Zanca (Zanca 1952, 311), believes that the inscription was originally placed above the ancient and destroyed royal throne, but as the headstone is still there, the inscription outside was probably created to reinforce the role of the kings in the cathedral.
- 26 Piazza 2006, 203.
- 27 Di Marzo Ferro 1858, 635, n. 1; Cancila 2006, 86, 101.
- 28 Cancila 2006, 101–3.
- 29 Zanca 1952, 310–11.
- 30 Rocco 1983, 43–65.
- 31 Trans.: 'arranging and cleaning the mausoleums of the kings of Sicily'; Basile 1926, doc. XXIV, 149.
- 32 For this hypothesis, see Bruno 2002, 180–2.
- 33 About Gothic revival in Europe, see Patetta 1975, 142–244; Bossaglia and Terraroli 1989; Guyot-Bachy and Moeglin 2015; Brittain-Catlin, De Maeyer and Bressani 2016.
- 34 Hope 1840, 323.
- 35 Ibid., 323.
- 36 Tomaselli 1994, 335.
- 37 About Dufourny in Sicily, see Dufourny 1991; Giuffrè 2004, 365–72; Raspi Serra 2008, 51–9; 1996. *La Sicilia del '700 nell'opera di Léon Dufourny. L'Orto Botanico di Palermo*; Aurigemma 2015b, 261–76.
- 38 See Aurigemma 2015a, 141–57.
- 39 The hypothesis is in Palazzotto 2004, 231.
- 40 Seroux D'Agincourt 1828, 129.
- 41 Seroux D'Agincourt 1826–9, 46, cit. by Palazzotto, 1994, 46.
- 42 Piazza 2006, 203.
- 43 Cancila 2006, 72.
- 44 Daniele 1784, XI.
- 45 Capitano 1989, 53; Piazza 2006, 205.
- 46 Capitano 1985, 29; Giuffrè 1987, 88.
- 47 Piazza 2006, 208.
- 48 Ibid., 208–9.
- 49 Lo Piccolo 1999, 91.
- 50 Architect Gaetano Bernasconi worked in the Royal Palace of Carditello, see Serraglio 2018, 18.
- 51 See Rosselli 1956; Gregory 1988; Mack Smith 2009, 437–61.
- 52 I put forward this theory for the first time at a seminar organised by the Heritage Office of Trapani Diocese and Erice Museum, *Il Duomo di Erice tra Gotico e Neogotico*, 16 December 2006; see Palazzotto 2008.
- 53 Mack Smith 2009, 462–89; Riall 2004, 37–73.
- 54 Boscarino and Giuffrè 1994, 43.
- 55 Lo Piccolo 1999, 91.
- 56 Boscarino and Giuffrè 1994, 31; Giuffrè 2000, 152.
- 57 In 1870 the villa was acquired by the Englishman Sir James Domville, Baron of St Albans, and his son, Admiral Sir William Cecil Henry Domville, who enlarged the house with two lateral wings and lived there for 30 years. See Purpura 2010, 142–4.
- 58 Palazzotto 2004, 230. See also Barbera and Rotolo 2006, 232–7.
- 59 Palazzotto 2000a, 100.
- 60 Palazzotto 2004, 232.
- 61 Bruno 2006, 72–6.
- 62 Bruno 2006, 76–7.
- 63 Di Blasi 1842, 829.
- 64 Palazzotto 2008, 99.
- 65 Ibid., 106.
- 66 Palazzotto 2004, 226–7.
- 67 Palazzotto 2007b, 62.
- 68 Chirco and Di Liberto 2002, 55–6.
- 69 Palazzotto 2004, 227–30.
- 70 Palazzotto 2007c, 137–8.
- 71 Trans.: 'Master of the art of mosaic' to 'learn the art of mosaicist'; Cianciolo Cosentino 2006, 246.
- 72 Di Benedetto 1998, 28.
- 73 Palazzotto 2000b, 71.
- 74 Palazzotto 2004, 233–4.
- 75 See Sessa 1995, 269–77.
- 76 Palazzotto 2004, 234–5.
- 77 See Di Benedetto 2011.
- 78 Ibid., 45–7.

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