



2025

IL CAPITALE CULTURALE
Studies on the Value of Cultural Heritage

eum

Rivista fondata da Massimo Montella



Il capitale culturale

Studies on the Value of Cultural Heritage

n. 32, 2025

ISSN 2039-2362 (online)

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Registrazione al Roc n. 735551 del 14/12/2010

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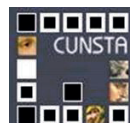
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Layout editor studio editoriale Oltrepagina

Progetto grafico / Graphics +crocevia / studio grafico



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Riccardo da Lentini and the import of Gothic into Hohenstaufen Sicily

Pio Francesco Pistilli*

Abstract

Given the difficulties in evaluating the beginnings of an Italian Gothic style, the essay focuses on a rediscovered figure, *magister* Riccardo da Lentini, by framing his personality on to the pivotal monument of Castel Maniace and at the launch of the *castra* season in eastern Sicily (*post* 1234-1240). Through the way, the picture has been enriched with additional data, gradually outlining the *modus operandi* of the *prepositus novorum hedificiorum* in the service of Frederick II, at times correcting understandable uncertainties, and the investigation has been extended to his proven travels to the mainland after 1240. Surrounded from the very beginning by skilled and anonymous collaborators, the quality of the working team led by Riccardo is clearly expressed by what has come down to us in the *Regnum Siciliae*: tangible results of operational guidelines dictated from above, which could be revised only within certain limits in the presence of the Emperor. Taking for granted that Riccardo was continually put to the test, the deliberate versatility in design with recognizable common features became *routine*, regularly applying the modernity of a redefined Gothic, enhanced by the most advanced technological solutions with a defensive coefficient reduced to the essentials.

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Ammesse le difficoltà nel radiografare gli esordi di un gotico italiano, il saggio focalizza il peso avuto da un ricomparso protagonista, il *magister* Riccardo da Lentini, ruotandolo sul monumento cardine di Castel Maniace e al lancio della stagione dei *castra* nella Sicilia orientale (*post* 1234-1240). Strada facendo, il quadro si è arricchito di ulteriori dati e via via si è delineato il *modus operandi* del *prepositus novorum hedificiorum* al servizio di Federico II, talora rettificando comprensibili incertezze, e dopo il 1240 l'indagine è stata estesa al provato peregrinare in terraferma. Sin dappprincipio attorniato da validi e anonimi collaboratori, di quale pasta fosse l'*équipe* governata da Riccardo lo avvalora il tanto sovrappiù nel *Regnum Siciliae*, che è la tangibile traduzione di direttive imposte dall'alto, solo entro certi limiti suscettibili di essere riviste in presenza dell'imperatore. Nel dar per scontato che Riccardo fosse messo di continuo a dura prova, di qui la mirata versatilità nel progettare con riconoscibili denominatori diventava *routine*, applicando a piè sospinto la modernità di un rimodulato gotico beneficiato delle più progredite soluzioni tecnologiche a un coefficiente difensivo ridotto all'essenziale.

Given the difficulties in evaluating the beginnings of an Italian Gothic style, it has been helpful to assess them within the context of the Cistercian movement¹. According to this approach, local practices were used as parameters, not even in consideration of the order's guiding abbeys². Moreover, the *crochet* capital was at risk of being compared to more superficial products from monasteries that had not yet a significant voice in the matter. Indeed, from Fossanova to San Galgano, centres of excellence devoted to rehashing the work of others³, the dissemination factor must be further deferred in light of its impact on the sacred and, in smaller doses, on urban construction⁴. As usual, the trailblazers lingered like enigmatic episodes. Deposited first along the Ligurian-Lombard route, with the sumptuous portals of the Cathedral of Genoa on display⁵, then spread in abundance across the *Regnum Siciliae*, appearing in profane buildings throughout the Mediterranean realm⁶, each case ultimately steers the research towards a particular transalpine context.

In fact, this situation would suggest that the references would gravitate more consistently around an era rooted in the Philipppian trajectory, which was not solely focused on the militarisation of a realm devoted to the English Channel and little inclined to become tangled in the Midi. At a *minimum*, this is reflected at the turn of 1220 in Sant'Andrea in Vercelli, which follows the model of Saint-Victor in Paris, the quintessential theological study in

¹ Romanini 1964, pp. 11-61, for a pioneering interpretation, later overused by others.

² Branner 1965, pp. 30-55; Bruzelius 1979, 1990, for Longpont in Picardy.

³ Cadei 2006, pp. 11-33; Gianandrea 2016.

⁴ *I Cistercensi* 1978; *Storia dell'arte* 1981; Pistilli 2002.

⁵ Di Fabio 2011, pp. 111-128.

⁶ Cadei 1995, pp. 105-120; 2006, *ad indicem*; Biller 2021, pp. 245-269.

the wake of the mendicant epiphany⁷. Almost out of time, it was brought to Lombardy, on the border with the Ligurian Oltregiogo⁸, at the behest of the munificent Guala Bicchieri, several times papal legate to Philip II of France and involved with the Plantagenets⁹. Indeed, the cardinal himself demanded for his Roman livery the *tourelles* corners *en vogue* in the Count's residences beyond the Loire¹⁰. In the absence of the dismantled Saint-Victor¹¹ for precise juxtapositions with Sant'Andrea, since *pilier cantonné* and *arc-boutant* are merely a hint of a refined borrowing¹² (fig. 1), the surviving cylindrical turret compensates for Guala's actions in updating for personal consumption, to the point of being confined within the city of Rome.

To our advantage, Clario Di Fabio has recently shown the extent to which the Vercelli workshop was in dialogue with San Lorenzo in Genoa, which had to be renovated in the portals on the façade¹³. Through further research, the regenerative path sought to coexist in the North with a long-lasting Romanesque style, sometimes nostalgic¹⁴, elsewhere leaving traces of works distant from our quadrant. It remains uncertain whether to include the most authoritative Frederician legacy in Sicily, the unfinished Castel Maniace. On a construction site on which, on purpose, idioms from the epicentres of continental Gothic converged, attention could not but fall on the doorway (fig. 2), designed as a passageway for a monastic body: *unicum* for an imperial residence and in clear anticipation of the repeated format meant to evoke the Antique¹⁵ (fig. 3).

For my part, I will briefly focus on the significance of a rediscovered figure, *magister* Riccardo da Lentini¹⁶, by framing his personality on to the pivotal monument of Siracusa, a site on the Ionian overseas territory at the time closely tied to the history of Genoa.

⁷ Willesme 1991; Schilling 2009.

⁸ Schilling 2003, 2004; Lomartire 2020.

⁹ Fonseca 1968.

¹⁰ Veilliard 1931, pp. 102-116; Krautheimer *et al.* 1971, pp. 113-115; Mesqui 1991, p. 207.

¹¹ Willesme 1992.

¹² Schilling 2004, p. 196, who causes the spread of Gothic to the 1220s, considers the components beyond the Alps mediated by Burgundy and Lausanne.

¹³ Di Fabio 2011.

¹⁴ Lomartire 2020, p. 16.

¹⁵ Biller 2021, pp. 157-162.

¹⁶ Sciascia 2000, pp. 29-30; Pistilli 2014; Bresc, Sciascia 2016; Cova 2016; Pistilli 2016, pp. 142-148; Pistilli, Gianandrea 2020, pp. 117-123.

1. *Awaiting Castel Maniace*

If thinking about Liguria, Siracusa might seem like an offsite location. However, there is no objection when considering Genoa at the dawn of the thirteenth century, rising in its predatory control of Mediterranean trade routes. The port was a strategic outpost, and by 1204 it hosted an active community¹⁷, much like another that operated on the shores of Malta¹⁸. After that, the records extend further beyond.

In the process of affirming Frederik's monarchy, the colony gained legitimate autonomy in governing the government of the city, a consequence of the state of anarchy experienced by the island¹⁹. From 1212, the community simultaneously gained prestige by supporting the risky imperial candidacy of the Swabian ruler, at the expense of their motherland, whose fleets had accompanied the sovereign to the threshold of those domains²⁰ and contributed to the proverbial opposition against Pisa, which supported his rival, Otto of Braunschweig²¹. Mercantile interests, along with investments²², had to be safeguarded at all costs. And the outcome in Germany, by no means a foregone conclusion until the Battle of Bouvines won by Philip Augustus over Otto in 1214, validated the foresight of the Ligurians. As a backlash, Alamanno da Costa was able to consolidate a recognised lordship in Siracusa²³, which came to an end in 1221 when Frederick II, crowned emperor, ruled with a different agenda²⁴. However, it must be reiterated that due to the Assizes of Capua with additional provisions²⁵, an ordinary measure was to appoint a *comes*, the title bestowed upon Alamanno, appropriately discharged also from Genoa, yet quite another to uproot a community from the usual multi-ethnic character of the maritime cities facing the Levant. At that date, not even royal centralism could afford such a move²⁶. The Genoese were responsible for a substantial part of the grain export to the North and African markets²⁷; it would have been enough for them to lose the privileges extorted in the past, just like any other Ligurian resident in the Kingdom²⁸. In the wake of the Melfi

¹⁷ Vitale 1929, pp. 2-3; Abulafia 1990, p. 85; Pispisa 2005, p. 759; Basso 2011, p. 82.

¹⁸ Kantorowicz 1988, pp. 110, 112, 115; Abulafia 1975, pp. 104-125.

¹⁹ Privitera 1879, II, pp. 26-32; Kantorowicz 1988, pp. 110, 112, 115; Powell 1962, pp. 439-453; Abulafia 1990, p. 113; Basso 2011, p. 80.

²⁰ Abulafia 1990, p. 96.

²¹ Kantorowicz 1988, p. 109.

²² Sciascia 2000, pp. 14-26, for Lentini.

²³ Abulafia 1990, p. 85; Pispisa 2005, p. 759.

²⁴ Kantorowicz 1988, pp. 110, 124; Abulafia 1990, p. 85; Petti Balbi 1996, pp. 62-71.

²⁵ Kantorowicz 1988, pp. 110, 124, pp. 110-111; Abulafia 1990, pp. 117 ff.

²⁶ Powell 1962, pp. 453-472; Abulafia 1990, pp. 183-184; 1994, pp. 165 ff.

²⁷ Powell 1962, pp. 518-519; 1966.

²⁸ Pavoni 1991, pp. 237-250; Pispisa 2005, p. 759; Petti Balbi 1997, pp. 71-72.

Constitutions²⁹, the bloody revolt of 1232 created the expected problems, and the swift retaliation actually produced them. Long contemplated, the gradual state appropriation of the production chain affected the large estates behind Siracusa and Catania, anticipated in 1231 by the territory of Augusta³⁰. The ones who paid the price were the Norman-origin feudal lords³¹, and to a lesser extent, the families of Aleramic descent who had arrived following the Del Vasto under Count Roger I³², mostly settled in the oasis of Piazza Armerina³³, outside the Hohenstaufen focus aims centred on Val di Noto³⁴. Because they were 'Ligurians' in the meaning the Romans had given to the term, and therefore still perfectly recognisable, it is not inconceivable that these pioneers embodied a providential support in Sicily in the unstable Genoese reconciliation with Frederician despotism³⁵. In any case, it was an uphill climb, and the motherland itself managed with mixed fortunes to navigate the most critical front subordinate to the Empire, from which it drew beneficial sustenance, only to be ultimately ostracised in 1238³⁶. The power of Genoa was an obstacle to the ambitions of the Crown, and the colonies in Sicily were of little use for trading, so they quickly packed their bags³⁷, if in 1239, the bold idea of retaking Siracusa emerged, as part of an anti-Hohenstaufen plan promoted by Pope Gregory IX³⁸.

Looking back, however, there is no reason to doubt that, at the launch of the *castra* season, the community of Ortigia had barely managed to hold out³⁹ and had been alerted by the central authority to comply with the whims of the sovereign. By 1234, there were the necessary conditions for relocating the *ateliers* from San Lorenzo to the terminus on the Ionian. If that were the case, the question remains as to who would bear the burden: would it rest solely on the *prepositus* Riccardo da Lentini, actively engaging with his entourage to plan a Gothic style centred at Castel Maniace, or on the mediation of foreign clans increasingly struggling to meet the demands of the monarch? On paper, both options could go 'hand in hand'. Just around the corner lay the threat

²⁹ Powell 1962, pp. 472-490, 519-524; Abulafia 1990, pp. 169 ff.

³⁰ Bresc, Sciascia 2016, p. 74.

³¹ Bresc 1980, pp. 636-641; Sciascia 2000, pp. 9-33.

³² Basso 2011, p. 79.

³³ Nigrelli 1983.

³⁴ Sciascia 2000, pp. 14-26.

³⁵ Powell 1962, pp. 496-505; Petti Balbi 1996, pp. 76-77.

³⁶ Abulafia 1990, p. 257.

³⁷ Vitale 1929, p. 4, for the oldest Genoese deeds with underwriters returning from the island.

³⁸ Vitale 1929, p. 4; Abulafia 1990, p. 283; Petti Balboni 1996, pp. 79-83; Pavoni 1997, p. 10 footnote 13, on Innocent IV's attempt to feudalise Lentini to his household immediately after the death of Frederick II.

³⁹ Pispisa 2005, p. 760

for the Genoese of falling into another trap, after the losses they had suffered – once again due to Siracusa – thirty years earlier under Henry VI⁴⁰. And the risk was keenly felt. The gradual rise of Augusta as a well-equipped harbour, complete with a fortified warehouse⁴¹, demoted the quay at Ortigia. A 1240 mandate issued to Angelo Frisaro, keeper of the eastern ports, unequivocally authorised only the ports of Augusta and Milazzo for the transit of goods to be exported from the Kingdom⁴². A mandate of authorisation serves as a clue to the efficiency of the manor, which was nearing completion⁴³. However, with the matter already settled, one wonders whether the project, even from the outset, envisaged that Castel Maniace⁴⁴ would mark the transformation of Siracusa into the exclusive domain of the sovereign, who had stayed there twice in 1233⁴⁵. Given the circumstances, nothing suggested that Castel Maniace would be abandoned above the columned hall shortly after 1240, as both cause and effect of a shift in power towards a peninsular logic – the same logic that led Riccardo to Capitanata to oversee the *palatium* of Lucera, overlooking the *inclita* Foggia⁴⁶.

2. A workshop set up with care, under the authority of Riccardo da Lentini

Prematurely forgotten, the figure of *magister* Riccardo has been heavily burdened by a judgment shaped by the ambiguity of his role as *prepositus novorum hedificiorum*. More than once, duties as a technocrat had been denied to him, as it was believed that this role was to be assigned to an official with administrative responsibilities over the building sites scattered across the eastern lands⁴⁷. Between the lines, Riccardo was much more. Already the title of *magister* placed him on a pedestal of authority and it indicated extensive training in field duties, sometimes quite thorny, such as the construction of the *muro luto confectis* carried out for three towers of the *castrum vetus* of his own Lentini⁴⁸. Without explicitly stating it, it is natural to describe his role as

⁴⁰ Vitale 1929, pp. 1-2; Abulafia 1990, p. 65; Pispisa 2005, p. 759; Basso 2011, p. 80.

⁴¹ Cadei 1995, pp. 112-113, for warehouse use.

⁴² Powell 1994.

⁴³ Lamb 1935, pp. 151-152, for the date 1242 already epigraphically attested.

⁴⁴ Agnello 1935, pp. 13-98; Alberti 1995d, pp. 376-407; Cadei 2006, *ad indicem*; Zorić 2009; Agnello 2010; Bares 2012; Biller 2021, pp. 264-267.

⁴⁵ Kiesewetter 2005, p. 106.

⁴⁶ Haseloff 1996, I, pp. 99-120, 189-233; Knaak 1996; Tomaiuolo 2005, pp. 25-50; Cadei 2006, pp. 169-199; Tomaiuolo 2012; Gangemi 2014; Biller 2021, pp. 200-206.

⁴⁷ With the exception of Sciascia 2000, pp. 29-30; Pistilli 2014, p. 127.

⁴⁸ Huillard-Bréholles 1857, pp. 509-511 (1239, 17 November) or Sthamer, Houben 2006, pp. 220-221, nos 1815, 1817; then Agnello 1935, p. 257 and in particular Cadei 2006, p. 161.

something between that of an engineer and an architect, an equal profile to who at that time managed construction sites in the heart of the Empire⁴⁹, construction sites well-known to Frederick after his stay ended in 1220⁵⁰.

It is, however, yesterday news that Riccardo's expertise emerged in full especially from a dispatch dated 29th March 1240, concerning Castle Ursino under construction, to be discussed face-to-face with the sovereign⁵¹. In simple terms, this encompassed both the delicate design phase and the organisational management of the construction site, from the quarrying of materials to the running of the building process, which likely involved the recruitment of stonemasons, individually identified only by stone marks⁵², though no record of such recruitment exists.

Along the way, the picture has been enriched with additional data, gradually outlining the *modus operandi* of the *prepositus*⁵³, at times correcting understandable uncertainties, and the investigation has been extended to his proven travels to the mainland after 1240⁵⁴. From the very beginning, surrounded by skilled and anonymous collaborators, the nature of the team led by Riccardo is evidenced by what has come down to us in Sicily, which is the tangible outcome of orders imposed from above, possibly revised only within certain limits in the presence of the sovereign⁵⁵. Taking for granted that Riccardo was continually put to the test, the *prepositus* repaid in hard currency what the Crown sought to propagate: turning the page was meant to inspire wonder in the eyes of the subjects, rather than instill fear⁵⁶. Thus, the deliberate versatility in design with recognisable common features became routine, quickly applying the modernity of a redefined Gothic, enhanced by the most advanced technological solutions⁵⁷, to a defensive structure reduced to the essentials. Aside from the turreted perimeter, even the retractable grille for the portal of Castel Maniace went against the principles applied in the castles of the lower Adriatic, where the outer wall was standard⁵⁸ and innovation was minimal. The fact remains that in Puglia, as occurred first at Lucera and later at Castel

⁴⁹ *Les Bâtisseurs* 1989, pp. 11-59, 81-101.

⁵⁰ Kiesewetter 2005, pp. 103 (Map 2), 106-108.

⁵¹ Huillard-Bréholles 1859, p. 862 (1240, 29 March) or Sthamer, Houben 2006, p. 221 n. 1817, then Pistilli 2014, pp. 130-133; Pistilli 2016, p. 127; Bresc, Sciascia 2016, p. 42.

⁵² Zorić 1995, pp. 413; Linguanti 2018, pp. 104-115.

⁵³ Pistilli 2014.

⁵⁴ Pistilli 2005, pp. 259-262; 2014, pp. 133-134.

⁵⁵ Pistilli 2014, pp. 130-131.

⁵⁶ Pistilli 2016, pp. 139, for the Lombard prisoners, forced to stand in front of monumental establishments in *Regnum: Il registro della cancelleria* 2002, I, pp. 313-350 nos. 310-335 (1239, 25 December) and II, pp. 743-744 nos. 824 (1240, 1 April).

⁵⁷ Cadei 2006, pp. 36-54.

⁵⁸ Benedettelli 1995, p. 245; Pasquale 1997, p. 17; Rescio 1997, p. 225; Cadei 2006, pp. 183-185.

del Monte⁵⁹, projects that were the result of experimentation in Sicily followed on from our *magister* and his companions.

And since the workshop of the Crown had been allocated along the Milazzo-Siracusa axis, there are, nonetheless, initiatives that seemingly stray from the beaten path, such as the *vivarium* of San Cusmano on the coast near Augusta or, by analogy, the unrecorded Lentini Biviere⁶⁰. Now, on a large scale, we are at the mercy of barriers for reservoirs important to hydraulic engineering, successfully employed in places like the “Bagno della Regina” at Castel Maniace⁶¹ or the water-tower in Augusta⁶². Thus, not only hilltop strongholds or quadrilateral castles for diverse functions. This, in turn, clarifies the generalist *novorum hedificiorum* of the office, later maintained in the *edificiorum Imperialis Curie* after Riccardo’s tenure on the peninsula. For any type of need, the office of the *prepositus* was available. Therefore, it would be a short step to also consider an intervention in the unimaginable realm of the sacred⁶³. Nevertheless, due to lack of evidence, the judgment on the abruptly interrupted walls of the Basilica del Murgo must remain inconclusive, despite the profile to the base of the portal being a cloned design, executed by another hand, of the inner side of Castel Maniace’s main gate⁶⁴.

With the elimination of the lost Lentini⁶⁵ and Caltagirone, there remain four documented castles. Except for the trapezoidal circuit of Milazzo, perched dramatically above the roadstead with a residence located near a Norman lighthouse⁶⁶, set into the sloped keep facing the sea, the others are designed on flat terrain. Leading the group is the pillar-hall castle of Siracusa (fig. 4), with a predominantly regular quadrangular layout, while Augusta and Catania are equipped with wings: the *fondaco* features three⁶⁷, and the Etnean barracks have one on each flank⁶⁸ (fig. 5).

However, only for Castello Ursino is its foundation securely dated to 1240⁶⁹; for the earlier castles, we must settle for a sparse collection of mandates issued

⁵⁹ Cadei 2006, *ad indicem*; Biller 2021, pp. 210-214.

⁶⁰ Huillard-Bréholles 1857, pp. 509-511 (1239, 17 November) or Sthamer, Houben 2006, p. 221 nos 1817-1818; then Agnello 1935, pp. 195-210 e 293-297 for the Lentini Biviere.

⁶¹ Agnello 1935, pp. 85-89; Zorić 2010.

⁶² Pistilli 1995a.

⁶³ *Imperialis ecclesia* 2021.

⁶⁴ Agnello 1935, pp. 231-248; Alberti 1995a, to have anticipated Castel Maniace to Murgo; Cadei 2006, pp. 135-136.

⁶⁵ Agnello 1935, pp. 251-289; Cadei 2006, p. 161; Biller 2021, pp. 260-261.

⁶⁶ Agnello 1961, pp. 9-46; Ministeri, Vinci 1995; Cadei 2006, pp. 130-131; Biller 2021, pp. 245-248.

⁶⁷ Agnello 1935, pp. 143-194; Alberti 1995b; Cadei 1995, pp. 112-113; Pistilli 1995a; Liessem 2012, pp. 71-88; Cadei 2006, *ad indicem*; Biller 2021, pp. 261-264.

⁶⁸ Cadei 2006, p. 133; Pistilli 2014, p. 132.

⁶⁹ Huillard-Bréholles 1857, pp. 527-529 (1239, 17 e 24 November) e 1859, p. 862 (1240, 29 March) or Sthamer, Houben 2006, pp. 221-224 nos 1819, 1829-1831.

from the Lombard encampments in the autumn of 1239, when the work was already well underway⁷⁰.

3. *Apprenticeship and Rise to the Court: through a blurred picture*

In the absence of documentation, dispatches inform us for the first time that *magister* Riccardo held the title of *prepositus*. Beyond this, we know nothing about his past, except his place of birth: the discredited Lentini, which had rebelled but was also the birthplace of the more famous poet Giacomo⁷¹, who accompanied the Emperor during his last stay in Sicily in 1233⁷².

Assuming it is reasonable to consider Riccardo as belonging to the same lineage as the court notary⁷³, his prestigious position in the service of the Curia opens up a range of possibilities. The most plausible one is that, like Giacomo, he had long been active under Frederick II, at least since the *bastide* foundation of Augusta⁷⁴. It would not even be coincidental that the *magister* and his lineage were residents there by 1249⁷⁵. However, what cannot even be deduced by conjecture when intertwining the later documents with Riccardo's undisputed design skills is guided, at its core, by the developments in Western Gothic around 1230, which Riccardo demonstrated to know inside and out, applying them judiciously to the needs of the Crown. And here, allow me to venture a hypothesis. Following a youthful apprenticeship completed locally - perhaps at the modest Cistercian monastery of Roccadia in the Lentini area⁷⁶ - his entry into the court would have been followed by a deliberate itinerant education undertaken during the third decade of the century.

This practice, unprecedented at the time (or at least undocumented) for a *magister* from the *Regnum*, was likely the norm for those aspiring to elevate themselves in the profession. Villard de Honnecourt exemplifies this through the notes in his architectural sketchbook, as he travelled from France to Hungary via southern Germany⁷⁷.

It is clear that behind the promising Riccardo stood the Imperial Curia, actively shaping his career well in advance. Like someone destined for great-

⁷⁰ Huillard-Bréholles 1857, p. 429 (1239, 5-9 October), pp. 509-511 (1239, 17 November), p. 529 (1239, 25 November) or Sthamer, Houben 2006, pp. 220-222 nos 1814-1819.

⁷¹ Antonelli 1994; Antonelli 1995.

⁷² Kiesewetter 2005, pp. 102 (Map 1), 105.

⁷³ Sciascia 2000, pp. 18 ff.; Bresc, Sciascia 2016, pp. 7-23.

⁷⁴ Bresc, Sciascia 2016, p. 76.

⁷⁵ ASSi, *Fondo congregazioni religiose soppresse, Monastero S. Chiara di Lentini*, XXII (1249, 18 April), in Dufour 1989, p. 213.

⁷⁶ Pistilli 2014, p. 129; Bresc, Sciascia 2016, pp. 37-40.

⁷⁷ Bechmann 2000; Wirtz 2015b.

ness, he must have been selected from every conceivable angle from among the highest levels of Sicilian society which were loyal to the Hohenstaufen cause. By heeding his Norman soul, Frederick was aware that, to act effectively, it was essential to rely on a Sicilian – ideally one recognised in the area targeted for intervention. Conversely, it was an act of authority to send the future *prepositus* elsewhere to gain experience. The dire conditions on the island and, foremost, the call of Gothic architecture left no alternative. Whether or not it mirrored Honnecourt's itinerary through the Alemannic regions, in Riccardo's case, the journey northward by sea would likely have included a stop in still-loyal Genoa. From there, the route would have led to the northwestern corner of Lombardy, where the Abbey of Sant'Andrea in Vercelli – under imperial protection since 1226⁷⁸ –, before crossing the Pennine Alps to reach his destination.

On the emerging Swabian frontier beyond the Alps, significant construction sites of the 1220s came to the rescue, including, along the way, the cathedral of French-speaking Lausanne.

Focusing on the main sites, it is essential to mention Strasbourg with the southern transept of the cathedral⁷⁹ and the *massif occidental* of Saint-Thomas⁸⁰ (fig. 6), as well as the second and opposing choir of Bamberg Cathedral⁸¹, alongside the episcopal complexes of Basel⁸² and Lausanne⁸³, or, as examples, the contemporary versions of Cistercian Maulbronn (fig. 4) and Ebrach⁸⁴. If, within the framework of a systematic and resolute action, the subjugation of the *Regnum Siciliae* to an unprecedented doctrine was part of the plan and to be scheduled within predetermined times, the shift in approach had to be identified in the restless Ionian Sicily, with the resolve to make a *tabula rasa*, starting with the port city of Augusta. It is evident that the uprising in Val di Noto and Catania was the awaited opportunity to physically assert imperial authority – dear also to Philip Augustus when he subjected his domains⁸⁵ – and that this part of the island was designated as a place for ex-

⁷⁸ Granted at the request of Abbot Tommaso Gallo during Guala's time, according to an imperial diploma from 1226 (for the edition from the original: Frova 1767, pp. 157-159), the Victorine canons of Sant'Andrea later also aligned with the Ghibelline party, much like the descendants of Cardinal Bicchieri (Pastè, Arborio Mella 1907, pp. 46-67). So much so that Emperor Frederick II is said to have stayed at the monastery while passing through Vercelli in February 1238 (again, see Pastè, Arborio Mella 1907, p. 59).

⁷⁹ Wirth 2015a; Meyer 2015; Bengel 2015.

⁸⁰ Schurr 2015.

⁸¹ von Winterfeld 1979, pp. 108-139, 142-145.

⁸² Meier 2019, pp. 111-115.

⁸³ Dupraz 1906, pp. 43-51; Sandron 2004; Villes 2012, pp. 55-90.

⁸⁴ Schmidt 1903, pp. 58-63, 76-84, 112-114; von Winterfeld 1979, pp. 142-143; Knapp 1997, pp. 82-86; Glaser 2024, pp. 182-184.

⁸⁵ Mesqui 1991, p. 185; *Paris gothique* 2020, pp. 74-79; Hayot 2021, pp. 209-232, for the cylindrical-base keep and the Louvre as a prototype.

perimentation and testing of models, with the opportunity to eventually apply them on the mainland.

And since Frederick never had the opportunity to personally inspect the numerous construction sites, it is implied that he placed blind trust in those prepared to oversee them under his explicit directives⁸⁶ and, likely, to select groups of sculptors from the North. This would bring back into focus the intermediary role of San Lorenzo in Genoa, whose portals were completed around 1230⁸⁷. In hindsight, it must be said that the Hohenstaufen ruler was right to entrust Riccardo da Lentini with one of the pieces of that immense plan aimed at transforming the island and subsequently the *regnum*: from the centre of a geopolitical system unfolding in the Mediterranean into a territory that entered through the front door into the broader and more complex system of Western Europe.

By extension, a definitive answer emerges: the Levantine-driven line of *castra imperfecta*, initiated in Apulia perhaps under the guidance of the Franco-Cypriot Philippe Chinard⁸⁸, had reached its destination. In fact, it was supplanted after 1240. As evidence, Riccardo appears before the monarch during the Diet of Foggia⁸⁹. Almost immediately afterward, he would return for the *domus* in Lucera⁹⁰ and the launch of Castel del Monte⁹¹ (fig. 7). Then came his wandering work far from the kingdom and Augusta, where he set foot again only after the defeat at Vittoria, always proudly maintaining his position, as it was recorded in a private document⁹².

In the meantime, the *prepositus* had left his mark on the *Regnum Italiae*: at Monselice, he replicated the keep of Milazzo⁹³, and in 1246, he was in Prato as *magister castri imperatoris*⁹⁴, though without undertaking any expeditions into Lombardy. After all, when had German emperors ever relied on fortresses to subjugate urban districts in their hereditary territories? At most, they used *Kaiserpfalzen*⁹⁵ or a *Kaiserhof*, as in Bamberg, or occasionally relied on *domus* south of the Alps⁹⁶.

⁸⁶ Pistilli 2016, p. 146.

⁸⁷ Di Fabio 2011.

⁸⁸ Cadei 2006, pp. 51, 67, 91, 182, 184; Pasquale 1997, p. 17, for the 1249 gravestone in Trani.

⁸⁹ Huillard-Bréholles 1859, p. 862 (1240, 29 March) or Sthamer, Houben 2006, p. 224, no 1831; Carcani 1786, p. 243 (1240, 6 May); then, Agnello 1961, p. 16 footnote 1; Pistilli 2014, p. 132; Pistilli 2016, p. 147.

⁹⁰ Pistilli 2014, p. 133; Pistilli 2016, pp. 147-148.

⁹¹ Huillard-Bréholles 1859, p. 697 (1240, 29 January) and Sthamer 1926, p. 62 no 734; Aceto 1990, p. 20, for the beginning of Castel del Monte.

⁹² Sciascia 2000, pp. 29-30; Pistilli 2014, p. 127.

⁹³ Pistilli 2014, pp. 133-134; Urban 2014; Romalli 2016; Biller 2021, pp. 270-271.

⁹⁴ Fantappiè 1991, p. 261 footnote 296 (1246, 23 April); also, Agnello 1954; Kappel, Tragbar 1996; Liessem 1996 and 1999; Biller 2019; Biller 2021, pp. 267-270.

⁹⁵ Binding 1996, pp. 262-396, for Hohenstaufen residences in the German regions.

⁹⁶ Pistilli 2005, pp. 74-75; Pistilli 2006, p. 173.

It goes without saying that, from 1240 to 1248, the Italian peninsula for Frederick II was and remained a concept of variable geometry, and his conduct could be summarised by the saying “double standards.”

4. *The Crucible of Gothic in the Heart of the Mediterranean*

Returning once again to the Sicilian season, we know the list of fortresses by 1239, along with their geographic distribution. There is little to rely on and, as *magister*, Riccardo is associated with the last in the series. Thus, to attribute the earlier ones to him, one must draw on the design principles. This approach immediately connects the chronological endpoints: from 1234 with Castel Maniace to 1240 with Castello Ursino (fig. 8). From the former, the Etnean example derives: square perimeter, geometric division of the layout into a grid of five modules per side and the use of cylindrical towers (fig. 5).

Compared to the Siracusan abode, the Catanian barracks are less imposing, though remaining a variant. Being equipped with an internal courtyard, they belong by right to the category of “castles with regular wings”. They are, in absolute terms, the first of their kind on the island and, as time nearly ran out, the only one, given that the elongated rectangle of Augusta must be excluded from the category due to its initial design with three wings⁹⁷.

This reveals that the advent of the castle with regular wings is significantly later than the *castra imperfecta* of Bari and Brindisi⁹⁸, with Trani remaining under investigation as a case of gradual adaptation⁹⁹. Moving to Capitanata, the transitive property once again binds the *domus* of Lucera¹⁰⁰ to Castello Ursino. Stripped of the towers in its circuit, the square of Lucera replicated the Sicilian model on a smaller scale, adding walkable levels conceived as continuous corridors¹⁰¹.

Focusing on the design advancements of the 1230s proves more problematic. Once established the extraneousness of Castello Ursino, the projects are not free from discrepancies, whether in terms of layout or technological improvisations. Beyond the acknowledged skills of the *prepositus* and his subordinates, the environmental conditions for experimenting with Gothic architecture according to specific needs were ideal.

⁹⁷ Cadei 2006, p. 115 and pl. IV/1.

⁹⁸ Benedettelli 1995, p. 245; Matitecchia 1995, pp. 272-275; Houben 1997, pp. 69-88; Benedettelli 1995, pp. 245-247; Cadei 2006, pp. 171-188; Biller 2021, pp. 214-219, 228-231.

⁹⁹ Tommasi 1983, pp. 228-247; Pistilli 1995a, pp. 224-227; Pasquale 1997, pp. 15-41; Rescio 1997, pp. 221-226; Benedettelli 1998, pp. 709-724; Biller 2021, pp. 207-210.

¹⁰⁰ Pistilli 2014, pp. 132-133.

¹⁰¹ Biller 1989, p. 113, regarding the *endlose Halle* that defined the perimeter corridor of the Hospitaller quadrilateral at Belvoir in Galilee, built shortly before 1187.

Under Norman rule, the region had been almost entirely demilitarised, and the documented garrisons often dated back to the “*età delle Contee*”. Moreover, starting from a blank slate, it was an added value for the Crown to interact with an evolving *élite* on the Ionian coast – an area that was, not coincidentally, home to both *magister* Riccardo and the poet Giacomo.

This undoubtedly aligned with the imposition of a novel face of power that inevitably had to be recorded within the European repertoire. Therefore, the *castra perfecta* must primarily be approached with an eye turned towards the North, rather than being influenced by the Outremer, firmly in the hands of the Knights Hospitaller in terms of fortification¹⁰², whose results had nothing in common with the “Levantine catalogue”, from which Apulian castles continued to draw inspiration¹⁰³.

The priority in the Sicilian quadrilaterals was the gradual rise towards the model offered by the Philippine castles, ultimately exemplified by Dourdan¹⁰⁴ (fig. 9), as well as the rough bill of cylindrical towers and perimeter walls at Catania (fig. 10). All of this was progressively reconfigured with structures developed along the perimeter by associating quadrangular bays, based on a system borrowed from monastic cloisters¹⁰⁵.

It was not a haphazard copy-and-paste of distinct components. Quite the contrary: in the castles with a regular layout, there is a noticeable refinement of approach and internal typological evolution, influenced by size and intended use, which paradoxically concluded its trajectory outside the island, in the *palatium* of Lucera, rather than in the octagon of Castel del Monte. It is plausible that the hesitant beginnings in the *fondaco* of Augusta were immediately followed by a strict application of the rule in the columned hall of Castel Maniace (fig. 4b). Subsequently, the regular wings of Castello Ursino emerged five years later, almost instantly transitioning to the luxury version with continuous wings at Lucera – a solution that made the otherwise-cramped spaces practical for the needs of the sovereign. In both Siracusa, at the outset, and later at Lucera, the reuse of the Antique was intentional¹⁰⁶, such as Roman herms carried from Naples to Capitanata¹⁰⁷ and a pair of Hellenistic bronze rams perhaps added during the course of the construction to adorn the gate of Castel Maniace, which was constructed with a lavish use of repurposed precious marbles (fig. 2b). Until then, nothing like this had ever been seen.

Nevertheless, starting with Augusta, everything was tailored to its purposes and enriched by technological highlights tested elsewhere. Notable among

¹⁰² Biller 1989; Biller 2006; Mesqui, Goepp 2018.

¹⁰³ Cadei 2006, pp. 101-111.

¹⁰⁴ Hayot 2021, pp. 159-182.

¹⁰⁵ Pistilli 2016, pp. 162 ff.

¹⁰⁶ Biller 2021, pp. 157-162.

¹⁰⁷ Huillard-Bréholles 1859, p. 912 (1240, 22 April) or Sthamer 1912, p. 11 n. 38 I-II.

these is the cistern-tower, disguised as a *bossage*-faced keep¹⁰⁸ and modelled after the *Brunnenturm* of Trifels Castle¹⁰⁹ (fig. 10). Crucial was the step aimed at channelling that know-how into Castel Maniace, with solutions later ignored by the imperial residences. Here, the design was governed by the square layout of the perimeter walls, to which the spans of the hall corresponded as exact subdivisions. In line with this approach were the eclectic bases of the cylindrical towers (fig. 12), indicating that unprecedented elements converged in alignment with the Curia's interest in scientific progress¹¹⁰.

Even accessible *abaci* proved useful, particularly Fibonacci's *Practica Geometriae*. For a high-ranking *magister*, it was a valuable working instrument¹¹¹ for becoming skilled at calculations of flat surfaces, essential for constructing increasingly intricate and complex structures, such as the polyhedral forms of angular bastions that recall the median joints of the Porta delle Torri of Capua. Conversely, in the case of the gate, tradition held sway – perhaps because it was sculpted in the early stages of construction. However, as a calling card, the grand entrance had to adhere at least to a pioneering principle of visibility, eliminating the mechanism of the portcullis from a frontal perspective.

In retrospect, the singularity of Castel Maniace lays in its identification at ground level as an enormous audience hall. Renate Wagner-Rieger¹¹² already discussed the concept of an expanded Cistercian chapter hall, also referencing the halls of Southern Italian monasteries. Now, projected beyond 1230, it becomes necessary to broaden the scope, starting with the fundamental elements. By that time, cylindrical pillars on tall plinths, often adorned with *crochet* capitals, had made their debut in limited instances in the Upper Rhine region, as seen in St Thomas' Church in Strasbourg (fig. 6a). Beyond their distant descent from examples in the early Gothic cathedrals of the *Domaine Royal*, these features had been implemented in Picardy, with Cistercian contributions¹¹³, and later migrated to Burgundy, where they appeared before 1220 in Notre-Dame of Dijon¹¹⁴.

From here, it was natural to see the transition to Lausanne and southern Germany. Thus, from the perspective of Frederick II, always attentive to changes within the Empire, the supports to be imported into Castel Maniace had to be of the latest style, as demonstrated by the refectory of Maulbronn¹¹⁵ (fig. 4a). And yet, the ensemble, when implemented in Siracusa, proved in-

¹⁰⁸ Pistilli 1995a, pp. 198-199; of a different opinion Liessem 2012, pp. 84-88, regarding a questionable use as a lighthouse.

¹⁰⁹ Ebhardt 1938, pp. 19-20, 42; Meyer 1997, pp. 81-86; Pistilli 2020, pp. 122, 132 footnote 41.

¹¹⁰ Delle Donne 2019, pp. 115-141

¹¹¹ Arrighi 1970, pp. 17-31; Hugues 2008; Ulivi 2011, pp. 247-288.

¹¹² Wagner-Rieger 1957, p. 179.

¹¹³ Kimpel, Suckale 1985, pp. 210-213, 268-277, in the case of Laon and Picardy.

¹¹⁴ Oursel 1938, pp. 18-22, 32-41; Gill 1996; Borlée 2015, pp. 122-140.

¹¹⁵ Knapp 1997, pp. 82-86.

sufficient. While the numerous half-columns and pillars were crowned with capitals proportionate to the scale of the hall, they represented typological categories undergoing hierarchical refinement: from the conventional *crochet* capitals with elongated celery-stalk stems on the perimeter walls – sculpted first – progressing in the corridors to an unprecedented overload of bulbous forms, culminating in the calligraphic creation of lobed acanthus above the triastyle pillar of the central bay (fig. 13).

Perhaps unbeknownst to the various workshops, Riccardo was shaping the genetics of ornamental plants, patenting a repertoire that, with the sample of the lobed acanthus, would define Hohenstaufen sculpture after 1240, complementing in unison the most prestigious projects in the *Regnum*¹¹⁶.

However, if the style of the supports already ruled out any resemblance to a chapter hall, for the open space in Siracusa, the answer must be sought with great care among the sparse extant examples of large halls with intersecting aisles. To find one comparable in both representation and chronology, we must look to Normandy, recently conquered by Philip II of France. The Knights' Hall on the second floor of *La Merveille* at Mont-Saint-Michel¹¹⁷ (fig. 14) currently represents yet another sign of functional updating.

The honour of being the progenitor of Frederick's euergetism, where waves of experimentation converged in a 360-degree approach, was balanced by the burden of being a potential *unicum*. As is often the case with high-ranking prototypes, some choices tailored to Castel Maniace amounted to nothing in subsequent developments. Thus, the pillared hall and the enigmatic gate shared the same fate.

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¹¹⁶ Cadei 1995, p. 122, where he reverses the route from Abruzzo to Sicily and anticipates it to the 1920s; Aceto 1990, pp. 15-96; also, Tota 2014; Pistilli, Gianandrea 2020, pp. 123-130.

¹¹⁷ Nortier 1966, pp. 458-460; Baylé, 1998, pp. 125-128.

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Appendix

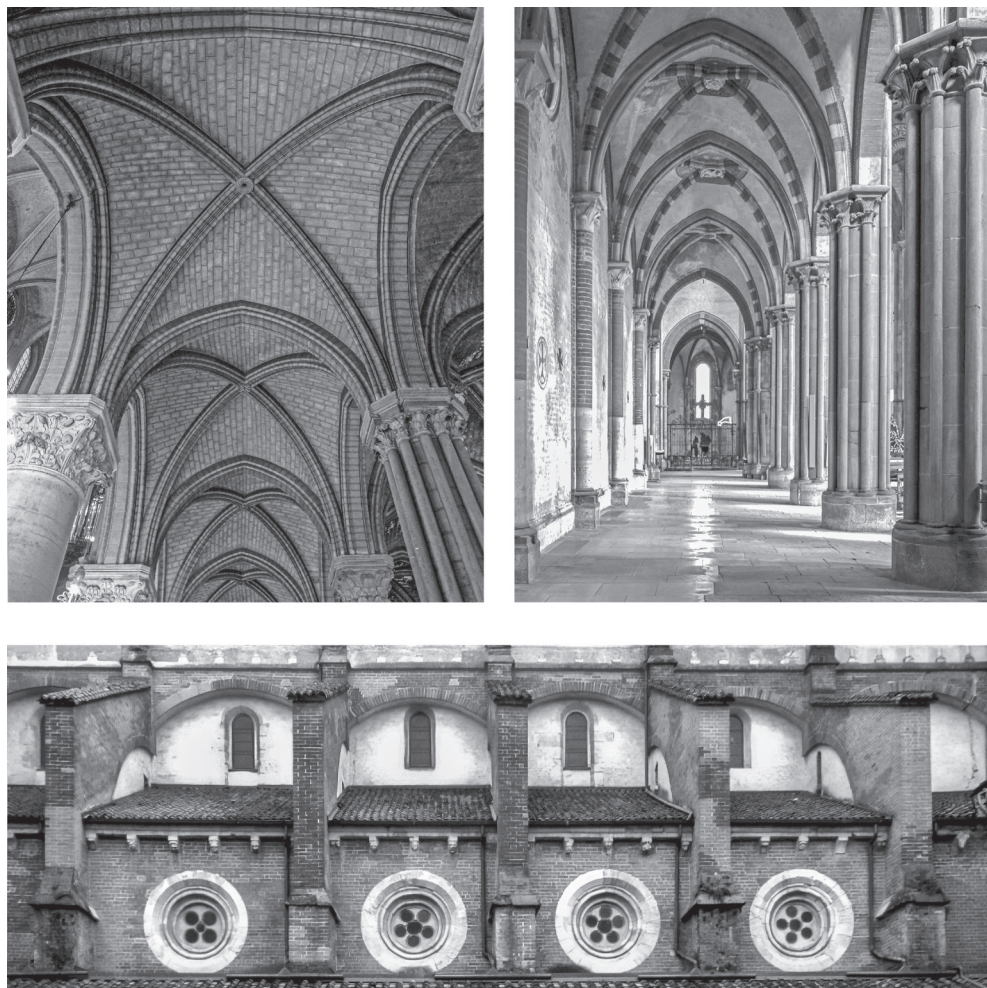


Fig. 1. *Pilier cantonné* and *arc-boutant*: a) Paris, Notre-Dame, nave; b) Vercelli, Sant'Andrea, aisle and side of the church

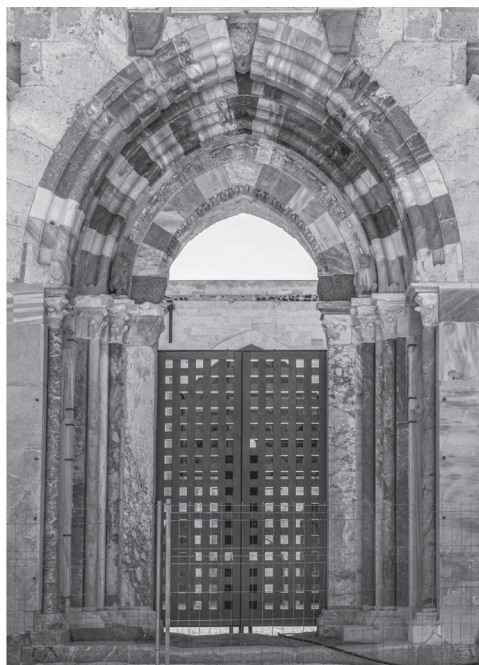


Fig. 2. Portal: a) Vercelli, Sant'Andrea, cloister; b) Siracusa, Castel Maniace



Fig. 3. Portals *post* 1240: a) Castel del Monte (Andria); b) Prato, *castrum imperatoris*



Fig. 4. a) Maulbronn (Württemberg), cistercian abbey, refectory; b) Siracusa, Castel Maniace (photo L. Mercuri)

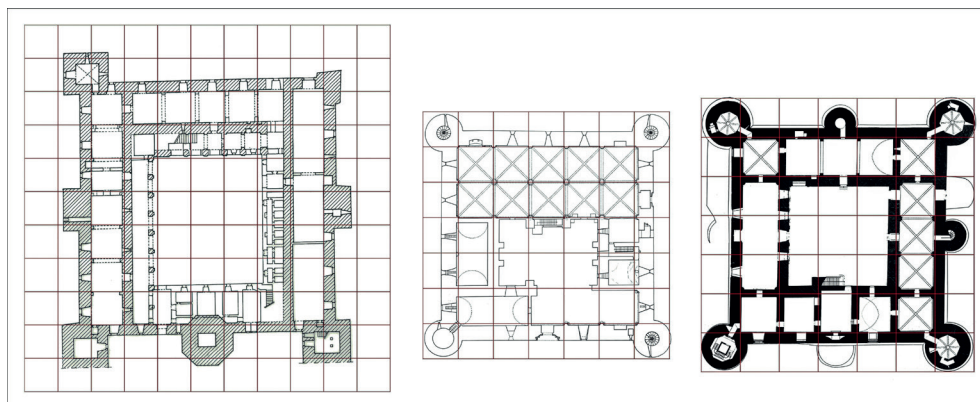


Fig. 5. Floor plans to scale (C. Costantini, Rome): a) Augusta (Siracusa), castle; b) Siracusa, Castel Maniace; c) Catania, Castello Ursino



Fig. 6. a) Strasbourg, Saint-Thomas, *massif occidental*; b) Augusta (Siracusa), castle, court gallery of west wing

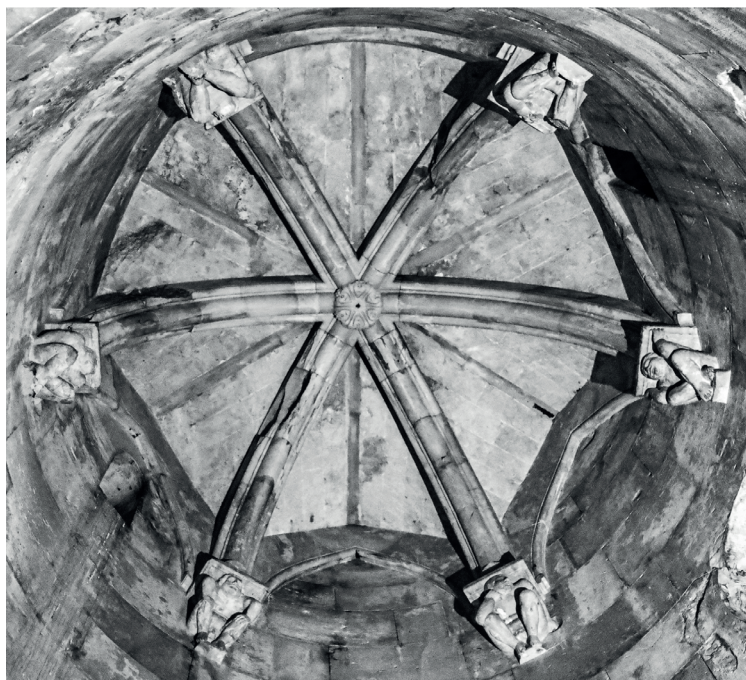
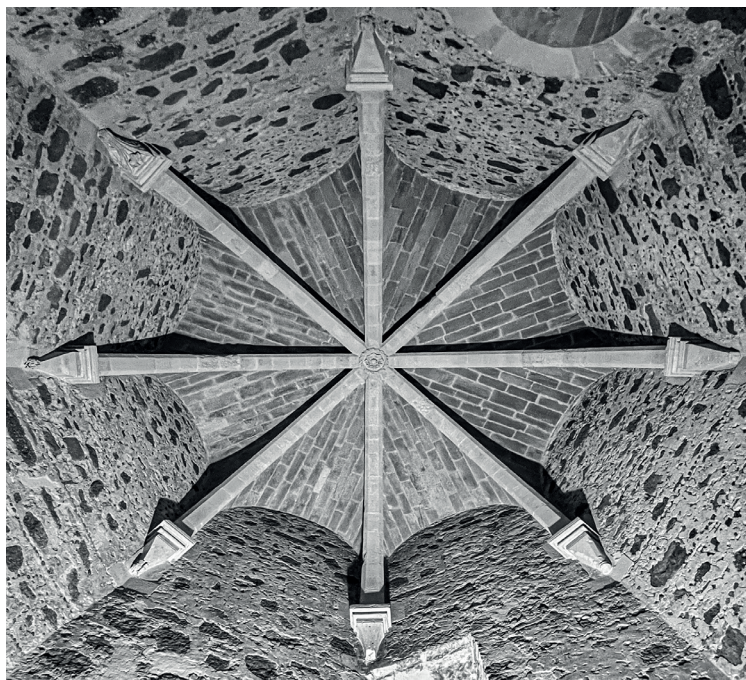


Fig. 7. Vaults: a) Catania, Castello Ursino, tower; b) Castel del Monte (Andria), tower



Fig. 8. Siracusa, Castel Maniace; Catania, Castello Ursino

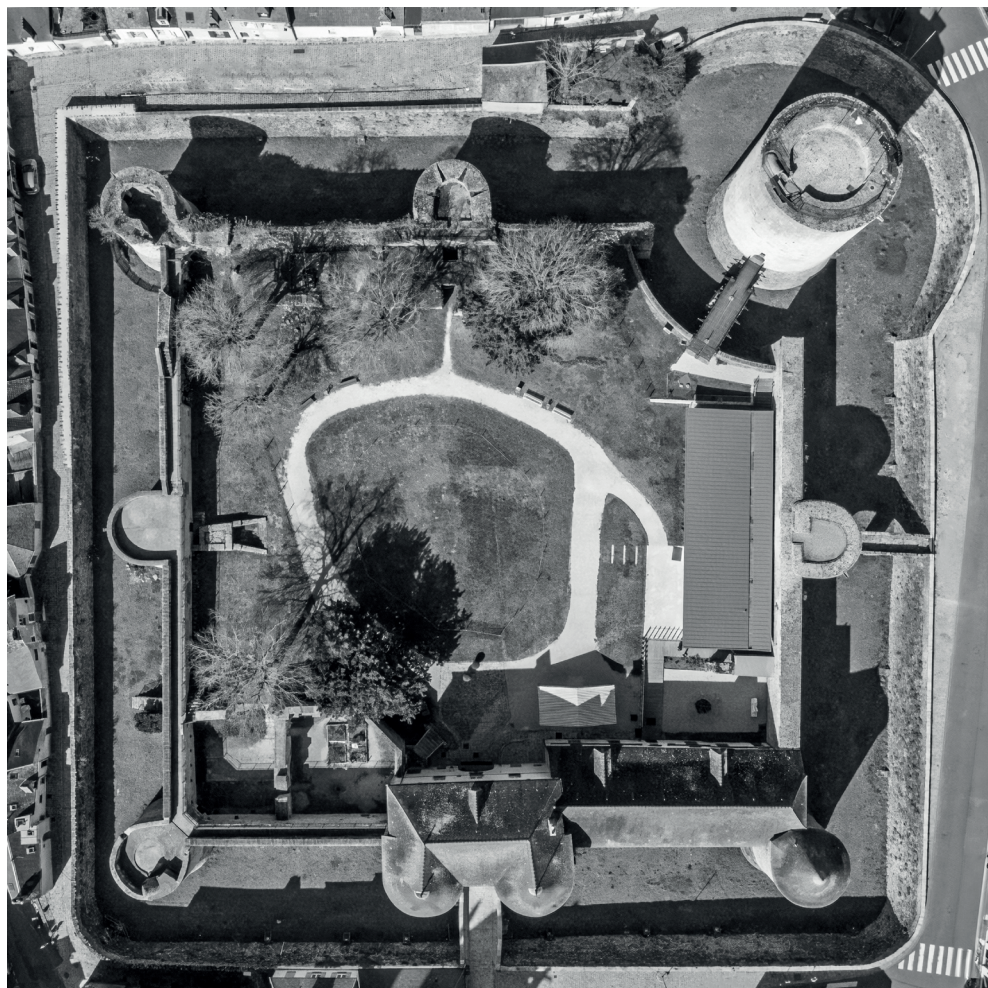


Fig. 9. Dourdan (Île-de-France), philippine castle



Fig. 10. a) Dourdan (Île-de-France), philippine castle; b) Catania, Castello Ursino

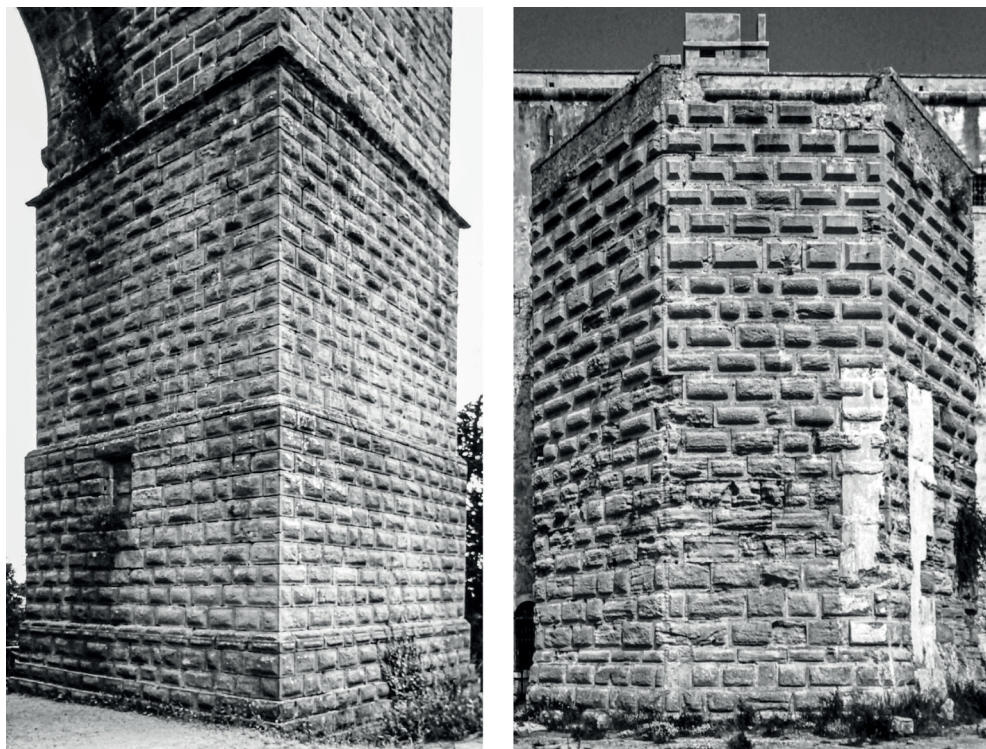


Fig. 11. a) Water-tower: Trifels (Rhineland-Palatinate), *Reichsburg*; b) Augusta (Siracusa), castle



Fig. 12. Tower bases: a) Siracusa, Castel Maniace; b) Capua, Porta delle Torri



Fig. 13. Siracusa, Castel Maniace, *crochets* capitals (photo L. Mercuri)



Fig. 14. Mont-Saint-Michel (Normandy), *La Merveille*, Knights' Hall

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