

The Stones of Naples. Church Building in Angevin Italy, 1266–1343

Review Number:

469

Publish date:

Thursday, 1 September, 2005

Author:

Caroline Bruzelius

ISBN:

300100396X

Date of Publication:

2004

Price:

£45.00

Pages:

288pp.

Publisher:

Yale University Press

Place of Publication:

New Haven, CT

Reviewer:

Claudia Bolgia

The main aim of this book (1) is to provide a social history of the religious architecture commissioned in the kingdom of Naples under three generations of French kings (from the conquest of Charles of Anjou in 1266 to the death of his grandson, Robert the Wise in 1343). Bruzelius's research is firmly anchored in the architecture itself, with significant revisions of chronology and style, but her primary concern is to relate the buildings to the history of the kingdom.

A similar approach, but focusing on painting, informs the work of Ferdinando Bologna on the Angevin court of Naples, to which Bruzelius's work can be seen as a complement.(2) The author's purpose to deal not only with issues of form and function, but also conception and production, is ambitious. Bruzelius is conscious of the difficulties of the task, as she acknowledges in the introduction: direct technical and architectural analysis is often impossible, either because of the Baroque remodelling of interior spaces (which, at times, completely conceal all those elements – mouldings, bases, capitals – that allow the recreation of the construction process or the identification of an architect, master mason or sculptor) or because of the restorations following the devastating bombardments of 1943. By combining a thorough rereading of the published sources with a patient and detailed analysis of the physical fabric (which justifies her choice of quoting Ruskin's book in her title), the author brilliantly sets the material remains of Angevin architecture in their historical and social context, often convincingly challenging traditional concepts radically ingrained in modern scholarship.

One of the main clichés tackled by Bruzelius is the idea that Angevin rulers in a Francophile court introduced – above all under Charles of Anjou – French architecture executed by French architects and builders. Having already devoted years of research to St Denis and the court of Louis IX, the author is well

aware that the traditional idea of a court style, one-sided, unchanging and dictated by the ruler, is a myth. Along the lines of Paul Binski's remarks on the court of the English kingdom (3), Bruzelius provides a picture of the patronage in the Angevin kingdom as varied, changeable and eclectic. Yet the difference with the famously energetic builder kings of the thirteenth century, Louis IX of France and Henry III of England, could not be more striking.

One of the author's great contributions is to demonstrate that the patronage in the kingdom of Naples was not exclusively 'royal': the role of mercantile and civic authorities, as well as of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and urban elites, in shaping the aesthetic agenda of the kingdom vividly emerges from the pages of Bruzelius's book. Opposing the traditional view that tended generically to attribute much southern Italian construction to foreign architects, Bruzelius persuasively shows that, if the patronage was far from being purely 'French', the architects and workmanship were also mainly non-French and local. One of the book's great strengths lies in the reconstruction of the ecclesiastical architecture of the kingdom as bilingual, based on a skilful combination of new Gothic signifiers (pointed arches, window tracery, stained glass and crocket capitals), with local traditions, materials and building methods.

The author convincingly argues that if 'importation' did take place (examples of 'pure' imported Gothic are the tomb of Isabelle of Aragon in Cosenza cathedral and parts of S. Eligio al Mercato in Naples), the colonial culture of the Angevins in Italy led to a standardisation and an 'ossification' of the imported Gothic elements, as attested in particular by the architectural detailing of S. Lorenzo Maggiore and the Cappella Tocco in the cathedral of Naples. Also, the sovereigns were not the only source through which Gothic forms were introduced: another of Bruzelius's merits is to focus the attention on the role of other forces – the Mendicant Orders (in particular the Franciscans) and the Papal Curia (filled with French Popes and clergy) – in the process of transmission of Northern architectural ideas.

The structure of the book is roughly chronological, based on the assertion that the character and design of the churches reflect the political tendencies of each reign. The volume is introduced by two plans (of the kingdom and of Naples at the death of Robert the Wise in 1343) and two very useful genealogical tables (of the House of Anjou and of the Norman Kings of Sicily and the House of Hohenstaufen).

The first chapter is dedicated to the religious buildings associated with Charles I, either by traditional attribution or documentary evidence. The author challenges the frequent interpretation of Charles as a great patron of arts, who played a significant role in shaping church buildings in the kingdom, and reconstructs him as a 'passive, incidental, or even "accidental" patron of church building' (p. 11), who mainly provided lands, or the rights to the use of forests and quarries, in response to specific requests. Bruzelius expunges from the buildings traditionally ascribed to Charles I's patronage both the cathedral and the Franciscan church of S. Lorenzo Maggiore in Naples. The most important religious commissions of Charles I remain the now-ruined Cistercian abbeys of Vittoria and Realvalle, for which rich documentation survives. While scaling down the role of Charles I as a patron of churches, the author simultaneously reassesses his role in the construction of secular buildings (especially fortifications) and the role of other figures in the patronage of ecclesiastical buildings, such as the Burgundian Archbishop of Naples Ayglerius and the three French patrons of S. Eligio al Mercato, who have been identified as members of the merchant community by Giovanni Vitolo in a forthcoming study.

Along with issues of patronage, questions of topography, original dedication and the cult of the saints are raised and discussed. The author demonstrates that the churches constructed in the kingdom at the time of Charles I (1266–1285) reveal a simple and austere aesthetic choice, very different from the Rayonnant style of the contemporary Paris of Louis IX, and better compared with the earlier patronage of Charles I's father or with Charles I's own commissions in Provence (S. Eligio al Mercato, in its lean and austere vocabulary and adoption of flat wall surfaces, resembles St-Jean-de-Malte at Aix-en-Provence, built in the 1270s for the burial of Charles's first wife).

The choice to dedicate the entire second chapter to one church is understandable: Bruzelius deals here with the Franciscan S. Lorenzo Maggiore, one of the most studied and debated churches of the kingdom. Its 'aura

of Frenchness', as the author calls it, due to the adoption of a choir with ambulatory and radiating chapels, has lead scholars to read this building as the most significant example of importation of French architectural concepts by Angevin kings and as the product of Cistercian architectural ideas and workmanship (from Royamont near Paris, through the mediation of Realvalle). Bruzelius overturns accepted chronology to argue that building activity preceded royal support. According to the author, construction was episodic and intermittent, driven by the need for subsidiary altars for the friars and by the foundation of private family chapels for local donors.

The architectural detailing of S. Lorenzo does not compare with what remains in Realvalle and the supports of the hemicycle have no Cistercian comparisons; the best parallel can be identified in the choir of S. Francesco at Bologna (which was a Franciscan *studium*, like S. Lorenzo). Building on Schenkluhn's observations about the relationship between plans with ambulatory and radiating chapels and Franciscan *studia*(4), Bruzelius convincingly reasserts the role of the Franciscans in the diffusion of northern architectural ideas in Italy. In the attempt to readdress the problem of the Franciscan contribution, however, she goes too far: she attributes the chevet of S. Lorenzo to Franciscan expertise (p. 60).

The idea that the chevet of S. Lorenzo is based on models used elsewhere within the Order is compelling, but the author's strong belief 'that the religious orders, and in particular the Franciscans, brought their own architectural experts to supervise and quite probably design the churches of their order' (p. 158) is less convincing. This suggestion has the merit of questioning the hitherto unchallenged leading role of the Cistercians builders as disseminators of Gothic forms in Italy; however, it would have been useful to see more evidence. Bruzelius promises to consider the issue of the Franciscan architectural vocabulary as part of the final chapter of the book 'in relation to the startling consistency of moldings in the smaller Franciscan churches of Campania, a consistency that can be most sensibly explained as the work of itinerant Franciscan architectural builders' (p. 58). Nevertheless, the last chapter simply contains the statement that a certain repertoire of standard elements (such as window mouldings) were repeated from one Franciscan site to another, in places such as Teano, Eboli, Nocera Inferiore, Nola and Aversa (p. 158). More visual evidence to support this assertion would have been helpful, and it should have been shown that such similarities of mouldings were exclusively limited to Franciscan sites. Without such evidence the similarities can be most reasonably explained as the work of itinerant *local* architectural builders.

It is a pity that two remarkable books that shed new light on the problem of Franciscan *maestranze* were published almost simultaneously with Bruzelius's book, and consequently the author could not include their outcomes in her volume.(5) Le Pogam's book, in particular, contains significant well-documented examples of friar-architects and master masons working in the construction of public buildings, cathedrals or churches unrelated to their own order. Also, when Bruzelius mentions known examples of Franciscan artists, she just records 'Fra Jacobo Torriti' (p. 60) as mosaicist in Rome and Filippo de Campello as architect at Assisi. In doing so, she ignores the thorny debate about Jacopo Torriti, who – according to some scholars – was not a friar, and – according to others – was both friar, architect and mosaicist.(6) As the question of Franciscan expertise forms an important part of Bruzelius's discussion, this debate should have been at least acknowledged in a footnote.

It seems that, when the author leaves the safe ground of the Angevin kingdom (where she moves freely with great competence and clarity), her arguments become less convincing. It is the case of the discussion of the tomb of Cardinal Philippe d'Alençon (after 1397) in S. Maria in Trastevere in Rome, used by Bruzelius as a comparison to support her hypothesis that the remains of frescoes (a Nativity and a Dormition of the Virgin) on the west and east side of the south transept of S. Lorenzo in Naples were originally part of wall funerary monuments (pp. 63–64). The d'Alençon tomb as it appears today is the result of a radical rearrangement following the remodelling of the south transept in 1584. The effigy figure, inscription and low-relief with the *Dormitio Virginis* are now to the left of the tomb, which includes non-pertinent parts. Bruzelius publishes a drawing by Seroux d'Agincourt (1730–1814) as a testimony of how the monument originally looked, but she does not take into account earlier drawings by Eclissi, showing that the monument was already in its present form in the seventeenth century (and, probably, as early as 1584).(7) Seroux d'Agincourt's drawing, therefore, is an unconvincing reconstruction: it is untenable to suppose that the Dormition relief appeared

originally below the effigy of the Cardinal, as it is made to be seen from below and, within the medieval symbolic hierarchy, the image of the deceased Virgin *below* that of a deceased man would have been inconceivable. It is also unlikely that the d'Alençon tomb included a mural painting (8), and the whole idea of the scenes of the Nativity and Dormition in S. Lorenzo as parts of tombs is very problematical. Medieval wall sepulchral monuments often included murals, but never – to my knowledge – scenes of Nativity: they usually showed the kneeling deceased introduced to an enthroned Virgin and Child or an enthroned Christ by saints. In general, throughout the book, this reader would have liked to have read more about painted or sculptural programs, liturgical furniture and the cluster of tombs and altars that formed an integral part of the 'stones' of Naples. But this is literally to quibble at the edges of Bruzelius's excellent book.

The third chapter focuses on religious architecture during the reign of Charles II (1285–1309) and Mary of Hungary. Unlike his father, Charles II (upon his return from captivity in 1294) was concerned with church buildings, possibly because for circa fifty years there had been very few major religious construction enterprises in the kingdom. As the new political and administrative centre after the loss of Palermo, Naples was the recipient of most of the urban works and church projects, but other centres – such as Lucera, L'Aquila, Rossano, Gerace, Manfredonia, and Aversa – were also involved in this intense building activity. Once again, Bruzelius provides a well-documented reconstruction of all these architectural enterprises, of their nature and significance: they were profoundly different both from those associated with Charles II's father in the kingdom and the contemporary ones in France (including – significantly – Charles II's major commission at Saint-Maximin-la-Saint-Baume in Provence), and were based on Roman and indigenous Campanian models. In the case of the cathedral, the lavish deployment of spoils and the adoption of Roman building techniques (*opus reticulatum* and *opus mixtum*) and architectural features were a vivid reminder of the antiquity of the site and of the alleged apostolic foundation of the Church of Naples. Charles II and the Archbishop of Naples, Filippo Minutolo, must have been aware that, in the reconfiguration of Naples as a major European capital, the cathedral would play an important role in shaping the historical past of the city.

The general plan type of the cathedral (a long nave with compounded piers and a projecting transept with two polygonal chapels flanking a polygonal apse) is strikingly similar to that of other monuments erected by Charles II: S. Domenico Maggiore in Naples, S. Domenico in L'Aquila and the cathedral of Lucera, which themselves bear a strong typological resemblance to the Dominican churches of Santa Maria sopra Minerva in Rome and Santa Maria Novella in Florence. The author suggests possible explanations: a Dominican source of inspiration, or an architect with experience in a Dominican context, or the presence of a Dominican architectural advisor or supervisor. The peculiar plan of Santa Maria Donnaregina, constructed for the Clares by Mary of Hungary, introduces the important issue of the enclosed female community, which is also discussed in the chapter on Santa Chiara in Naples. In the case of Donnaregina, the adoption of a raised gallery occupying the first four bays of the nave may be explained by the need to guarantee strict enclosure in response to Boniface VIII's bull of 1298 on the separation of religious female communities.

The fourth chapter deals with religious buildings associated with Robert the Wise and his wife Sancia of Mallorca (1309–1343), therefore concentrating on the magnificent Franciscan double convent of Santa Chiara, the only surviving church from that time. Here, the location of the nuns' choir (behind the flat end wall of the church, with grated windows overlooking the main altar) represents an interpretation of strict enclosure in deliberate contrast to Donnaregina (while in the latter the female community had no visual access to mass, in Santa Chiara they had a privileged view). A thorough discussion of foundation and site, along with the analysis of the actual physical building and its historical context, lead the author to suggest that the shift of royal attention away from the cathedral (still under construction) to Santa Chiara (with the use of the latter for state ceremonial and royal burial) was probably part of a larger movement to shift the centre of gravity in Naples towards the new elite quarters in the southwest, around Castel Nuovo and the Arsenal, and, simultaneously, was part of a short-lived programme to propose a (Spiritual) Franciscan alternative to the authority of the papacy that had moved to distant Avignon.

In the fifth chapter Bruzelius provides a fascinating overview of civic and aristocratic patronage in both Naples and the secondary courts of the kingdom. She vividly reconstructs the aristocratic families' predilection and strong support for the Franciscan Order, as well as the role of both the protonotary

Bartolomeo da Capua and Giovanni Pipino da Barletta, one of Charles II's most trusted agents and advisors, in creating an architectural language, a 'rhetoric of building', which responded to the specific situation of the kingdom in the different moments of its history. In the background of the activity of figures such as Louis of Taranto at Montevergine and Filippo Sangineto at Altomonte, or families such as the Filangieri at Nocera de' Pagani, the Orsini at Nola and the Della Ratta at Caserta Vecchia, the author paints a nuanced and multifaceted picture of the spiritual, cultural and politico-diplomatic interchange and collaboration within the kingdom.

The book is completed by five appendices. The first provides a remarkable insight into the organisation of labour (much of the workforce was conscripted, a typical aspect of royal workshops), wages and building practices in the Angevin kingdom, based on the edited documents regarding Vittoria and Realvalle. The second and third appendices are very welcome for providing respectively a discussion of the Rufolo fine (a significant source of funding for S. Lorenzo Maggiore), and the transcription of the two 1283 texts referring to this fine. The fourth and fifth appendices, a list of churches and religious foundations in the kingdom dating from the mid thirteenth to the mid fourteenth centuries and a number of drawings of base profiles, will prove a useful tool for scholars and research students.

The quotation of primary (and secondary) sources is vital, and this reader would have liked more citations in the footnotes. This may, however, have been an editorial, rather than the authorial, choice. Nevertheless, other aspects of this handsome edition are to be highly praised: a magnificent body of illustrations (both in colour and black and white) lends visual support to Bruzelius's arguments, while numerous plans and reconstruction drawings clarify the different building phases and original appearance of the buildings.

The Stones of Naples is an important contribution, distinguished by its intellectual balance, its common sense and its sensitive approach to problems: it is a book that should be read by every medievalist working on social history or Gothic architecture, and will be an indispensable reference for both scholars and students.

Notes

1. Also available in Italian as [*Le pietre di Napoli. L'architettura di Napoli religiosa nell'Italia angioina 1266–1343* \(Viella, Rome, 2005\), ISBN: 8-883-341-46-5, €60](#)[2].[Back to \(1\)](#)
2. Ferdinando Bologna, *I pittori della corte angioina di Napoli: 1266–1414* (Saggi e Studi di Storia dell'Arte, 2, Rome, 1969).[Back to \(2\)](#)
3. Paul Binski, 'The Cosmati at Westminster and the English Court Style', *Art Bulletin*, 52 (1990), 6–33; Paul Binski, *Westminster Abbey and the Plantagenets: Kingship and the Representation of Power, 1200–1400* (New Haven, Conn. and London, 1995).[Back to \(3\)](#)
4. Wolfgang Schenkluhn, *Ordines studentes: Aspekte zur Kirchenarchitektur der Dominikaner und Franziskaner im 13. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1985).[Back to \(4\)](#)
5. Louise Bourdua, *The Franciscans and Art Patronage in Late Medieval Italy* (Cambridge, 2004); Pierre-Yves Le Pogam, *Les maîtres d'oeuvre au service de la papauté dans la seconde moitié du XIII^e siècle* (Collection de l'École Française de Rome, 337, Rome, 2004), pp. 49–72. See also Joanna Cannon, 'Sources for the Study of the Role of Art and Architecture within the Economy of the Mendicant Convents of Central Italy: A Preliminary Survey', in *L'economia dei conventi dei frati Minori e Predicatori fino alla metà del Trecento, Atti del XXXI Convegno Internazionale, Assisi 9–11 October 2003* (Spoleto, 2004), pp. 217–62, esp. pp. 253–58.[Back to \(5\)](#)
6. Among the scholars who do not believe that Torriti was a friar: Gerhart Burian Ladner, *Die Papstbildnisse des Altertums und des Mittelalters* (3 vols, Vatican City, 1941–84), ii, 237 and 245; Carlo Bertelli, 'L'Enciclopedia delle Tre Fontane', *Paragone*, 235 (1969), 24–49; Alessandro Tomei, 'Un frammento ritrovato dal mosaico del monumento di Bonifacio VIII in S. Pietro', *Arte Medievale*, 10 (1996), 123–31. Among the scholars who identify Torriti with both a friar, an architect and a mosaicist: Francesco Gandolfo, 'Assisi e il Laterano', *Archivio della Società Romana di Storia Patria*, 106 (1983), 63–113, esp. p. 68; Maria Grazia Ciardi Duprè Dal Poggetto, 'La committenza e il mecenatismo artistico di Niccolò IV', in *Niccolò IV: un pontificato tra Oriente e Occidente. Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi*

(Spoleto, 1991), pp. 193–222, esp. p. 209; Valentino Pace, ‘Per Jacopo Torriti, frate, architetto e pictor’, *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 40 (1997), 212–21. [Back to \(6\)](#)

7. See *The Paper Museum of Cassiano Dal Pozzo: Early Christian and Medieval Antiquities*, i, *Mosaics and Wallpaintings in Roman Churches*, ed. John Osborne and Amanda Claridge, (1996), pp. 254–57, fig. 110. [Back to \(7\)](#)
8. Julian Gardner, *The Tomb and the Tiara. Curial Tomb Sculpture in Rome and Avignon in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 126-30; *Die Mittelalterlichen Grabmäler in Rom und Latium vom 13. bis zum 15. Jahrhundert*, ii, *Die Monumentalgräber*, ed. Jörg Garms, Andrea Sommerlechner and Werner Telesko (Vienna, 1994), pp. 119–26. [Back to \(8\)](#)

Other reviews:

[3]

Source URL: <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/469#comment-0>

Links

[1] <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/item/2484>

[2] http://www.viella.it/Edizioni/LibriViellaArte/LibriViellaArte_09.htm

[3] <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews>