

Monográfico



[Recepción del artículo: 17/06/2018]
[Aceptación del artículo revisado: 06/08/2018]

THE MOSAICS OF CEFALÙ REVISITED: INNOVATION AND MEMORY LOS MOSAICOS DE CEFALÙ REVISITADOS. INNOVACIÓN Y MEMORIA

BEAT BRENK
University of Basel
bbrenk@gmx.net

ABSTRACT

All previous scholars have considered the mosaics of the Cathedral of Cefalù piece-meal. The mosaics were thought to display no program, and were dated to the forties, sixties and seventies of the twelfth century.

By adopting a holistic method and considering the sources, the architecture, the liturgical instalments, the porphyry sarcophagi and throne platforms in the presbytery, and the mosaics simultaneously, a new perspective can be opened. The technique of mosaic requires working from the top to the bottom, and not the other way round. This means that the two cupola mosaics, those of the Cappella Palatina and the Martorana, the transept mosaics of the Palatina and the apse-and-choir mosaics of Cefalù are the earliest mosaics to have been executed. The dates of 1143 in the Palatina and of 1148 in Cefalù are related to the latest mosaics that were executed on the lower levels, however the actual starting date must have been considerably earlier. The year 1148 of Cefalù also means that the mosaics of the choir were finished by that date. The start of mosaic decoration in Palermo and Cefalù was surely before 1140; the total surface of the mosaics at Cefalù amounts to 630mq! Also the mosaics of the Martorana must have been completed before 1143 and most probably started before 1140.

The program of the mosaics in the choir and in the apse of the Cathedral of Cefalù is centred on the Pantocrator in the apse, who is Creator, Redeemer and Judge. He appears with all his witnesses: the Virgin, the Archangels, the Seraphim, the Cherubim, the Apostles, the Prophets, the Church-fathers and the Saints, and He creates in that way the “City of God”. All the prophetic quotations refer to God, the Pantocrator in the apse. This program forms a unity and was executed contemporaneously. It also is a breathtakingly innovative program, and does not refer to any earlier model, despite the fact that several elements appear in the narthex of Hosios Lucas. Roger used his own funerary context to commemorate his name. The empty porphyry sarcophagus was meant to function as a monument and reminder of his name for eternity, and by so doing, he compared himself with Christ the Pantocrator.

KEYWORDS: Mosaics and their technique, porphyry sarcophagi, throne platforms, Pantocrator in the apse, Christ, apostles, prophets, unity of program, Roger II.

RESUMEN

Los relevantes investigadores que han estudiado los mosaicos de la Catedral de Cefalù interpretaron diferentes segmentos pero no todos ellos en conjunto. Se creía que los mosaicos no mostraban ningún programa global y que databan de los años cuarenta, sesenta y setenta del siglo xii. Sin embargo, se puede abrir una nueva perspectiva al adoptar un método holístico y considerar simultáneamente las fuentes documentales, la arquitectura, las instalaciones litúrgicas, los sarcófagos de pórfido, las plataformas del trono en el presbiterio, y los mosaicos. La técnica del mosaico requiere trabajar desde arriba hacia abajo, y no al revés. Esto significa que los mosaicos más antiguos son, en este orden, los de la cúpula de la Cappella Palatina, los de la cúpula de la Martorana, los mosaicos del crucero de la Cappella Palatina y los mosaicos del ábside y el coro de Cefalù. Las fechas de 1143 en la Palatina y de 1148 en Cefalù están relacionadas con los últimos mosaicos que se ejecutaron en los niveles inferiores. Sin embargo, las decoraciones musivas en Palermo y Cefalù debieron iniciarse en una fecha considerablemente previa, con probabilidad antes de 1140. En Cefalù, en el año 1148 también se terminaron los mosaicos del coro: ¡la superficie total de los mosaicos en Cefalù asciende a 630m²! También los mosaicos de la Martorana deben haber sido completados antes de 1143 y probablemente se comenzaron antes de 1140.

El programa de los mosaicos en el coro y en el ábside de la Catedral de Cefalù está centrado por la inmensa figura del Pantocrátor en el ábside, que es Creador, Redentor y Juez. Él aparece con todos sus testigos: la Virgen, los Arcángeles, los Serafines, los Querubines, los Apóstoles, los Profetas, los Padres de la Iglesia y los Santos. De esa manera, Él crea la “Ciudad de Dios”. Todas las citas proféticas se refieren al Pantocrátor que domina el ábside. Este programa constituye una unidad y se ejecutó contemporáneamente. Además, resulta ser un programa impresionantemente innovador, y no se remite a ningún modelo anterior, a pesar del hecho de que varios elementos aparecen en el nártex de Hosios Lucas. Roger II usó su propio contexto funerario para conmemorar su nombre. El sarcófago de pórfido vacío estaba destinado a funcionar como un monumento y un recordatorio de su nombre para la eternidad. Al hacerlo, el soberano Hautville se comparó con Cristo Pantocrátor.

PALABRAS CLAVE: mosaicos, técnica, sarcófagos de pórfido, plataformas de trono, Pantocrátor, Cristo, apóstoles, profetas, programa unitario, Roger II.

INTRODUCTION

The mosaics of Cefalù have been investigated by three famous scholars¹, but none of them had access to the mosaics on eye level. They could view the top most sections which extend to a height of nearly 25 meters only with binoculars, which could in no way replace

¹ V. LAZAREV, “The mosaics of Cefalù”, *The Art Bulletin*, 17 (1935), pp. 184-232; O. DEMUS, *The Mosaics of Norman Sicily*, London, 1949; E. KITZINGER, *I mosaici del periodo normanno in Sicilia*. Vol.6 *La Cattedrale di Cefalù, la Cattedrale di Palermo e il Museo Diocesano*, Palermo, 2000 (Accademia Nazionale di Scienze Lettere e Arti).

an inspection of the mosaics on eye level. Two years ago I could climb the scaffold in the Cathedral of Cefalù, thanks to the courtesy of my colleague, Professor Fabrizio Agnello and Giammarco Piacenti, head of “Piacenti S.p.A.”, and for the first time in my life, see the mosaics close up. This has changed drastically some of my ideas, and I started to study again everything, including the written documents about Cefalù. My first discoveries *sur place* concerned particularly the question: How were the mosaics made? This looks as if I will return to the good old history of style in this essay, but I will not. In some points I am unable to agree with Lazarev, Demus and Kitzinger. I am far from opening a polemic debate against these great scholars, who belong to the most important Byzantinists of the twentieth century. I simply belong to another generation, and it seems to be a sort of a biological necessity that each generation invents itself and needs a fresh start. I also am fully aware that among the readers of this text there will be prominent representatives of younger generations, and it is their right and duty to invent themselves too, and criticise what I write.

In this text I shall try to adopt a holistic and comprehensive method, that is to say: I will try to consider the sources, the architecture, its liturgical instalments (the porphyry sarcophagi of Roger and the king’s and bishop’s throne in the presbytery) and the mosaics simultaneously, because I would like to show that all these elements served king Roger’s rhetoric or ideology.

THE DIPLOMAS OF 1131 AND 1145 AND THE SARCOPHAGI

As this monographic issue deals with the problem of “memory”, I will start out with the analysis of Roger’s diploma of the foundation of the Cathedral of Cefalù, dated 1131, by which the Archbishop Hugo of Messina confirms (without being entitled to do so) the foundation of the Cathedral of Cefalù by Roger II “*apud Cephaludem in die Pentecostes fundandi gratia in eodem loco ecclesiam ad honorem sancti Salvatoris et beatorum apostolorum Petri et Pauli pro anima patris sui pie memorie Rogerii primi comitis matrisque sue Adelasie regine*”². In the same year Pope Anacletus II confirms (without being entitled to do so) the church of Cefalù as a Cathedral and seat of a bishop. In other words King Roger could have made this foundation without referring to his parents, but by referring *expressis verbis* to them, the foundation puts weight on Roger’s ancestry. By this move Roger deprived the city of Cefalù of its Islamic past and changed the city into a Norman foundation. We know from the historian Malaterra (2.35) that this Islamic past was not particularly memorable, because Count Roger had plundered the city ca. 1060. The Cathedral was thought to be the most visible signal of royal Norman supremacy³. In a second diploma of 1145 Roger II donated to the Cathedral the property of the city of Cefalù in memory of his parents Count Roger I and Queen Adelasia. Roger was granting the privilege to the church of Cefalù the property of the city of Cefalù and of the Sea *pro anima patris mei pie memorie Rogerii primi comitis matrisque mee Adalasiae*

² C. VALENZANO, M. VALENZANO, *La Basilica Cattedrale di Cefalù nel periodo Normanno*, Ho Theologos, Palermo, 1979, p. 6.

³ J. DEER, *The Dynastic Porphyry Tombs of the Norman Period in Sicily*, Cambridge (Mass.), 1959, pp. 1-14, part. 5: “When Roger II donated the two porphyry sarcophagi to Cefalù he wanted thereby to enhance the prestige of the bishopric, which had been founded by anti-Pope Anacletus (1130-1138), and, in the midst of his struggles with the Roman Curia, <show it to all the world as a symbol of his royal power in defiance of the papal claims> (Caspar).

regine". In the same document Roger states his wish to have his sarcophagus displayed in the Cathedral after he died, and a second sarcophagus displayed there in order to commemorate his name, because God the Saviour himself (and not the Pope) had decorated the name of Roger with royal honour (*qui ... nomen nostrum laude regia decoravit*). This was quite an unusual thought! God the Saviour has decorated Roger's name with royal praise. In other words, the Saviour has made of Roger a King. This was nothing but a clip round the pope's ears, whose mercenaries were the Normans since the treaty of Melfi of 1059. It also was a slap in the face of the anti-pope Anacletus II who crowned Roger in 1130, but is not mentioned at all, probably because he died in 1138. The pope of 1145 was Lucius with whom Roger had endless troubles. The short sentence (*qui ... nomen nostrum laude regia decoravit*) bypasses him and means that all power – not only in heaven but also on earth - comes from Jesus Christ. We shall see that the Pantocrator in the apse (Fig. 5) expresses this view so to speak one to one. Interestingly the word "*nomen*" returns in the diploma of 1145 that talks of two porphyry sarcophagi, and, surprisingly, these sarcophagi are preserved to-day in the cathedral of Palermo. The first sarcophagus was thought to be the tomb of King Roger II (Fig. 1). An empty porphyry sarcophagus was intended to be installed uniquely - as the document of 1145 says – *ad insignem memoriam mei nominis quam ad ipsius ecclesiae gloriae stabilimus*" (Fig. 2). Here we find the word "*memoria*" in a rather rare constellation. Roger wanted to install the second sarcophagus "to the conspicuous memory of his (my) name and to the glory of the Church of Cefalù". Hence Roger compares himself with God whose name is mentioned in Psalm 72. 17: "May his name go on for ever, as long as the sun", and verse 19 "Praise to the glory of his noble name for ever". How was it possible that the visitors could know this idea of King Roger? Were there inscriptions to explain everything? Or was this an idea known only

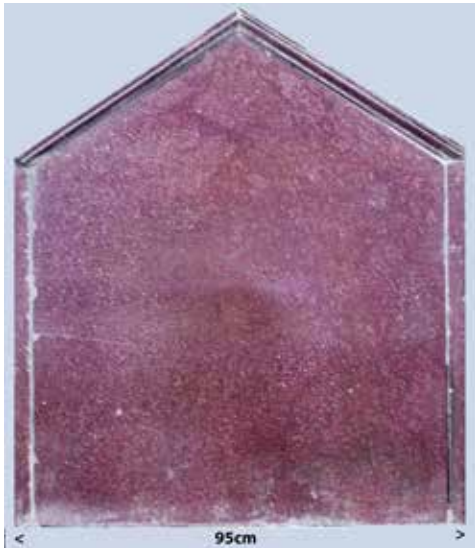


Fig. 1. Palermo, cathedral. Sarcophagus and tomb of Roger II. Photo: B. Brenk



Fig. 2. Palermo, cathedral. Cenotaph of Roger II. Photo: B. Brenk

to the Archbishop and to King Roger? We do not know. Oddly, the second sarcophagus was not meant to contain the corpse of Roger's wife. It was a pure cenotaph (Fig. 2). Usually, an empty sarcophagus served to commemorate the person who was thought to be buried in it. The irony of all this is that Roger was never buried in Cefalù, though the instalment of the two sarcophagi was realized surely around 1145 (Fig. 3). The burial could not take place because the cathedral was not yet consecrated. Roger's idea to be buried in Cefalù was a declaration of intent⁴. The document of 1145 says, however, that the two sarcophagi should be placed *iuxta canonicorum psallentium chorum*, and archaeology led to the discovery of traces of the foundations of both sarcophagi on the right and left side of the canon's choir (Fig. 3). According to a document of 1170 it seems that Roger's tomb (Fig. 1) was on the right hand side⁵. The plan published in 1989 (Fig. 3) shows the foundations of the two sarcophagi, sadly without measurements and without an archaeological documentation⁶: they were put down nearly symmetrically in the north and south wing of the transept, *iuxta canonicorum psallentium*

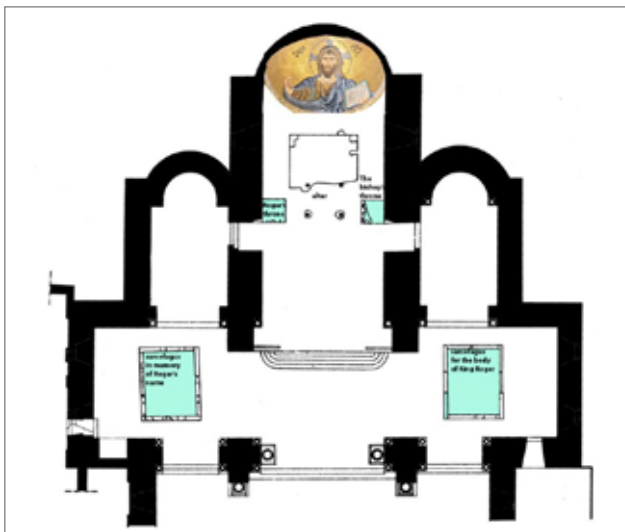


Fig. 3. Cefalù, cathedral, plan

⁴ The document of 1145 is above all a political document that was issued in order to equip the Cathedral with royal power. DEER, *The Dynastic Porphyry Tombs of the Norman Period in Sicily*, p. 7 has shown that “King William I is said to have expressed approval of his father's plan on two separate occasions”...William “stopped at his father's tomb (in Palermo), where, in the presence of many persons, he told the bishop, who at that time was still merely *electus*, and several canons how the late King should be honoured when one day his remains were transferred to Cefalù...”.

⁵ On his visit in 1170 in the Cathedral of Palermo King William I decided *ut omnis populus civitatis cum ad altare causa offerendi accederet, in dextra parte ante sepulcrum patris sui omnes transirent ut orarent pro anima eius, in redeundo vero ab altari in sinistra parte iuxta alterum sepulcrum redirent ut similiter orarent pro eius anima, qui in eo sepeliendus erat* (DEER, *The Dynastic Porphyry Tombs of the Norman Period in Sicily*, p. 9).

⁶ I have not found an analysis of the foundations of the two sarcophagi in the volumes *La Basilica Cattedrale di Cefalù*, Palermo, 1989.

chorum. This necessarily means that Roger had the two sarcophagi installed. I cannot believe that only the foundations of the sarcophagi were laid out, and that the sarcophagi would have been added later. The foundations were laid out with their measurements because the sarcophagi were *sur place*. In other words: Roger's declaration of intent was half fulfilled. The casket of Roger's sarcophagus (Fig. 1) consists of 23 thin porphyry slabs, and its gabled lids are made of porphyry⁷. In comparison with the Early Byzantine Imperial porphyry sarcophagi Roger's "casket" was a rather modest construction, made of *spolia* material sawed into thin slabs. As it measures only 95cm to 2m 25cm, it cannot be thought of as a copy or as a cheaper version of, for example, the famous Byzantine porphyry sarcophagus in St. Irene in Istanbul. The peculiarity of Roger's sarcophagus consists in the fact that the porphyry slabs are coating a smaller marble sarcophagus that was discovered, but not analysed let alone photographed by Corrado Ricci in 1916⁸. If Ricci had analysed and described what he discovered we would better understand the situation. Poeschke and other scholars thought that the sarcophagus of Roger II was made and installed only after his death in 1154. This thesis is not convincing. It would



Fig. 4. Cefalù, cathedral, scann of the mosaics (courtesy Prof. F. Agnello)

⁷ DEÉR, *The Dynastic Porphyry Tombs of the Norman Period in Sicily*, p. 66 says "that the sarcophagus in which the remains of Frederick II lie today must be identical with one of the two tombs donated by Roger II to Cefalù in 1145, and more specifically, with the one that Roger had designated as his own resting place". He suggested (p. 86) that "the tomb of Roger II was produced not long after the King's death in 1154". The presence of the foundations in Cefalù speaks against such an assumption. See also J. POESCHKE, *Regum Monumenta. Kaiser Friedrich II und die Grabmäler der normannisch-staufischen Könige von Sizilien im Dom von Palermo*, München, 2011, pp. 141-152.

⁸ F. VERGARA CAFFARELLI, *Fonti documentarie per la storia delle tombe reali, in Il sarcofago dell'imperatore. Studi ricerche e indagini sulla tomba di Federico II nella cattedrale di Palermo 1994-1999*, Palermo, 2002, p. 336. In a document from January 31, 1916 the soprintendente G. Rao says: *E fu constatato che all'interno del sepolcro esiste una cassa di marmo di unico pezzo coperto di varie lastre pure di marmo che incastrano perfettamente nel battente della cassa stessa*. Monsignor Enrico Perricone adds to this that *l'apertura della tomba si fece in segreto, in privato, nascostamente* (*Ibidem*, p. 337). In addition to this the soprintendente says: *Le lastre verticali di porfido delle due fronti...non aderiscono al sarcofago interno, ma se ne distaccano per circa cinque centimetri. Per l'ancoraggio ci sono delle grappette di bronzo in forma di righetta coi due bordi piegati per l'incastrato. Le lastre della copertura poggiano sopra un nucleo di muratura incerta costruita sul sarcofago interno*.

have appeared rather odd that the porphyry sarcophagi were installed at Roger's death in 1154 without his having been buried in Cefalù. The presence of a marble sarcophagus that was coated with thin porphyry slabs speaks for another thesis. I think that Roger had his sarcophagus executed more or less contemporaneously with the document of 1145. It was a decision taken in a hurry. Had Roger another choice? The Cappella Palatina, finished in 1143, was decidedly not the place for his own tomb. In 1145 the mosaics in Cefalù (Fig. 4) were nearly finished, and Roger must have realized that his cathedral was going to be the most impressive and most representative ecclesiastical building of his time. No other church in Sicily and southern Italy (except maybe the Cathedral of Salerno) was so large and so richly decorated. I admit that this is a hypothesis: but to me it makes sense.

Roger used his own funerary context to commemorate also his name, and doing so, he compared himself with Christ. Hence, the Pantocrator in the apse is the focal point of the whole program (Figs. 3-5). Roger's body would disintegrate, not his name which would survive in eternity. The empty porphyry sarcophagus was meant to function as a monument and reminder of Roger for eternity. This means that Roger's personality was to be considered omnipresent in the Cathedral of Cefalù. Besides the two porphyry sarcophagi that marked Roger's presence and eternity, there were two bases on the left and right hand side in the long presbytery (Fig. 3). They were most probably installed at the same time as the sarcophagi. These bases have been interpreted by Mark Joseph Johnson as bases for the King's and the Bishop's thrones⁹. Roger had his throne on the left side, so that he was sitting on the right side of the

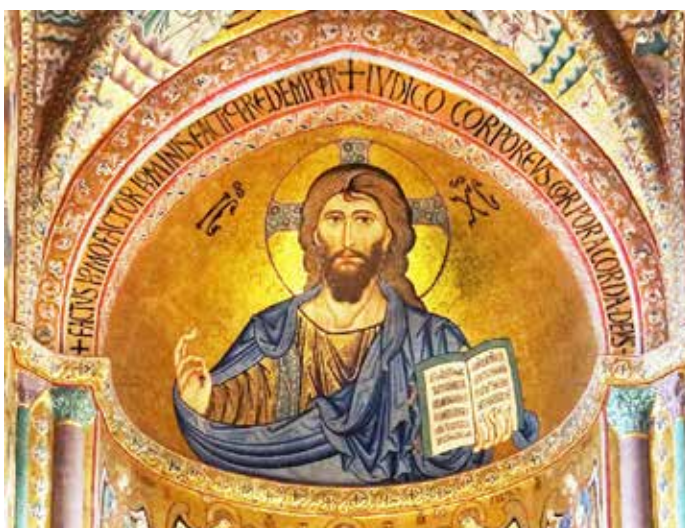


Fig. 5. Cefalù, cathedral,
apse with Pantocrator.
Photo: B. Brenk.

⁹ M. J. JOHNSON, "The Episcopal and Royal Views at Cefalù", *Gesta*, 33/2 (1994), p. 125; C. FILANGERI, "Le trasformazioni del presbiterio e il completamento decorativo dai normanni all'età barocca", in *Materiali per la conoscenza storica e il restauro di una cattedrale, Catalogo della mostra. Documenti e testimonianze figurative della basilica ruggeriana di Cefalù*, Cefalù, 1982, p. 94: *tracce di fondazione di un ipotetico ciborio, insieme a quelle dei due seggi, che...dovettero essere qui collocati lungo le pareti, immediatamente dopo i due vani di passaggio verso la protesi ed il diaconico, nella parte più alzata a fiancheggiare l'altare.*

Pantocrator; whereas the bishop sat on the left side. A similar situation is still visible in the Cathedral of Monreale, where the king's throne is attached to the northern pillar and the bishop's throne is attached to the southern pillar. In the apse-vault of Monreale the Pantocrator is repeated. In other words: the two thrones beneath the Pantocrator in the apse of Cefalù cathedral express one and the same Norman concept, and the two sarcophagi make part of this concept. We have by now acquired the necessary information in order to interpret the mosaics.

THE PROGRAM OF THE MOSAICS

The evidence of dated documents and inscriptions in Cefalù is quite exceptional. The above mentioned document of 1145 talks of the porphyry sarcophagi, and we know now that they were installed in 1145. In the apse mosaic a monumental inscription¹⁰ says that the mosaic was finished in 1148 (Fig. 6). These dates give us an unequivocal argument for the contemporaneity of the mosaics and the sarcophagi-project in Cefalù. In order to finish the mosaics in 1148, work must have been started several years before, probably in the early forties. The total surface of the mosaic amounts to 630mq! The mosaics were undoubtedly begun at the top of the apse and in the choir vault. In other words: the Pantocrator and the choir vault with the Seraphim and Cherubim (Fig. 4) are the earliest mosaics. I shall return immediately to this problem. The scaffold was then lowered in the apse and in the choir, step by step, and there was no way to return to a higher level.

Hence it is impossible to conclude that the mosaics are sort of a funerary program, because the mosaics must have been started several years before the sarcophagi were brought into the cathedral. If we assume that the mosaic project started only in 1145, it would have been absolutely impossible to decorate the whole presbytery of Cefalù with mosaics within only three years, namely between 1145 and 1148. Apart from that the two platforms for the bishop and the king form a functional entity with the mosaics. Hence, the wall mosaics are part of a royal-dynastic and biblical program that I will try to analyse in what follows.



Fig. 6. Cefalù, cathedral, apse inscription of 1148. Photo: B. Brenk.

THE ARRANGEMENT AND DATES OF THE MOSAICS

Before starting with this analysis I return briefly to the problem of how the mosaics were arranged. As I have just said, the topmost mosaics, that is to say the Pantocrator in the apse (Figs. 4-5) and the Cherubim in the choir vault (Figs. 4 and 7) including the Prophets Abraham

¹⁰ O. DEMUS, *The Mosaics of Norman Sicily*, London, 1949, p. 6.

and Melchisedek (Fig. 4), were contemporaneously executed. I shall prove this shortly. These were the earliest mosaics to have been executed¹¹. There must have been, of course, a working sequence, but there is no way to reconstruct this. One fact is, however, certain: The dates of 1143 in the Cappella Palatina and of 1148 in Cefalù are related to the latest mosaics that were executed on the lower levels, whereas the actual starting date must have been considerably earlier, that is around 1140, in the case of the Cappella Palatina, however, much before 1140. The year 1148 of Cefalù also means that the mosaics of the choir were finished by that date.

The clearest proof for the thesis of a more or less simultaneous execution of apse and choir vault mosaics in Cefalù is the comparison of the head of the Virgin in the apse and one of the angels in the choir vault (Fig. 8)¹². The design of the two heads, the colouring and shading is absolutely identical so that we must conclude that both mosaics were done more or less contemporaneously by the same workshop. This is corroborated by another comparison, namely the faces of the angels in the choir vault of Cefalù and in the cupola of the Palatina and in the Martorana (Fig. 9): they are not totally identical but all are designed on the same model¹³. The design of the archangels in Cefalù and in the Martorana is nearly identical, that is to say more or less contemporaneously executed.



Fig. 7. Cefalù apse. Pantokrator and virgin with archangels. Photo: B. Brenk.

¹¹ If we accept this thesis of the working process from the top to the bottom, we necessarily must conclude that also two cupola mosaics of the Cappella Palatina and of the Martorana and the transept mosaics of the Palatina are the earliest mosaics to have been executed.

¹² This comparison was first proposed by M. ANDALORO, “La decorazione del presbiterio prima del Seicento. I mosaici”, in *Materiali per la conoscenza storica e il restauro di una cattedrale. Catalogo della mostra. Documenti e testimonianze figurative della basilica ruggeriana di Cefalù*, Cefalù, 1982, p. 98.

¹³ On models see: B. BRENK, “I volti delle botteghe bizantine. Nuove osservazioni e conclusioni sulle tecniche dei mosaicisti nella Cappella Palatina di Palermo”, *Arte Medievale*, IV serie - anno III, 2013, pp. 237-256.



Fig. 8. Cefalù, cathedral, left: Seraph choir vault; right: Virgin in the apse. Photos: B. Brenk.



Fig. 9. Heads of angels. Palatina, Cefalù, Martorana. Photo: B. Brenk.

As to the date of the Martorana mosaics I would like to point to the well-known donation document of 1143¹⁴ where we read the following statement:

ἐξ' αὐτῶν τῶν

βάθρων ἀνήγειρα, καὶ ἔσθην σπουδὴν καὶ προθυμίαν ἐνεδειξάμεν εἰς τὴν τοῦτου οἰκοδομὴν καὶ καλλονὴν καὶ ὠραιότητα αὐτὰ βοῶσι τὰ πράγματα.

“I have erected the church from the ground”, says Admiral George, and he continues: “how much zeal and enthusiasm I summoned for its entire construction, beauty and perfection is proclaimed by the mere facts”. If the Martorana had not been finished, George could not have spoken in 1143 of its beauty and perfection (*kallonhn kai vraitothta*), and he could not have used the word *bovsi* which means proclaim loudly. The word *bovsi* in this context

¹⁴ B. LAVAGNINI, “L’epigramma e il committente”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 41 (1987), p. 339; O. DEMUS, *The Mosaics of Norman Sicily*, London, 1949, pp. 73-74; E. KITZINGER, *I mosaici di Santa Maria dell’Ammiraglio a Palermo*, Palermo 1990, pp. 15-16.

is particularly meaningful. These words point unequivocally to the completion of the Martorana together with its mosaics before 1143, and most probably also before 1140. The beauty and perfection of the Martorana are properly announced and proclaimed. Neither Demus nor Kitzinger acknowledged this text, because both were working from the preconceived idea that the Cappella Palatina was the earlier building and that the Martorana copies the King's chapel. I think that neither of the two buildings copied the other. Each building –and also the Cathedral of Cefalù– is an entity unto itself, although they were all constructed and decorated with mosaics more or less contemporaneously. The start of mosaic decoration in Palermo and Cefalù was surely before 1140.

The consequences resulting of my new dating proposal are far reaching, and I am sorry that I cannot discuss them within this short paper.

THE PANTOCRATOR

The dominant and overwhelming figure of the presbytery is the Pantocrator (Figs. 3, 5, 7) accompanied by an inscription explaining its message: *FACTUS HOMO FACTOR HOMINIS FACTIQUE REDEMPTOR IUDICO CORPOREUS CORPORA CORDA DEUS*. The first six words tell us that Christ-Pantocrator is human (*homo*), but simultaneously he is the creator and the saviour. Absolutely unexpected is the second sentence: “As a corporeal, physical God I judge the bodies and hearts of humanity”. The image and the text are highly unusual, original and utterly un-Byzantine. The churchgoer was meant to be overwhelmed by the physical monumentality of Christ, profoundly solemn with the rhetoric of gravity. This is a united vision of Christ and God as one, and a most stunning creation. Not a single Byzantine central apse was ever decorated with so immense an image. To create such a large figure, an experienced and highly gifted artist was necessary. The execution was most probably Greek, but the concept itself was Norman. We recall that King Roger granted to the church of Cefalù the property of the city of Cefalù and of the Sea *pro anima patris mei pie memoriae Rogerii primi comitis matrisque mee Adalasiae regine*. If Roger installed one of the two sarcophagi to commemorate his name (*insignem memoriam mei nominis*), it is surprising that the mosaics do not represent a single member of the family of Roger. King Roger is evoked by the two sarcophagi and by his throne (Figs. 1-3).

The mosaics represent uniquely New and Old Testament figures. In other words: what we see is a sharp juxtaposition of Biblical iconography and Royal sarcophagi and throne. Everything and everybody is subject to the Pantocrator's rule. This is the basic message of the program. The Pantocrator is the Creator, the Redeemer and Judge of humankind altogether.

The Pantocrator in the calotte of the apse, shown alone on an empty golden ground and declaring Himself the Light of the World, radiates a solar-cosmic claim to power addressed directly to the Norman ruler sitting on his throne in the presbytery, but also to all believers. The Greek and Latin inscription (Fig. 10) is a quotation from John 8.12 “I am the light of the world. He that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life”. Whereas the inscription in the apse is absolutely unprecedented, and talks about the supreme God who judges the bodies and the hearts of the believers, the inscription of the book of the Pantocrator is a well known biblical quotation that changes tone and becomes mild, simply encouraging the believers to follow Christ. The great Latin inscription above the apse (Fig. 5) is a Norman creation. It is thoroughly theological and religious, and does not address the king in particular,



Fig. 10. Cefalù, cathedral, the Pantocrator's book. Photo: B. Brenk

but rather all believers. This holds true also for the quotation from John 8.12. So it is only the exceedingly large figure of the Pantocrator that sets a new standard. So is the message that everybody, including the king, is a subject to Him. Again: this is breathtakingly new!

If we compare the Pantocrator of the cupola of Daphni¹⁵ with the Pantocrator of Cefalù (Fig. 11), it becomes obvious that the Cefalù Pantocrator is much larger and much more human and compassionate, and conceived as a real human portrait, while the face of the Daphni Pantocrator appears more like a severe and angry mask. His eyes do not meet those of the believer, while those of the Cefalù-Pantocrator are the eyes of a “physical judge” gazing into the spectator’s heart. They express what the inscription says. This very specific content and form of the face of Christ has no parallels in the Byzantine realm.

The comparison of the measurements of the two apses of Cefalù and the Cappella Palatina (Fig. 12) clearly shows that Cefalù with its apse height of 24.13m (it is 7.85m large) cannot be the copy of the apse of the Cappella Palatina which is only 8m and 78cm high. Each building is an entity of its own. The only common feature is the Pantocrator in the apse vault. The Cefalù-Pantocrator has, however, a large Latin inscription that talks of Jesus Christ in a rather peculiar way. The Cappella Palatina Pantocrator has no inscription at all. The Latin inscription in the apse of the Cappella –Palatina does not refer to the Pantocrator, but rather to the hetomasia in the barrel vault immediately attached to the apse¹⁶. Given these differences I prefer

¹⁵ R. CORMACK, “Rediscovering the Christ Pantocrator at Daphni”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 71 (2008), pp. 55-74.

¹⁶ DEMUS, *The Mosaics of Norman Sicily*, p. 37; S. KALOPISSI VERTI, *Die Kirche der Hagia Triada bei Kranidi in der Argolis (1244): ikonographische und stilistische Analyse der Malereien*, (Miscellanea Monacensia vol. 20), München, 1975.

Fig. 11. Left:
Pantocrator Cefalù;
right: Pantocrator
Daphni.
Photos: B. Brenk.



not to speak of a copy in either direction. My thesis is that both the Pantocrator in the Cappella Palatina and the one in Cefalù are more or less contemporaneously executed. This is shown clearly *not by the style*, but by the design of the tesserae. The two compositions are extremely similar, but all that follows beneath the Pantocrator is in both apses totally different.

There is no way to talk of any dependence. Each program has its own message, as a look at the Cefalù-program reveals.

THE VIRGIN AND THE TWELVE APOSTLES

In Cefalù the praying Virgin is flanked by four archangels (Fig. 7). Demus thought that “the Virgin of Cefalù is part of a programme in which the idea of Christ’s Ascension and of his Second Coming was as much in the foreground as in Byzantine Ascension cupolas”¹⁷. It is difficult to agree with this interpretation because the Pantocrator does not ascend to heaven nor is the Virgin in Byzantine Ascension iconography flanked by archangels. The apse program of Cefalù cathedral has nothing to do with the Ascension of Christ. As a matter of fact, the iconography in Cefalù is without parallels. The Maria orans appears normally in Byzantine iconography as a monumental apse figure as



Fig. 12. Comparison of the measurements of the two apses of Cefalù and the Cappella Palatina.
Photo: B. Brenk.

¹⁷ DEMUS, *The Mosaics of Norman Sicily*, p. 309.

for example in S. Sophia in Kiev¹⁸ (Fig. 13). In these cases she receives the prayers of the believers and sends them to her Son. Her principal function is intercession. The four archangels seem to be added in Cefalù because of the broadness of the mosaic register. This renders the scene extremely solemn. It was simply not possible to represent the Virgin alone.

What follows on the next two registers is as innovative as the Pantocrator and the Virgin orans. Demus correctly observed that the choice of the twelve apostles (Fig. 14) is typically Byzantine insofar as the three Evangelists Matthew, Mark and Luke and S. Paul are included¹⁹. “Another cycle of Apostle figures closely resembling the apse mosaics of Cefalù is the series in the Pentecost scene in the southern transept of the Cappella Palatina” in Palermo²⁰



Fig. 13. Kiev, S. Sophia, apse. Photo: B. Brenk.



Fig. 14. Cefalù, cathedral, twelve apostles. Photo: B. Brenk

¹⁸ H. LOGVIN, *Kiev's Hagia Sophia*, Kiev, 1971, figs. 49-50, pp. 24-25.

¹⁹ DEMUS, *The Mosaics of Norman Sicily*, p. 318.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 319.

(Fig. 15). Here the Apostles are sitting on a bench and are connected to the Holy Spirit by red ribbons. Furthermore on top of each apostle a tiny dove signals the descent of the Holy Spirit on them. Nothing of the kind is visible in Cefalù. That notwithstanding, Thomas Creissen followed Demus' interpretation and went so far to suppose that the twelve apostles represent the Pentecost²¹. I am sorry to say that the iconography of the apse program of Cefalù has absolutely nothing in common with the iconography of Pentecost. The most important element of Pentecost, the diffusion of the Holy Spirit to all apostles via red ribbons and doves, is not represented. What we see is an assembly of twelve apostles who simply represent themselves

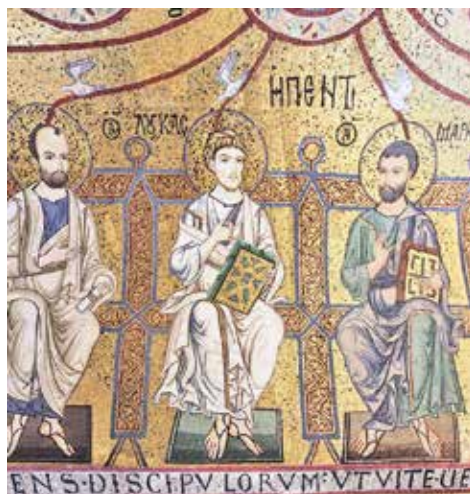


Fig. 15. Cappella Palatina, Pentecost. Photo: B. Brenk

without looking or gesticulating towards Christ. This is an unknown and unprecedented iconography, comparable to, if you allow me a contemporary comparison, the work of Georg Baselitz. By putting his figures and heads upside down he expresses his protest against rules and habits as he himself explained recently at the Beyeler Museum in Basel. The Norman designer, however, does not protest against rules and habits, he rather felt himself free to invent an unprecedented composition, by using traditional elements. In Byzantine art the Pantocrator never appears in an apse, but rather in the narthex above the main door. This is the case in the narthex of Hosios Lukas (Fig. 16), where the Pantocrator above the main door is flanked by the Apostles Peter and Paul²². The remaining Apostles are Thomas, Bartholomy, Philip, Jakob, John the Theologian, Mark, Andrew, Matthew, Simon and Luke: in other words: this series of Apostles corresponds completely to the series in Cefalù. Hence it is clear that this program with the Pantocrator and the twelve Apostles including the three Evangelists Mark, Matthew and Luke is a pure Byzantine program that was quoted, but thoroughly redesigned in Cefalù. If we look closer to the narthex program of Hosios Lukas we discover that even the Virgin flanked by the archangels Michael and Gabriel appear in the vault on top of the Pantocrator. Furthermore John the Baptist is included into this composition. In other words: this is a Deesis-scene, a private-devotional iconography for the church-goers who enter the church that is linked to the Pantocrator.

The Norman designer of the mosaics of Cefalù obviously had all these typical Byzantine elements at his disposal, and he reordered them and condensed them all in the apse. The result is a stunning composition with no precedence. I do not think that these Byzantine elements

²¹ Th. CREISSEN, "Architecture religieuse et politique: à propos des mosaïques des parties basses de l'abside dans la cathédrale de Cefalù", *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale*, 46 (2003), pp. 183, 247-263.

²² N. CHATZEDAKES, *Hosios Lukas*, Athens, 1995.



Fig. 16. Hosios
Lukas, Narthex.
Photo: B. Brenk



Fig. 17. Left: Cefalù Paul; right: Martorana Paul.
Photos: B. Brenk.

were linked with a well-defined narthex iconography; hence it would be mistaken to say that the narthex mosaics of Hosios Lukas functioned as a model for the apse of Cefalù. The Byzantine elements were used in many ways in the various Byzantine provinces. The fact is that the Norman designer was able to invent an impressively monumental composition in an apse with a height of nearly 25 meters, where the portraits of the Apostles are designed in an extremely delicate way. I shall try to demonstrate that only some of the heads were carried out by Byzantine artists; whereas the figures' bodies were designed and executed by local artists. I compare the S. Paul figures in Cefalù and in the Martorana (Fig. 17). Although they share the same basic format,

the Martorana-Paul displays a greater delicacy of design, with his tiny hands and feet and the slight swing of his slender body. The Cefalù-Paul instead virtually drowns in his exuberant tunica and pallium, and his feet look like paddles. The head appears too small for the massive body. Clearly the Cefalù mosaicist had access to the models of the Martorana, but was incapable of reproducing their subtlety²³. The heads of both figures (Fig. 18), despite some differences, were most probably done by Byzantine experts. The Martorana-Paul on the right side

²³ B. BRENK, "Arte del potere e la retorica dell'alterità: La Cattedrale di Cefalù e San Marco a Venezia", *Römisches Jahrbuch der Bibliotheca Hertziana*, 35 (2003/04), pp. 83-100.

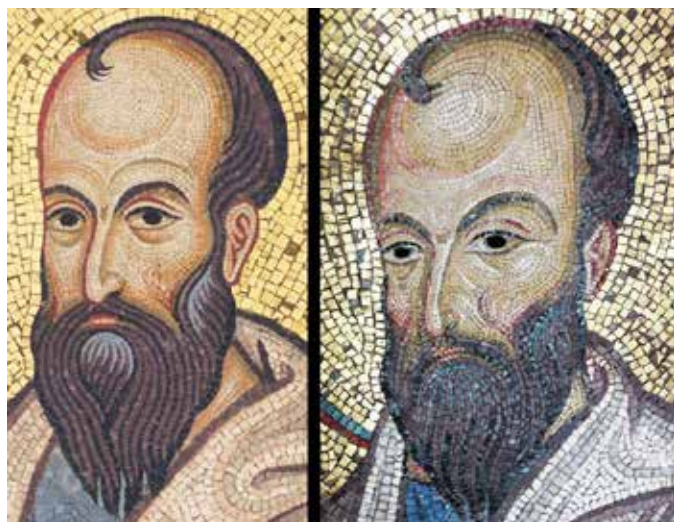


Fig. 18. Left: Cefalù, head of Paul; right: Martorana, head of Paul.
Photos: B. Brenk.



Fig. 19. Cefalù, cathedral Jakobus. Photo: B. Brenk.

of the image, however, displays a much finer design than the Cefalù-Paul. An interesting case is that of the Apostle Jacob (Fig. 19). Here the design of the *pallium* is somewhat misleading since the non-weight-bearing leg is not given the usual emphasis with highlighted folds, and these folds instead fall between the free and the standing legs. In other words, the designer of this *pallium* did not understand the rules; he was not an expert at all, and I presume that he had only very recently joined the mosaicist's crew of Cefalù. The head, on the contrary, was executed by a great expert, most probably by a Byzantine master. My conclusion is that the Greek mosaicists worked together with local Italian artists right from the start.

THE CHOIR MOSAICS

Since the top most mosaics of Cefalù (Figs. 4 and 7) were laid out simultaneously, it is time to consider the ribbed vault of the choir²⁴ and both the wall arch mosaics on the north and south side. These wall arch mosaics are barely visible from the floor because of the narrowness of the choir, and as a consequence because of the inevitable perspective shortening. Furthermore the wall arches and registers below are virtually perforated by two enormously large windows that leave little space for the mosaics. Evidently when these high walls were built during the thirties of the twelfth century, nobody was thinking of decorating these walls with mosaics. The effect is that the designer of the mosaics had only asymmetric segments of vertical walls at his disposal, and it was very difficult for him to find an adequate design for the Old Testament figures. Indeed, the two registers on the top of the side walls were decorated

²⁴ DEMUS, *The Mosaics of Norman Sicily*, p. 7 thought that, the vaulting must have been an afterthought', but there is no archaeological evidence for such an assumption.



Fig. 20. Cefalù, cathedral
Abraham, David and
Solomon. Photo: B. Brenk

uniquely with Old Testament prophets: monumental standing figures holding scrolls with Latin inscriptions. Clearly, these prophets are to be interpreted as the forerunners of Christ. But what is the message of their labels? There are six prophets represented on each side. On the right side the praying Abraham is isolated in a huge medallion, and he is flanked by David and Solomon (Fig. 20). The addressee of Abraham's praying gesture is with no doubt the Pantocrator in the apse, but the gesture is not easy to be understood. Is it *intercessio* for mankind? Or is it a thanksgiving to God, the Pantocrator, for having received the divine promises? Abraham is the forerunner of Christ par excellence²⁵. With Abraham starts a new phase of the history of salvation: God promised to Abraham and his progeny (Isaac and Jacob) the land Canaan. The figure of Solomon is heavily restored, but his label seems to be original: AUDI FILI (mi) PRAECEPTA²⁶ PATRIS TUI. "Hear, my son, your father's instruction" (Prov. 1.8). David's label contains a quotation from Psalm 45.11: AUDI FILIA ET VIDE ET INCLINA AUREM TUAM. "Listen, daughter, and see and pay careful attention". Since Augustine the Psalms were understood in Christian exegesis as a prophecy on Christ and the Church²⁷. According to Augustine, Christ has established the City of God by the patriarchs and the prophets²⁸. The three prophets on the lower register are Jonas, Micheas (Micha) and Nahum. Jonas' label says: "The word of Yahweh was addressed to Jonah" (Jon.1.1). Micheas' (Micha) label says AUDITE POPULI OMNES. "Hear, all ye people: and let the earth give ear". Nahum's label says INFIRMATUS EST (1.4). "He rebukes the sea and dries it up; he makes all the rivers run dry". Chapter one of Nahum shows the absolute majesty and

²⁵ B. BRENK, *Die frühchristlichen Mosaiken in S. Maria Maggiore zu Rom*, Wiesbaden, 1975, pp. 113-116.

²⁶ Vulgata: disciplinam.

²⁷ AUGUSTINUS, *Enarrationes in psalmos*, 44.25.11 (Migne, PL. 36, 510).

²⁸ AUGUSTINUS, *De civitate Dei* 17, 16 on Psalm 44 (45): "And thus Christ, who is God, before He became man through Mary in that city, Himself founded it by the patriarchs and prophets".

might of God the Lord in his severity. All these prophetic quotations refer to God, the Pantocrator in the apse. The prophets exhort the viewer to listen to the word of God, the Pantocrator. They thus belong to the immediate entourage of the Pantocrator and establish the City of God.

On the north wall of the choir the corresponding medallion to Abraham contains the figure of Melchizedek king of Salem (Jerusalem), a priest of God Most High (Fig. 21). He offers wine in a chalice, and we know that he blessed Abraham. This is a clear allusion to the liturgy that is celebrated at the altar in the choir. Melchizedek is flanked by the prophets Hosea (Osee) and Moyses. The figure of Moses is entirely renewed by Riolo whose signature (R. RIOLO 1862) we can read under the figure²⁹. The text of Moses' label is the famous quotation of Moses 1.1 (IN PRINCIPIO CREAVIT DEUS COELUM ET TERRAM); it matches nicely with the inscription of the Pantocrator in the apse that calls him FACTOR HOMINIS.

Hosea's label says: VIVIFICABIT NOS DNS DS POST DUOS DIES (Hos. 6.1-2). Verse 1 "but he will heal us" verse 2 "After two days he will revive us". As the sixth chapter of Hosea starts with the sentence "Come, let us return to the LORD", it is clear that the prophet talks about God the Almighty, the Pantocrator in the apse who will bring back humanity to life from the dead when he appears as a judge.

On the lower register there are other three prophets. Joel's label says (2.29): EFFUNDAM DE SPIRITU MEO SUPER OMNEM CARNEM³⁰. "I will pour out my Spirit in those days"³⁰. I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth". The Book of Joel is apocalyptic in nature, referring to the "Day of the Lord." This text is quoted by Peter the Apostle in Acts of the Apostles 2.17. As the Pantocrator in the apse is characterized as a judge –IUDICO CORPORA– Joel refers with the word CARNEM exactly to this divine intervention in the future. I compare the prophet Joel with the Apostle Peter (Fig. 22) in the apse and conclude that the design of both heads is rather similar; this points to their contemporaneity. The label of prophet Amos sounds ECCE DIES VENIUNT Dicit DOMINUS ET COMPREHendet (9.13). "The days are coming," declares the LORD.... when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman.... and I will bring my people Israel back from exile". The prophet depicts in bright colours the blessings of the kingdom of Messiah, pointing thus to the Pantocrator. The prophet Abdias is entirely renewed by Riolo. But Abdias' label cannot be an invention of Riolo; it says: IN MONTE SION ERIT SALVATIO ET ERIT SANCTUS ET POSSIDEBIT DOMUS JACOB EOS QUI SE POSSEDERANT (Abdias 17). "But on Mount Zion will be deliverance; it will be holy, and Jacob will possess his inheritance". The meaning of Abdias' prophecy is that Israel



Fig. 21. Cefalù, cathedral Melchizedek, Osee and Moyses. Photo: B. Brenk.

²⁹ DEMUS, *The Mosaics of Norman Sicily*, p. 23.

³⁰ Vulgata: SED ET SUPER SERVOS MEOS ET ANCILLAS IN DIEBUS ILLIS EFFUNDAM SPIRITUM MEUM.

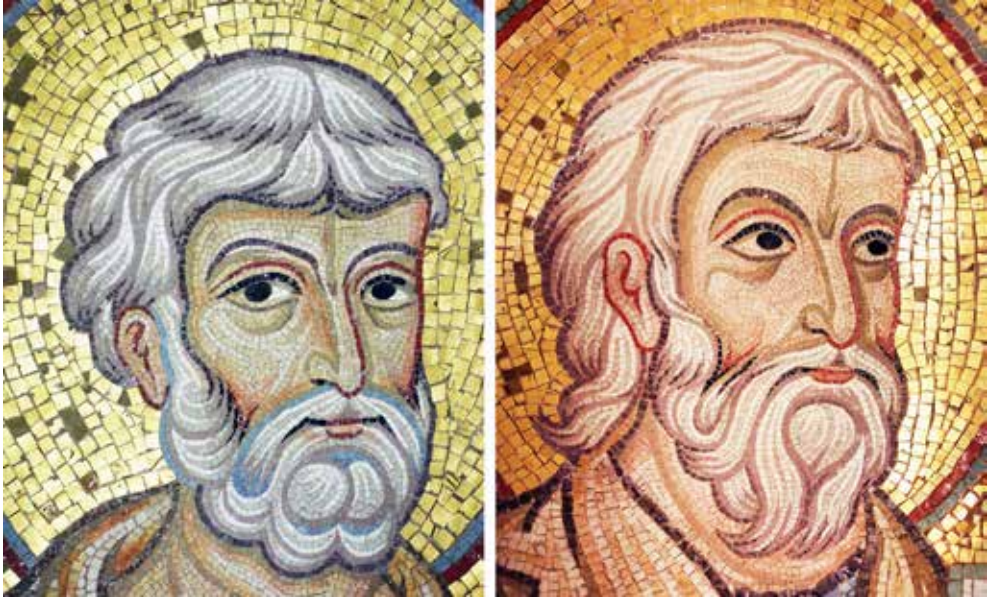


Fig. 22. Cefalù. Left: Peter apse; right: Joel presbytery. Photo: B. Brenk.

will be delivered, and God's kingdom will triumph. In other words: this is another reference to the power of the Pantocrator in the apse which becomes visible in the City of God. It turns out that all these prophets in the choir are not an after-thought, as Demus³¹ believed, but they all talk about the Lord, his power and his kingdom now and in the future, and they all exalt the supremacy of the Pantocrator.

This unity of concept, that I am analysing here, is also visible in the design of the heads of the apostles and the prophets. I compare for example the head of the Apostle Andrew in the apse with the head of the Prophet Micheas in the choir (Fig. 23). Both heads share an extremely rare but nevertheless significant element: the sidelocks, the so-called "payot", are so long that they have been either turned back over the ear or they have been arranged in a way so that they form a curl hanging from the ear to the sideburns. This looks like a typical Jewish hair dress as it is described in Leviticus 19.27 and later discussed in the Babylonian Talmud, Makot 20b. It is not easy to understand this allusion, since all the prophets and apostles were Jews. Both heads share another rare element: the *tesserae* have been painted with a brush in red³². As this is well visible on the faces of the Apostles in the apse and on the faces of the Prophets in the choir as well (Figs. 22-23), we obtain another strong argument for the contemporaneity of the mosaics in the apse and in the choir. These delicate painterly effects were

³¹ DEMUS, *The Mosaics of Norman Sicily*, p. 16.

³² This has been observed first by M. ANDALORO, "I mosaici di Cefalù dopo il restauro", *III Colloquio internazionale sul mosaico antico*, R. FARIOLI CAMPANATI (ed.), Ravenna, 1983, vol. I, pp. 105-116.

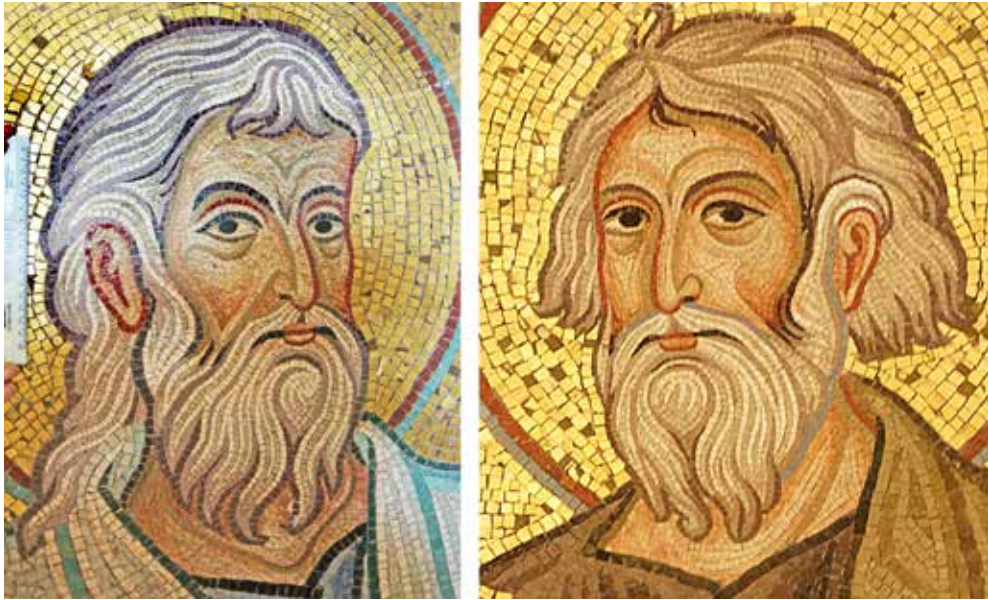


Fig. 23. Cefalù. Left Micheas presbyter; right: Andrew apse. Photo: B. Brenk

not visible from below, but they prove how important it was for the mosaicist to lend a high degree of expression to the faces of the prophets.

I return to the question of memoria. As the Cathedral of Cefalù was founded in memory of Roger's parents the foundation puts weight on Roger's ancestry, this, however, is not made visible at any point. The program of the mosaics of Cefalù is breathtakingly innovative, and does not refer to any earlier model. It is exclusively made of Old and New Testament figures who all are part of the City of God. Roger used his own funerary context to commemorate his name. The empty porphyry sarcophagus was meant to function as a monument and reminder of his *name for eternity*, and doing so, he compared himself with Christ without being represented in an image, whereas all Old-and-New-Testament figures are witnesses for eternity to the Pantocrator and to the history of Salvation.

The limits of this text do not allow me to go further. I hope that my thesis of a conceptual unity of the program of the mosaics of Cefalù opens to a new approach to understanding these hitherto neglected mosaics.

