

**Symposium**  
**Conquest and Construction: Architecture and Landscapes in the Medieval Mediterranean**

Architecture Space and Society Research Centre, Birkbeck (University of London)  
Friday 1<sup>st</sup> March 2019

Keynes Library, School of Arts, 43 Gordon Square

Registration: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/conquest-and-construction-tickets-55022443610>

**Programme**

Arrival from 10:30

Welcome from Professor Mark Crinson, Director of the Architecture, Space and Society Centre

**Session 1: Italy (11:00 – 12:30)**

John McNeill and Rosa Bacile

The Abbey of Venosa and its Place in the Norman Conquest of Southern Italy

Theresa Jaeckh

Palermo Revisited: The Conquests and Transformation of a Mediterranean Capital

Dana Katz

‘For Who Shall Have Seen the Collapse of Strongholds and City-States?’: The Norman Recasting of the Landscape of Muslim Palermo

Lunch (not provided)

**Session 2: Spain (1:30 – 2:30)**

Rose Walker

San Salvador de Toledo: a site of shifting identity

Tom Nickson

‘Magnificently adorned with towers’: Sound and surveillance in reconquest Seville

Short break

**Session 3: The Eastern Mediterranean (2:40 – 3:40)**

Danielle Park

Construction as Conquest: the Reign of King Fulk and Queen Melisende of Jerusalem

Kate Franklin

Spatial patronage and princely piety under the Ilkhanid *aegis* in Armenia

Tea and Coffee (provided)

**Keynote Lecture (4:15 – 5:15)**

Leonie Hicks

Landscapes of Conquest: Southern Italian Norman Chronicles and Other Animals

## Abstracts

### Keynote

**Leonie Hicks**

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#### **Landscapes of Conquest: Southern Italian Norman Chronicles and Other Animals**

This paper considers the descriptions and images of the landscape presented in Southern Italian chronicles associated with the eleventh-century Norman conquest and settlement of Apulia, Calabria and Sicily. It seeks to understand why, at certain points in their narrative, Amatus of Montecassino, Geoffrey Malaterra and William of Apulia chose to focus on the landscape and how that sheds light on the connection between the subject of their work – the Normans -, the writing of the past and the connection with place. The chroniclers' influences will also be considered to understand how the landscape is described. Finally, through a brief comparison with historical writing from Normandy and England, the question of whether there was a common idea of a 'landscape of conquest' will be discussed.

### Papers

**John McNeill and Rosa Bacile**

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#### **The Abbey of Venosa and its Place in the Norman Conquest of Southern Italy**

Following their conquest of southern Italy and the eventual concentration of power in the hands of Roger II, the Normans established a capital in Palermo, where they were prolific architectural patrons. But before Palermo, there were other centres where architectural patronage was used to confirm Norman authority. One such early project was Venosa, in modern-day Basilicata. While the conquest was still in progress, the dominant Norman family, the Hautevilles, began the reconstruction the abbey of the Holy Trinity on the edge of the ancient city of Venosa, close to their first 'caput' at Melfi. The new church was never finished - indeed it is commonly known as the 'incompiuta' in Italian. However, despite its reuse of local Roman masonry the new monastic church owes little to local architectural traditions. The new monastic church at Venosa is one of three southern Italian churches that adopted ambulatory plans with radiating chapels (the others being the cathedrals at Acerenza and Aversa). All three buildings are likely to have been begun in the 1070s and 1080s. Acerenza and Venosa form a pair. Aversa is formally distinct. However, the unusual treatment of the apse supports distinguishes all three from the lightweight columnar apse hemicycles common in 11th-century France, and the best parallels for the southern Italian buildings are in Normandy and Anglo-Norman England. As such it seems likely a Norman designer was brought to Italy to design both Venosa and Acerenza. The sculpture at both sites similarly suggest the involvement of stone-carvers from northern France. By the late 1080s the Norman conquest of southern Italy shows signs of consolidation. Robert Guiscard had died in 1085 and despite potential discord a succession was effected. The new pilgrimage

church of San Nicola at Bari was begun in 1087, and Salerno cathedral was in large part complete. There is little evidence after this point to show that the architecture of conquest in southern Italy had recourse to the architecture of the conquerors. But Venosa is very different, and suggests that there a brief moment when, as in England, an architectural aesthetic was imported.

### **Theresa Jaeckh**

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#### **Palermo Revisited: The Conquests and Transformation of a Mediterranean Capital**

Since the earliest historical narratives, conquests have been used to represent the rise and fall of political and religious entities. However, a lesser-studied line of inquiry concerns the role conquests play in shaping captured spaces. This is particularly true in the case of cities where discontinuity and continuity of rule herald processes of destruction and construction. Here, targeted urban transformations often represented messages of power and authority; transformations in the absence of central direction frequently indicated more wholesale societal and cultural changes. This paper will analyse such questions with a focus on the spatial history of Palermo between the 9<sup>th</sup> and the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

Recent research has focussed on how the Normans refashioned Palermo as a locus for multiculturalism in terms of its art and architecture, its topography and its people. However, as valuable as such studies have been, they have frequently isolated this period from wider historical patterns of conquest and resultant transformations. Thus, this paper shall consider the Norman period alongside two comparable conquests. It shall assess how the Muslim period witnessed Palermo's development from a provincial town into a Mediterranean trading metropolis, and investigate how Hohenstaufen interventions catalysed the city's decline. Such an approach to Palermo's urban dynamics shall focus on changes in three urban spaces: religious, administrative and "public" spaces. The analysis will, therefore, open a broader dialogue between conquests and processes of topographical and demographic change. This framework aims to provide a case study for the investigation of urban centres in the medieval Mediterranean.

### **Dana Katz**

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#### **'For Who Shall Have Seen the Collapse of Strongholds and City-States?': The Norman Recasting of the Landscape of Muslim Palermo**

In a well-known letter of 1093 to Gerland, bishop of Agrigento, Count Roger I noted the wide-spread devastation of Muslim Sicily. The Norman conquest having been completed only a short time before, Roger acknowledged the destruction of palaces, castles, and cities built during the previous rule. Despite this lament, the centralized rule of the North African Kalbid dynasty had in fact collapsed decades before the Norman arrival. On their approach to the former Muslim capital Balàrm (Palermo), the Normans encountered a landscape that bore the traces of profound human modification. Roger and his men encamped at a site that their chronicler Amatus of Montecassino called "a delightful garden, full of fruit and water. . . [an] earthly paradise." It was here, in the area of the former Kalbid elite's estates outside the city, that Count Roger's son and successor, King Roger II, chose to build one of his most prized palaces of La Favara (Maredolce). His successors, William I and William II, would continue

to construct residences outside the walls in the parkland known as the Genoard (from the Arabic, “Paradise on Earth”). At La Zisa and La Cuba, the Norman kings incorporated waterscapes of lakes, ponds, and fountains. Monumental texts in Arabic commemorating their patrons crowned these structures, and their interiors included ornate *muqarnas* vaults. In contrast to Roger’s court which was renowned for its pluralism, his successors became increasingly hostile toward their Muslim subjects. Nonetheless, what we may term an Islamic mode persisted in royal residential architecture well until the end of Norman rule of Sicily. The paper will interrogate the relationship between the built environment and its surroundings in the Norman secular realm and contemporary royal policies toward Muslims, questioning the possible legacy of the prior rule on the island.

### **Rose Walker**

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#### **San Salvador de Toledo: a site of shifting identity**

This paper will focus on San Salvador in Toledo. It is believed to have been the second mosque in the city before the congregational mosque was re-purposed as the cathedral in 1086. King Alfonso VI of León and Castile had conquered Toledo in the previous year. Part of the structure of the mosque at San Salvador was retained after its conversion to a church, in the mid-twelfth century. More alterations followed, and a major restoration after a fire in 1822. Reuse is extensive and repeated in this building: the Roman masonry was used to construct the minaret that became the bell tower; Roman capitals appear to have been reused in the much restored arcade that survived from the mosque prayer hall to support the nave of the church. Also reset into the walls of the church are fragments of sculpture that may date to the sixth or seventh centuries, to the Visigothic period, when Toledo sought to appropriate the cultural capital of Mérida. Both the mosque and the church went through more than one building campaign. One of the most substantial pieces of sculpture, a pier, now supports one end of the nave arcade. On three sides the carving belongs to the repertoire of Mérida, but on the fourth it has been cut down. Four scenes from the life of Christ are depicted in low relief on this face, carving that is also traditionally assigned to the Visigothic period. Here I shall consider other contexts for this sculpture, including one that fits with conversion c. 1100, prior to its relocation to San Salvador. The re-purposing of this mosque will also be considered in the context of the translation movement in mid-twelfth century Toledo.

### **Tom Nickson**

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#### **‘Magnificently adorned with towers’: Sound and surveillance in reconquest Seville**

Writing a few years after Fernando III of Castile’s conquest of Seville (1248), the anonymous author of the *Rithmi de Iulia Romula* praised the city as ‘magnificently adorned with towers’. Another author admired the city’s ‘lofty towers well positioned, most beautifully constructed’, and especially the *Giralda*, formerly the minaret of Seville’s congregational mosque, ‘so large and of such fine workmanship that in all the world there could be none more beautiful’. Indeed, rising approximately eighty metres in height, the *Giralda* was then one of the tallest structures in the world, its decoration imitated in a number of north African minarets. Scholars have long recognised the polemical significance of the conversion of minarets into bell towers, but the visual and auditory effects of these multiple bell towers have been little explored. In this paper I will examine their role in the soundscapes of the city

and in the process of surveying and *repartimiento* (partition) that followed conquest. The paper focuses on Seville, but will examine these issues as part of a wider Mediterranean phenomenon of conquest and reuse.

### **Danielle Park**

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#### **Construction as Conquest: the reign of King Fulk and Queen Melisende of Jerusalem**

Fulk and Melisende's reign marked a pivotal point in the Kingdom of Jerusalem representing the first direct succession from father to child, and occurring as Muslim opposition to the Crusader States escalated. During their reign castle building, urban construction, and church patronage escalated considerably as the Crusader States shifted into a phase of consolidation after the earlier period of conquest. Martin recently argued that the architectural programme instituted by Queen Urraca of Léon-Castile (whose experiences as a ruling queen parallel those of Melisende) were instrumental as tools of dynastic propaganda. This paper will apply this line of inquiry to the building works undertaken by Fulk and Melisende. Their patronage operated in a range of fields: their support of ecclesiastical foundations (the Holy Sepulchre, the convent at Bethany, the Templum Domini, and the Armenian church of St James); the fortification programme (including Bethgibelin, Blanchegarde and Ibelin); and after Fulk's death, the construction of the covered market in Jerusalem to provide space and shelter for the increasing pilgrim traffic. This paper will consider the prestige projects undertaken from 1131-61 within the frameworks of colonisation, dynastic propaganda, and cross-cultural exchanges. These construction programmes were directed towards the further colonisation and security of the kingdom – at both spiritual and secular levels - in addition to augmenting the prestige of its rulers and underlining their dynastic ambitions. Dynasty is of particular significance to this reign given the power dynamic of an heiress married to a relative outsider, Fulk's migration to the Holy Land, alongside the competing influences of his Angevin interests and her continuation of Baldwin II's line. Their reign is an important lens through which we can examine cross-cultural interchange - not least through Melisende's Armenian heritage and patronage of Eastern Christian churches, and the cooperation with Byzantium in the restoration of the Holy Sepulchre.

### **Kate Franklin**

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#### **Spatial patronage and princely piety under the Ilkhanid *aegis* in Armenia**

This paper will briefly explore the effects of the 13th century Mongol conquest on traditions of architectural politics in the south Caucasus, specifically within the territories of medieval Armenia located in what is now Eastern Turkey and the modern Republic of Armenia. Armenian cities such as Kars, Ani and Dvin were major centers of trade in the high medieval period; the valleys between them were studded with bridges and caravan inns linking the Mediterranean coast to the Black Sea, the Volga plain, and the Iranian heartland. Drawing on archaeological, architectural and art/historical evidence, this paper will trace an Armenian tradition of architectural endowment and epigraphic performative politics dating back to the 7th century. The social universe in Armenia was dominated in historical accounts and in visual culture by proudly Christian dynastic princes (*ishxans*), who engaged with 'global'

forms of sovereign authority even while building their own local realms. The paper will look at the spaces these actors constructed: churches, monasteries and caravan inns (*karavanatn'ner*), sketchily contextualized within broader networks of moving material culture. Against the background of this constructed local world is then presented the question of the impact or influence of the Mongol conquest in 1236 AD, and the installation of the Mongol Ilkhanate in the 1250s. In particular, the paper looks at the noble Armenian families in the southern region of Vayoc' Dzor, who in the 13th and 14th centuries constructed worlds of Christian patronage within the canyon landscape while serving as proxies for the Muslim Ilkhans. Ultimately, the paper will present the spatial politics of Ilkhanid Armenia as framed by reorientations around local axes, as the borders of worlds of power and desire shifted, and Ilkhanid rulers assumed places at the apex of local traditions of patronage.