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Parading Staurothekes in Norman Sicily: Relics, Community, and the Conversion of the Other†

This article explores the liturgical functions of cross-shaped staurothekes, reliquaries of the True Cross, in twelfth-century Sicily. These luxurious objects were once at the centre of the devotion of the growing Christian communities on an island undergoing dramatic social changes. This contribution examines the figuration of these crosses and the messages they conveyed to their audiences, focusing on documented processions as displays of public piety. To this end, the contents of two liturgical manuscripts from Palermo, evidence in contemporary pictorial arts and coinage, and the urban layout of the Norman capital will shed light on the reception of the symbol of the cross in the cosmopolitan, yet increasingly intolerant Sicilian kingdom.

When the Andalusi scholar Ibn Jubayr (1145–1217), travelling through Sicily in the mid-1180s, visited the city of Messina, he resentfully noted that the streets were crammed with "cross worshippers" (*'ubbad al-Salib*).[1] Surprisingly enough, Ibn Jubayr gave a rather contradictory opinion about the capital of the Norman *regnum*, Palermo. He described the city as beautiful and wealthy, compared it to Cordoba in his native Spain, and praised the tolerant Norman king, William II (1166–1189).[2] Perhaps wary of generating some degree of sympathy towards the Normans, who conquered the Sicilian emirate over the 1061–1091 period, Ibn Jubayr reassured his readership and quoted the opinions of several high-ranking Muslims in the capital. In stark contrast, these conversations depicted a grim reality behind the majesty and

1. R. J. C. Broadhurst, *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1952), 296; I. R. Netton, *Seek Knowledge: Thought and Travel in the House of Islam* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 135–37.
2. Broadhurst, *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, 305. The description also refers generically to "gold and silver crosses." This quotation perhaps alluded to the bell gables in Messina churches.

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apparent fusion of Mediterranean cultures of the Norman court and churches in Palermo. Unlike in the times of King Roger II (1130–1154), the Muslims of late Norman Sicily were feeling "under threat," in the words of Graham A. Loud.[3] Many of these courtiers officially converted to Christianity, Ibn Jubayr reported, while retaining and practising their original Islamic faith privately, a phenomenon also recorded by Hugo Falcandus and Romuald of Salerno.[4]

Even though Peter of Eboli still described Palermo as a cosmopolitan and trilingual city after the German Emperor Henry VI took the Sicilian throne from King Tancred (1189–1194) and his short-lived heir, William III (1194), Sicilian society had dramatically changed.[5] There was violence, too. In 1161, a young Tancred and other Sicilian noblemen rebelled against King William I (1154–1166) and the palace coup unleashed a wave of assassinations of Palermitan Muslims, with massacres being also reported in the south of the island.[6] After the death of William II in November 1189, Muslim communities across the island rebelled permanently for more than thirty years, some becoming effectively independent.[7] From 1224 onwards, thousands of Sicilian Muslims were gradually transferred under Frederick II to the Italian mainland, mainly to the Apulian town of Lucera.[8] Occasional waves of voluntary Muslim emigration, leaving the island towards North Africa, probably took place as well.

Christianity was on the rise and the constant arrival of Latins from the Italian peninsula in particular, the "Lombards" of the sources, slowly began shifting the composition of Sicilian society and the preponderance of religion in the public domain. This contribution aims to see behind the progressive homogenisation of the island as a Christian entity by analysing public liturgies and the performative use of reliquaries of the True Cross during a complex period of social convulsion and ecclesiastical expansion. This was a display of group identity often set within urban contexts that were also inhabited by Muslims and Jews. Moreover, documented Christian liturgies in many instances also included adherents to both the Latin and the Byzantine rites, at least before 1204.[9] At the centre of these processions were often

3. G. A. Loud, "Communities, Cultures, and Conflict in Southern Italy, from the Byzantines to the Angevins," *Al-Masaq. Journal of the Medieval Mediterranean* 28, no. 2 (2016): 143.
4. Broadhurst, *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, 357; D. Abulafia, "The Italian Other," in *Italy in the Central Middle Ages*, *1000–1300*, ed. D. Abulafia (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 225.
5. T. Kozler and Gereon Becht-Jordens, *Petrus de Ebulo*, *Liber ad honorem Augusti sive de rebus Siculis. Codex 120.II der Burgerbibliothek Bern. Eine Bilderchronik der Stauferzeit* (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1994), 54.
6. J. C. Birk, *Norman Kings and the Rise of Anti-Islamic Critique: Baptized Sultans* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 267.
7. Loud, "Communities, Cultures, and Conflict in Southern Italy," 147–48.
8. A. Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 283–92. See also J. A. Taylor, *Muslims in Medieval Italy: The Colony at Lucera* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005).
9. H. Houben, "Between Occidental and Oriental Cultures: Norman Sicily as a 'Third Space'?," in *Norman Tradition and Transcultural Heritage: Exchange of Cultures in the "Norman" Peripheries of Medieval Europe*, ed. S. Burkhardt and T. Foerster (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 23–24.

precious liturgical items, such as reliquaries, illuminated manuscripts, or portative crosses. These objects were carried by the different members of the local ecclesiastical hierarchy and paraded across streets.[10] Relics and reliquaries of all types arguably enjoyed a special resonance for both worshippers indoors and liturgies in the outdoors. The remains of holy men and women attracted constant masses of faithful locals and pilgrims, while the agency of containers in gold, silver, and embedded precious stones intensified their effect during both exercises of private devotion and public rituals.

Twelfth-century South Italy witnessed the creation of a number of luxurious cross-shaped staurothekes. These portable reliquaries contained fragments of the Holy Cross, their name literally deriving from the Greek words σταυρός ("cross") and θήκη ("container").[11] Sometimes staurothekes took the shape of a small box (like the Fieschi Morgan reliquary in New York), a small altarpiece-like panel (such as the Byzantine staurotheke at Limburg Cathedral), or a cross. The four cross-shaped staurothekes analysed here embody the sort of material culture of Christian worship developing on the island of Sicily in the High Middle Ages. Even though there is no confirmed provenance nor clear patronage pattern, all four crosses have been specifically ascribed to the so-called Tiraz in Palermo. These royal workshops, also called *Nobiles Officinae* or *Ergasterion* in the Latin and Greek sources, respectively, manufactured the celebrated Mantle of Roger II now in Vienna.[12] In the case of the four staurothekes, after all, only the Sicilian court and the highest-ranking ecclesiastical figures of the island were capable of obtaining extremely rare relics such as fragments of the True Cross, commissioning precious containers for them. Therefore, the current article will henceforth label this group of four staurothekes examined here as "Sicilian." After the collapse of the Norman kingdom in 1194, the staurothekes became part of cathedral treasures in different locations of the south of the Italian mainland. Now in Cosenza, Salerno, Velletri, and Naples, these four reliquaries of the True Cross were of relatively small dimensions, the largest, that of Salerno, measuring 35.5×28 cm. The objects were all made of gilded silver plaques assembled over a wooden core and display enamels featuring Christological figuration and embedded precious stones and pearls.

Despite their artistic richness and devotional importance in the Norman *regnum*, these artefacts have not been considered within the wider panorama of Sicilian arts in the late eleventh-, and twelfth centuries. Art historical scholarship, both in Italy and abroad, has been traditionally focused on architecture, related sculpture, and monumental pictorial arts, such as mosaics, as

10. J. Rodríguez Viejo, "The Performative Manuscript. Art, Agency, and Public Ritual in Ottonian Mainz," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 70, no. 2 (2019): 17–18.
11. H. Klein, "Eastern Objects and Western Desires: Relics and Reliquaries between Byzantium and the West," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 58 (2004): 283–314. See also A. Frolow, *Les Reliquaires de la vraie croix. Archives de l'Orient chrétien*, *Vol. 8* (Paris: Institut Français d'Études Byzantines, 1965).
12. C. Hourihane, ed., *The Grove Encyclopedia of Medieval Art*, *Vol. 2* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 425, 549; M. Andaloro, ed., *Nobiles officinae: Perle*, *filigrane e trame di seta dal Palazzo Reale di Palermo*, 2 vols. (Catania: Maimone, 2006).

well as occasional examples of patronage in other media, such as Roger II's Mantle.[13] In a very recent book about Norman visual culture, which devotes a lengthy chapter to Sicily, these decorated cross-reliquaries are nowhere to be found.[14] In general terms, luxury art objects, called in the past "minor arts," have never fit within grander art narratives. The analysis of these Sicilian staurothekes by Italian academics in particular has been limited to provenance and comparative discussions and catalogue-like publications of a descriptive nature, which often stress subjective concepts such as style, school, or influence.[15] Furthermore, the study of these objects has also been hindered by an early dispersal across ecclesiastical collections in Italy and the absence of wide digitisation initiatives over the past two decades.

This article discusses how staurothekes were used to display and promote the communal cohesion of Sicily's Christian populations, implicitly demonstrating the growing power of these communities and the church in the face of non-Christians in particular. By intertwining chronicles and liturgical sources, urban studies, and visual evidence, this contribution therefore emphasises the functions of the staurothekes during public ceremonies across the capital city of Palermo, which serves as case study. Processions were important and regular displays of group identity in a multi-religious state with vast Muslim communities and a Jewish minority. Finally, this article also discusses conversion scenarios and the role that portable crosses played in these largely undocumented processes.

Objects, Messages, and Locations

The Cosenza Staurotheke is arguably the most complex of these four crosses. Emperor Frederick II donated the object to the cathedral of this Calabrian town in 1222.[16] The recto of this cross, which measures 27.7 × 20.7 cm, displays an enamel image of the *Maiestas Domini* as the central medallion (Fig. 1). The four arms of the cross, covered by gilded filigree and embedded

13. See comprehensive studies in W. Tronzo, *The Cultures of His Kingdom: Roger II and the Cappella Palatina in Palermo*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); V. Noto, *Architetture medievali normanne e siculo normanne* (Palermo: P. Vittorietti Editori, 2012); G. Cassata, G. Costantino and R. Santoro, *Sicile romane* (Paris: Zodiaque, 1986); and O. Demus, *The Mosaics of Norman Sicily* (New York: Hackert, 1950).
14. L. Reilly, *The Invention of Norman Visual Culture: Art, Politics, and Dynastic Ambition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 117–90.
15. M. P. Di Dario Guida, *La Staurotheca di Cosenza e la cultura artistica dell'estremo Sud nell'età normanno sveva* (Cava de' Tirreni: Avagliano, 1984); L. Dolcini, "La croce staurotheca di Cosenza: da Bisanzio a Palermo," in *Federico e la Sicilia dalla terra alla corona. Arti figurative e arti suntuarie. Catalogo della mostra* (Palermo, 1995), ed. M. Andaloro (Palermo: Servizio di Pubblicazioni della Regione Sicilia, 1995), 109–14; L. Wehrhahn-Stauch, "Zur Ikonographie des Reliquienkreuzes von Cosenza," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 31 (1968): 59–63. A. Lipinsky, "La stauroteca di Cosenza e l'oreficeria siciliana nel secolo XII," *Calabria Nobilissima* 9 (1955): 76–100; R. Farioli Campanati, "Il reliquiario e l'arte per la liturgia," in *Splendori di Bisanzio. Testimonianze d'arte e riflessi d'arte e cultura bizantina nelle chiese d'Italia. Catalogo della mostra*, ed. G. Morello (Milan: Fabbri, 1990), 125–32; C. Guastella, "Stauroteca," in *Nobiles officinae*, ed. M. Andaloro, 233–37; D. Cantarella, "La Croce 'di Roberto il Guiscardo' attraverso i documenti dell'archivio diocesano di Salerno," *Rassegna Storica Salernitana* 35, no. 2 (2018): 161–89.
16. Dolcini, "La croce staurotheca," 109.

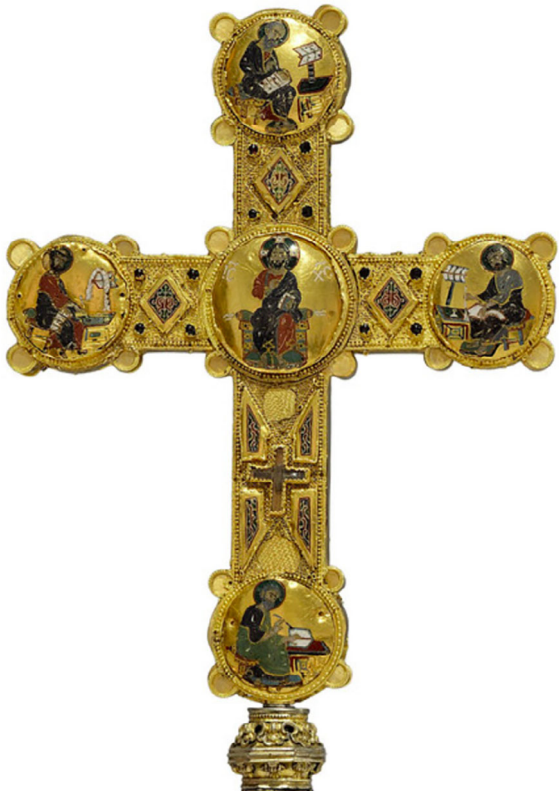

Figure 1 Cosenza Staurotheke, recto; Palermo c. 1150. (Cosenza, Diocesan Museum; Image: Courtesy of Dr. Stefano Martinelli).

precious stones, show instead the four Evangelists in enamel. A cross-shaped receptacle hosts the sacred *legnum* beneath the image of the *Maiestas*. On the retro, the central axis displays a larger crucified Christ in enamel located on top of the Golgotha rocks and Adam's skull, whereas the left and right enamel medallions portray the Virgin and St John the Baptist, respectively (Fig. 2). An image of the Archangel St Michael appears above the crucified Christ. The medallion at the bottom shows a miniature representation of an altar with a dove, a chalice and the Eucharistic bread. These three elements were depicted on top of a red altar cloth from which a hanging cross is suspended. The luxurious gold *pēs*, or base, of the Cosenza Staurotheke was added in the fifteenth century.[17]

The second of these Sicilian staurothekes, that of Salerno, has been traditionally known in Italy as the "Cross of Robert Guiscard," who died in 1085.[18] As Dario Cantarella has shown, the association between this Salerno

17. Leone, "Relicario della Vera Croce," 49.
18. M. Venezia, "Stauroteca cosiddetta di Roberto il Guiscardo," in *Nobiles officinae*, ed. M. Andaloro, 219–21. Cantarella, "La croce 'di Roberto," 161–63.

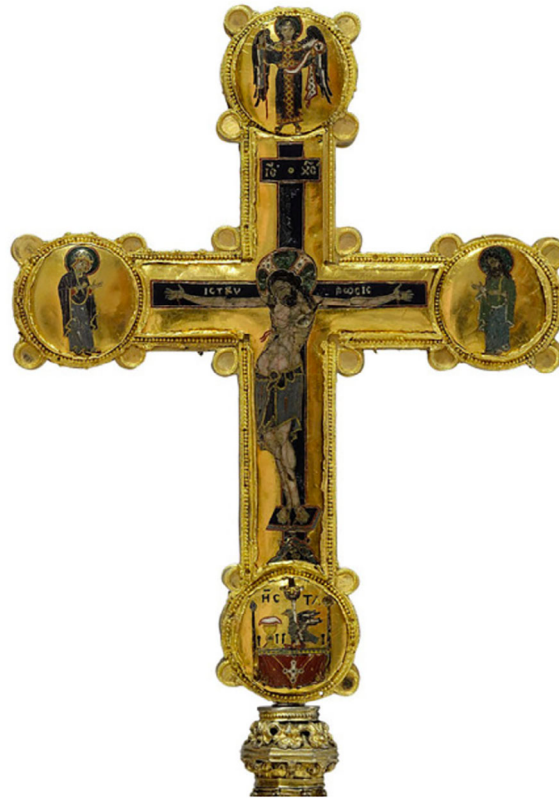

Figure 2 Cosenza Staurotheke, retro; Palermo c. 1150. (Cosenza, Diocesan Museum; Image: Courtesy of Dr. Stefano Martinelli).

cross and the early Norman ruler goes back to claims made by a seventeenth-century local scholar.[19] The presence of this staurotheke in Salerno was first recorded in 1227.[20] It is therefore plausible to consider this second cross-reliquary as another gift by Emperor Frederick II to mainland ecclesiastical institutions after the conquest of Sicily. The Salerno cross is the largest of all four Sicilian staurothekes, measuring 35.5 × 28 cm. The aspect of the object is simpler than the Cosenza cross. There is little surface covered by filigree, but the staurotheke displays instead an abundance of embedded emeralds and sapphires. The recto shows the cavities that hosted not only a relic of the True Cross but also two teeth, one from St Matthew and one from St James (Fig. 3). The square medallions containing enamels portraying the

19. H. Hoffmann, *Chronica Monasterii Casinensis* (Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptores, vol. XXXIV) (Hannover: Hahn, 1980), 423. Cantarella, "La croce 'di Roberto," 162–64. The 1081 Montecassino entry discussed here states that Robert Guiscard carried a cross with him to battle.
20. Cantarella, "La croce 'di Roberto," 162.

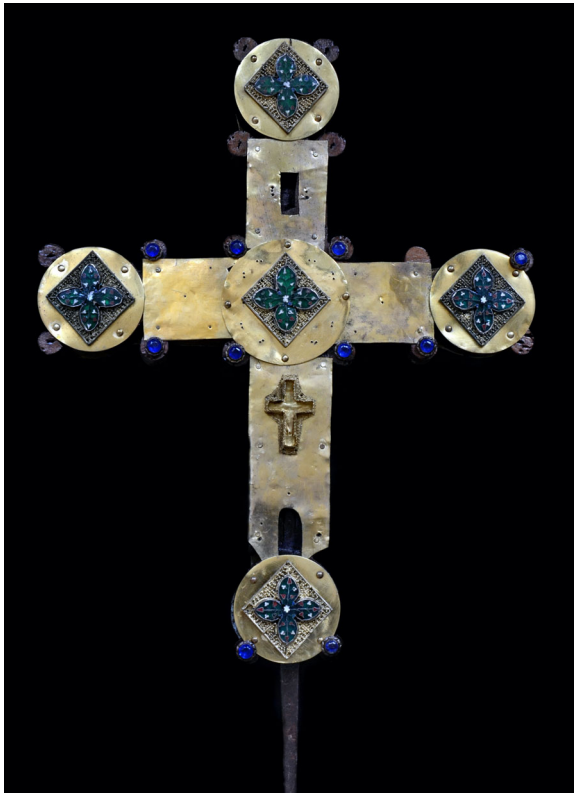

Figure 3 Salerno Staurotheke ("Cross of Robert Guiscard"), recto; Palermo c. 1150. (Salerno, San Matteo Diocesan Museum; Image: Courtesy of Dr. Dario Cantarella).

Agnus Dei, the Virgin, and St Matthew on the retro of the cross were added in the fourteenth century (Fig. 4).

The third Sicilian staurotheke is that of the Velletri Cathedral, near Rome. The cross appeared in this city of Latium in the mid-thirteenth century.[21] The dates given are either 1244 or 1254. On both occasions, the two Velletri ecclesiastical figures presumably responsible for the donation of the cross to the cathedral were both attached to Frederick II's court. This third staurotheke is much smaller (19.8 × 12.4 cm). The recto shows a smaller gold cross of possible manufacture in a Greek-speaking milieu. This smaller cross is attached to the central body of the staurotheke and displays a crucified Christ in enamel standing on top of a *suppedaneum*, but with no cross actually represented behind him (Fig. 5). The four corners of this smaller cross display portraits of the Virgin, St John the Baptist, St Peter, and St Helena.[22]

21. G. Leone, "Stauroteca di Velletri," in *I Papi della Memoria. Catalogo della mostra* (Rome, 2001), ed. M. Lolli Ghetti (Rome: Gangemi, 2013), 130–32. See also A. Lipinsky, "La croce processionale di Veroli: la stauroteca di Velletri e l'orefice Dietrich da Boppard," *Bollettino dell'Istituto di Storia e di Arte del Lazio Meridionale* 9 (1976–77): 133–56.
22. Leone, "Stauroteca di Velletri," 130.

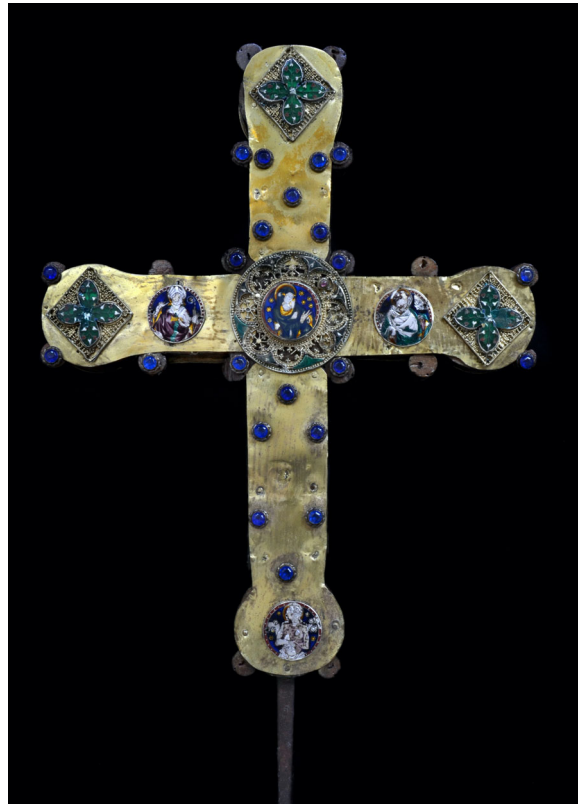

Figure 4 Salerno Staurotheke ("Cross of Robert Guiscard"), retro; Palermo, c. 1150. (Salerno, San Matteo Diocesan Museum; Image: Courtesy of Dr. Dario Cantarella).

Beneath the lower arms of this smaller cross and the portrait of St Helena, the larger staurotheke displays the cavity for the relic. Large precious stones and pearls frame the smaller gold cross. The retro of the Velletri staurotheke displays a surface largely covered in gilded filigree and embedded pearls. Four enamel medallions displaying the *Agnus Dei* and the Tetramorph were added in the Late Middle Ages (Fig. 6). The Velletri *pēs* was also perhaps added over this period, although there is no specific chronology to date.

A fourth, twelfth-century Sicilian staurotheke, today in Naples Cathedral, is known locally as the "St Leonzio Cross" and probably arrived in the city in the time of Frederick II.[23] The recto displays the cross-shaped receptacle for the relic at its centre. Four enamel medallions featuring portraits of the Evangelists were placed on the arms and numerous embedded precious stones frame these medallions (Fig. 7). The retro is a silver repoussé plaque featuring a representation of the *Agnus Dei* at the centre. The four images of the

23. A. Lipinsky, "La stauroteca del Duomo di Napoli," *Partenope* 1 (1960): 65–74; G. Taglialatela, *La stauroteca di San Leonzio nella Cattedrale di Napoli* (Naples: La Fede, 1877). The available bibliography in Italian for this object is particularly dated and limited.

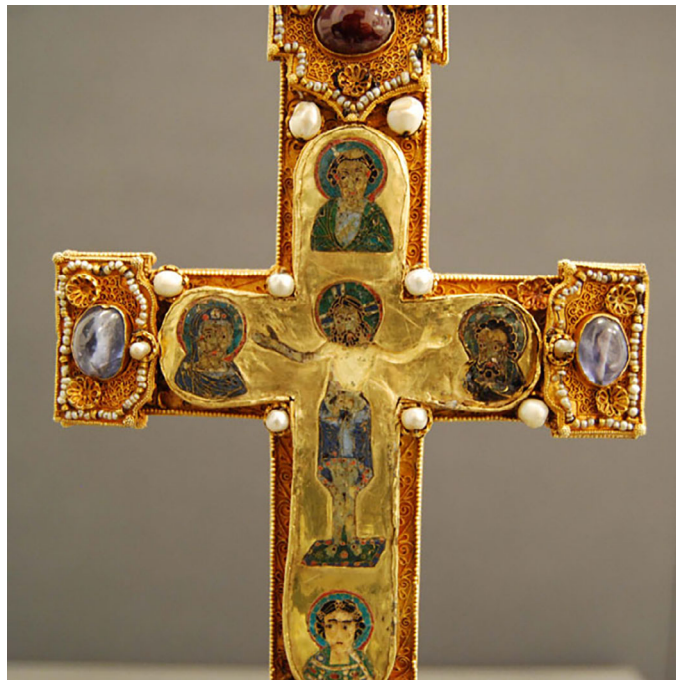

Figure 5 Velletri Staurotheke, recto; Palermo, c. 1150. (Velletri, Diocesan Museum; Image: Courtesy of the Museo Diocesano di Velletri, Giuseppe Fazio).

Tetramorph, mirroring their respective Evangelists on the recto, were placed on all four arms (Fig. 8).[24]

Other staurothekes were created in South Italy in the High Middle Ages.[25] A Palermitan origin for some of these luxurious objects is a realistic option, but this is not entirely clear. The cross-reliquary at the Abbey of Cava de' Tirreni is considered one of the earliest of these Italian crosses.[26] Current bibliography states that the staurotheke was donated by Pope Urban II (1088–1099) to this Salernitan institution, although this may well be yet another early modern embellishment. The Cava cross was also made through gilded silver plaques and presents a far more complex filigree surface, but no figuration. Another well-known Italian staurotheke is that of Gaeta Cathedral,

24. C. Ciolino, "La croce in argento di Messina," in *Federico e la Sicilia*, ed. M. Andaloro, 230–31. See also M. Accascina, *Oreficeria di Sicilia dal XII al XIX secolo* (Palermo: Flaccovio, 1974), 96.
25. Some examples predate Norman Italy, such as the tenth-century Byzantine cross-reliquary at Montecassino. See H. M. Willard, "The Staurotheca of Romanus at Monte Cassino," *Dumbarton Oak Papers* 30 (1976): 55–64.
26. A. Lipinsky, "La Stauroteca A. Santissima Trinità di Cava," *Rassegna del Centro di Cultura e Storia Amalfitana* 5 (1983): 21–25. See also C. García de Castro Valdés, *Signvm Salvtis. Cruces de orfebrería de los siglos V al XII* (Oviedo: KRK, 2008), 383–92.

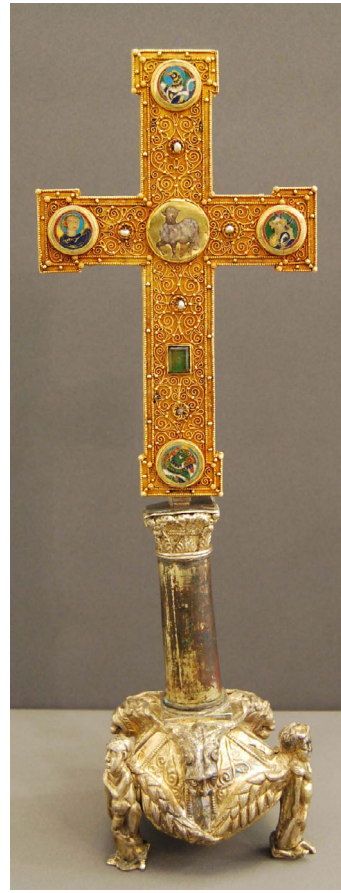

Figure 6 Velletri Staurotheke, retro (with support); Palermo, c. 1150. (Velletri, Museo Diocesano; Image: Courtesy of Museo Diocesano di Velletri, Giuseppe Fazio).

in Latium.[27] The cross is by far the smallest, measuring only 10.4 × 8.4 cm. The first provenance notice dates back to the mid-sixteenth century. This small cross-reliquary in gold displays an enamel Crucifixion and portraits of the Virgin, St John, and the Archangel St Michael on its recto, as well as numerous inscriptions in Greek. The retro shows a larger image of Mary at the centre, together with portraits of St John the Baptist, St George, St Demetrius, and St Theodore (Fig. 9). Specialists have put forward a late

27. A. Lipinsky, "Enkolpia cruciformi orientali in Italia: 1. Calabria 2. Campania, la Stauroteca di Gaeta già nel Cenobio di San Giovanni a Piro," *Bollettino della Badia Greca di Grottaferrata* 11 (1957): 3–36, 91–105. See also B. Montevecchi, *Sculture preziose: Oreficeria sacra nel Lazio dal XIII al XVIII secolo* (Rome: Gangemi, 2015), 245–50.

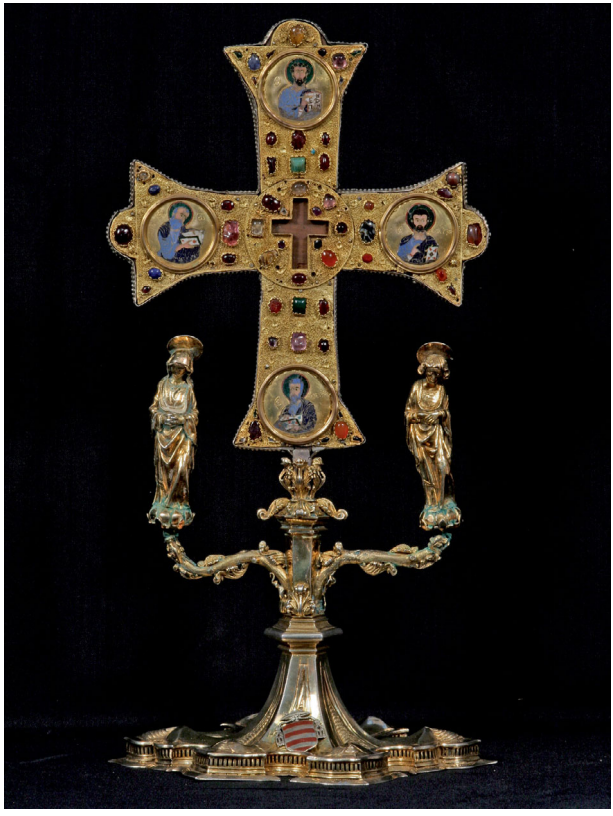

Figure 7 Naples Staurotheke ("Cross of St Leonzio"), recto (with support); Palermo, c. 1150. (Naples, Diocesan Museum; Image: Courtesy of Prof. Pierluigi Leone de Castris).

eleventh-century chronology and argued for some connection with the smaller gold cross attached to the Velletri staurotheke seen earlier.

The Palermitan royal workshops witnessed the creation of at least one more type of reliquary. The so-called "Arm of St Blaise" is today part of the Cathedral Treasure of Dubrovnik, the former Ragusa, capital city of the eponymous maritime republic.[28] St Blaise became the patron saint of this Dalmatian city, which alternated Byzantine, Venetian, and Norman rule between the late eleventh and the twelfth centuries. The first notice about this reliquary dates back to the mid-fourteenth century. Researchers have claimed that the arm came to Ragusa in the early twelfth century from Palermo.[29] The most remarkable feature of the object is arguably the forearm, which is

28. V. B. Lupis, "The Cathedral Reliquary," in *The Cathedral of the Assumption of the Virgin in Dubrovnik*, ed. K. Horvat-Levaj (Zagreb: Artresor Publishing, 2016), 410–11; C. Guastella, "Reliquiario del braccio destro S. Biagio," in *Nobiles officinae*, ed. M. Andaloro, 265–73.
29. Lupis, "The Cathedral Reliquary," 410. See also R. Bianco, "Un santo taumaturgo dall'Armenia alla Puglia: Culto e iconografia di San Biagio di Sebaste tra XII e XV secolo," in *I Santi venuti dal mare. Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studio, (14–18 Dicembre 2005)*, ed. M. S. Calò Mariani (Bari: Mario Adda, 2009), 367–92.

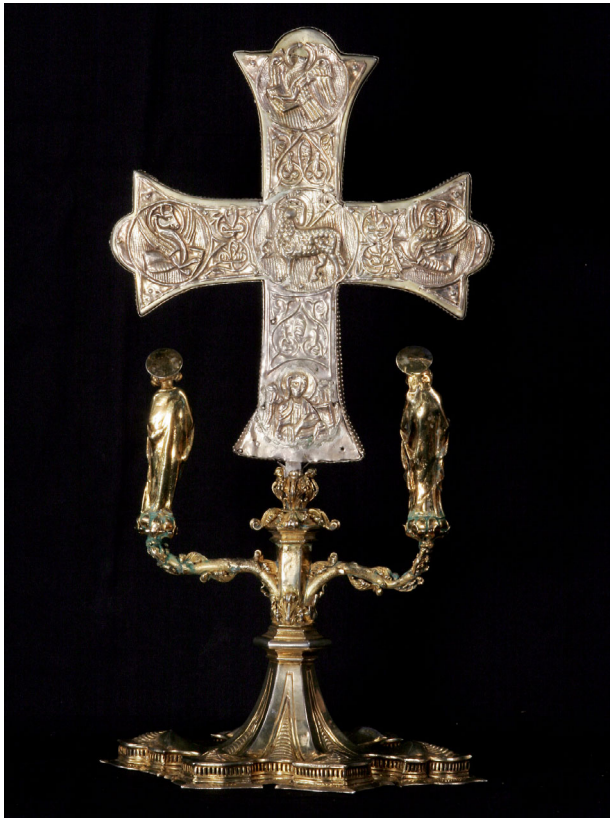

Figure 8 Naples Staurotheke ("Cross of St Leonzio"), retro (with support); Palermo, c. 1150. (Naples, Diocesan Museum; Image: Courtesy of Prof. Pierluigi Leone de Castris).

made of a large number of gold plaques with enamel portraits of saints, the archangels, and numerous inscriptions in Greek.

The four Sicilian staurothekes in Cosenza, Salerno, Velletri, and Naples were precious portable containers of a multiple symbolism for twelfth-century Christian audiences. Made in gilded silver, filigree, pearls, embedded precious stones, and colourful enamels portraying holy figures, these crosses attracted the eye of the viewer through aesthetic luxury and light reflection. Furthermore, in the collective imagery of medieval Christians this richness also embodied a much deeper theological significance. In the form of a central cross-shaped receptacle, or a simple cavity, all these staurothekes contained a much-sought relic of the True Cross.[30] During the performance and perception of this sign-container, audiences therefore associated the very shape of the object, as well as the decoration of the Cosenza and Velletri crosses in particular (featuring a scene of the Crucifixion), to the type of sacred matter it contained.

30. C. Hahn, *Strange Beauty. Issues in the Making and Meaning of Reliquaries, 400–circa 1204* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 84–96.

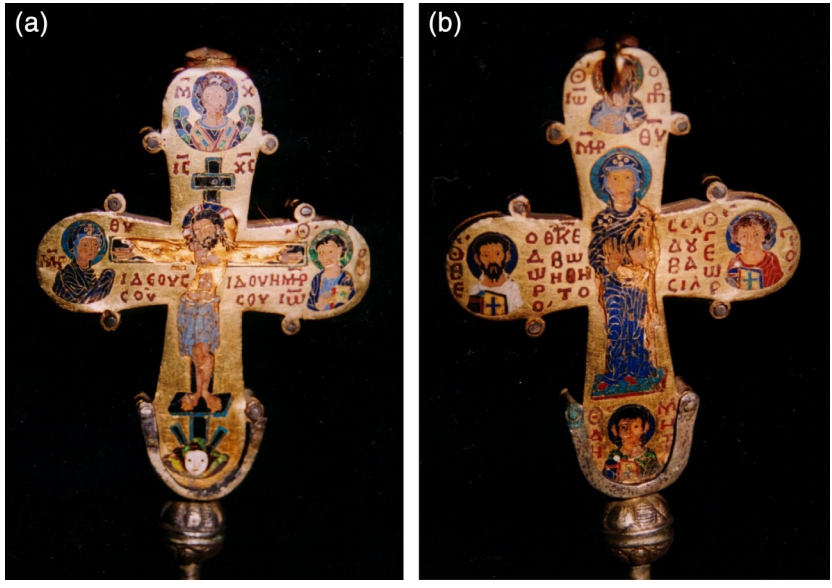

Figure 9 Gaeta Staurotheke, recto and verso; South Italy (?), c. 1150. (Gaeta, Diocesan Museum, Image: Courtesy of the Museo Diocesano di Gaeta, Giuseppe Fazio).

The Cosenza Staurotheke is representative of the possibilities and problematics of a preliminary analysis of the perception of these objects from a liturgical perspective. For a start, museum displays in Italy today tend to highlight the richest enamels as the original recto of these crosses, and not the receptacles that hosted the relic, which in fact concentrated the attention of medieval viewers. In the Cosenza case, the *Maiestas Domini* and the four Evangelists at work were the figuration that churchgoers firstly observed if the cross was frontally displayed on an altar or paraded forward. For Christian audiences, the vision of the heavenly *Maiestas* and the sacred *lignum* beneath, which effectively served as the medium for Christ's death, preceded the appearance of the tragic scene on the retro. The relic appeared thus connected to the triumphant Christ on the throne above, whereas the striking beginning of the redemption process, the crucified *Christus patiens* on the cross, was displayed on the retro of the moving object.

The Cosenza Staurotheke also added several layers of liturgical symbolism for attentive Christian audiences when the retro was seen. Beneath the *suppedaneum* of the cross and the Golgotha rocks, inside the lower golden medallion, the artists created a complex representation featuring a dove, a chalice, and a piece of sacramental bread laying on an altar (Fig. 10).[31] This structure is covered by a red altar cloth, while a cross hangs from it at the

31. Wehrhahn-Stauch, "Zur Ikonographie des Reliquienkreuzes von Cosenza," 60–61.

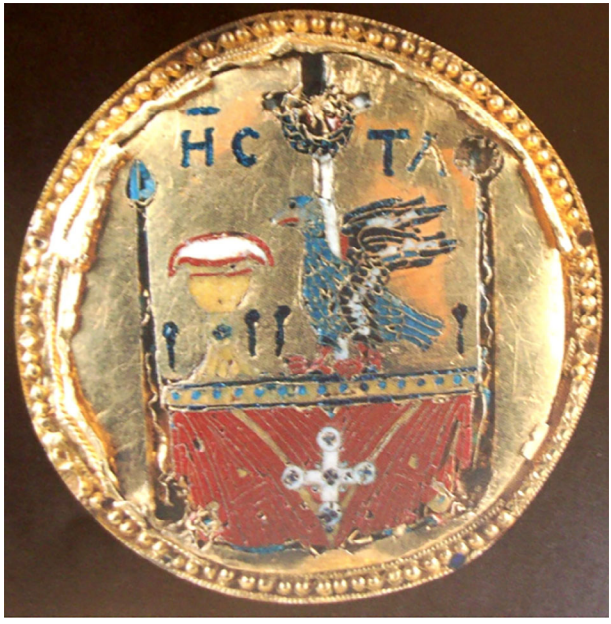

Figure 10 Cosenza Staurotheke, retro (detail); Palermo, c. 1150. (Cosenza, Museo Diocesano; Image: Courtesy of Dr. Stefano Martinelli).

front and is framed by two spears. This iconography, which also appeared on a larger scale in the mosaic programmes of both the Cappella Palatina and Monreale Cathedral, referred to the most prominent symbols of the Eucharist, the Passion, and the Resurrection, relating the cross itself to both dogma and liturgical performance. It is also worth noticing the inclusion in Cosenza of the bearded St John the Baptist as the side witness to the Crucifixion. The presence of this figure directly alluded to the sacrament of baptism, the rite that marked the beginning of the process of redemption for individuals that embraced the Christian faith, as it shall be seen later in the context of twelfth-century Sicily.

The Salerno Staurotheke is arguably the simplest in its current state. The frontal display of the object only permitted the viewers to observe the cross-shaped receptacle that hosted the relic. Since the enamels of the retro were added in the Late Middle Ages, it is impossible to ascertain the original aspect of this surface and the symbolic messages that it entailed for pious audiences. If the original Salerno cross displayed the *Agnus Dei* with the Tetramorph, this retro therefore highlighted the sacrificial Lamb at the centre of escathological imagery. The representation prefigured Christ's death on the cross and also alluded to the Eucharistic transformation of his flesh and his blood into the sacramental bread and wine that the assembly ingested.

The Velletri Staurotheke played with an even more complex symbolic concept for viewers, while resulting in the same problematic seen at Salerno. The crucified Christ in enamel, on top of a *suppedaneum*, is displayed on the smaller gold cross in turn attached to the recto of the larger and actual

staurotheke. The depiction of St Helena beneath the *suppedaneum* explicitly referred to the finding of the True Cross and to the celebration of the Feast of the Cross in September each year.[32] Once again, the figuration of this cross-reliquary ultimately referred in multiple evident ways to the relic itself. However, nothing with certainty can be said about the retro and its late medieval enamels featuring the *Agnus Dei* and the Tetramorph. If these additions mirrored earlier figuration, then a clear performative narrative parallel with the Salerno case can be established.

Finally, when frontally displayed, the Naples Staurotheke displayed the relic's cross-shaped cavity at the centre of the object's recto and surrounded by the enamel portraits of the Evangelists. The silver repoussé was probably added later, although seemingly reproducing the same visual dynamic seen at Salerno and Velletri involving the representations of the *Agnus Dei* and the Tetramorph. The *artifices* behind the Naples and the other three Sicilian staurothekes, including those who centuries later probably replicated earlier models, orchestrated dogmatic messages in close relation to liturgical display and movement. The perception of these multiple messages depended on the actual visualisation of the two sides of the cross by both the Christian clergy and the lay populace. It is plausible to believe that, first of all, due to their devotional importance and aesthetic richness, these crosses-reliquaries were frontally displayed on the altars of twelfth-century Sicilian churches for prolonged periods of time.[33]

A range of roughly contemporary examples of visual evidence clearly suggests this possibility. On the wood ceiling of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo, dating back to the second quarter of the twelfth century, there is a small scene partially erased depicting the interior of a church space. Two characters wearing robes seem to be exiting the building. An altar, with a basin and a cross on top of a *fustis*, stands behind them. The roof of this space also displays two crosses between a number of domes. Secondly, the Campanian monk and author Peter of Eboli composed around the year 1197 the *Liber ad honorem Augusti sive de rebus Siculis* whose presentation copy is now in Bern.[34] In two of the illustrations that accompany this eulogy celebrating the conquest of Sicily by Emperor Henry VI in 1194, two important church interiors were depicted. In the episode preceding the death of William II (1189), the king was depicted agonising inside the royal palace. Next to this space appears a small representation of the *Capella Regia* displaying an altar covered with a cloth and a cross mounted on a base (fol. 97r) (Fig. 11). A page later, the artist depicted the city and the different peoples of Palermo mourning the death of William II (fol. 98r). The Palatine

32. L. van Tongeren, *Exaltation of the Cross: Towards the Origins of the Feast of the Cross and the Meaning of the Cross in Early Medieval Liturgy* (Leuven: Peeter, 2001), 41–73. See also C. Chazelle, *The Crucified God in the Carolingian Era: Theology and Art of Christ's Passion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 36–37.
33. S. de Blaauw, "Following the Crosses: The Processional Cross and the Typology of Processions in Medieval Rome," in *Christian Feast and Festival. The Dynamics of Western Liturgy and Culture*, ed. P. Post and G. A. M. Rouwhorst, L. van Tongeren, and A. Scheer (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 319–43.
34. Bern, Burgerbibliothek, Ms. 122.II. See Kolzer and Stahli, *Petrus de Ebulo*, 247–85.

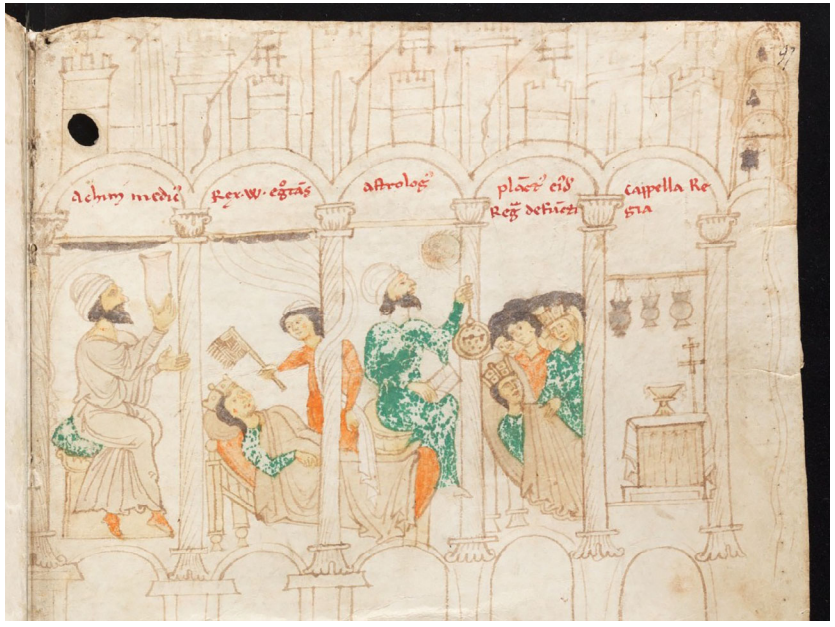

Figure 11 King William II on his deathbed, detail (from Peter of Eboli's *Liber ad honorem Augusti*; Bern, Burgerbibliothek, Ms. 122.II, fol. 97r). Palermo, c. 1195–1197. (Image: Courtesy of Burgerbibliotek Bern, *e-Codices*).

Chapel was depicted on a larger scale and the apse area also shows the same altar structure with a cross on top of it (Fig. 12). In stark contrast, the *Liber*'s depiction of Old St Peter's featuring Pope Celestine III (1191–1198) displays a basin and some candles, but no altar crosses (fol. 105r). Although earlier in date, a final example comes from late eleventh-century Apulia, then a contested territory between Byzantines and Normans. The Exultet Roll II of the Bari Diocesan Museum displays an image of a church interior. In the scene, an altar was depicted on the right, against the wall and behind the officiants, on top of which appears a cross mounted on a base.[35]

These images are probably indicative of the most common display of crosses in twelfth-century Sicily and South Italy, that is, permanently lying on an altar, such as that of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo or perhaps on the main altar of Palermo Cathedral, mounted on some type of *pēs*. Another, less likely possibility remains that seemingly portrayed in one of the Cosenza enamels – a cross

35. T. Forrest Kelly, *The Exultet in Southern Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 206–18; G. Cavallo, *Rotoli di Exultet dell'Italia meridionale* (Bari: Adriatica Editrice, 1973), 117–39. One similar scene appears in the early Carolingian Stuttgart Psalter (Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Hs. Bibl. Fol. 23; 130v). See B. Kitzinger, *The Cross*, *the Gospels*, *and the Work of Art in the Carolingian Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 49–53. The donation by Basil II of a gold crucifix to an altar church appears depicted in the Madrid Skylitzes (Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de Espana, Cod. Vitr. 26–2; fol. 152r), created in Sicily in the twelfth century.

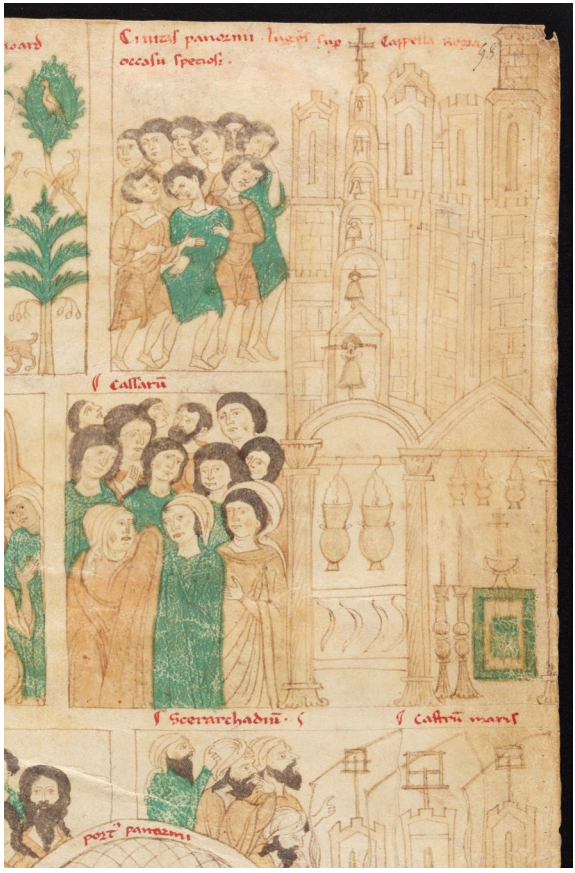

Figure 12 Palermo mourning the death of King William II, detail (from Peter of Eboli's *Liber ad honorem Augusti*; Bern, Burgerbibliothek, Ms. 122.II, fol. 98r). Palermo, c. 1195–1197. (Image: Courtesy of Burgerbibliothek Bern, *e-Codices*).

hanging from the front of the altar. This circumstance was a possibility in the case of simple wooden or metallic crucifixes. However, these four Sicilian staurothekes were particularly delicate and expensive liturgical objects containing a precious relic, a circumstance that naturally favoured more stable arrangements. Although exact display patterns are difficult to imagine, it is possible that the crosses were placed on main altars during special celebrations or when the clergy was nonetheless present. At night or besides the actual services, this and other liturgical objects were probably moved to a secured compartment elsewhere, perhaps in a sacristy or the treasury. In the case of the Cappella Palatina, for example, precious liturgical items were probably hosted in the northern and southern auxiliary spaces known as the *próthesis* and the *diakonikón*.[36]

36. U. Bongianino, "The King, His Chapel, His Church. Boundaries and Hybridity in the Religious Visual Culture of the Norman Kingdom," *Journal of Transcultural Medieval Studies* 4, nos 1–2 (2017): 17. T. Kolzer and M. Stähli, Petrus de Ebulo. Liber ad honorem Augusti sive de rebus Siculis. Codex 120 II der Burgerbibliothek Bern. Ein Bilderchronik der Stauferzeit (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1994), 247–85.

The depictions of the different base supports are also telling about a wider problematic in relation to the study of the liturgical function of these crosses — their mobility. The addition of a *pēs* to each of the four Sicilian staurothekes suggests that the necessity to make the objects self-standing on a flat surface appeared early on. These supports were perhaps originally very simple wooden or metallic bases that late medieval and early modern owners of the reliquaries decided to replace with more sumptuous structures. However, as some of these images seem to suggest, a longer, staff-like *fustis* was another possibility. This tool permitted officiants to carry the staurotheke in processions, indoors and to the outside.

Parading the Norman Cross

The Anna-Grisandus tombstone has been at the centre of many of the discussions surrounding multicultural interactions in Norman Sicily.[37] This object dates from the year 1149, when the Latin court priest Grisandus decided to move the remains of his mother Anna from Palermo Cathedral to a private chapel in the church of St Michael Archangel, roughly five hundred metres away. Displaying commemorative texts in Arabic, Greek, Latin, and Judeo-Arabic, the Anna-Grisandus tombstone briefly refers to the actual procession that took the remains across the city. Although all four texts imply a procession, the Greek and Arabic versions are more specific about its nature. The Greek inscription says that Grisandus "took with him Greek and Latin clerics," while the more detailed Arabic text describes a procession "with prayers of intercession […] at the first hour of the evening."[38]

Material evidence such as the Anna-Grisandus tombstone elucidates to some extent the overlooked nature of religious processions in twelfth-century Sicily, allowing consideration of performative scenarios for the use of processional crosses such as these staurothekes. Whereas this inscription in particular refers to a perhaps low-key episode, other textual and visual evidence becomes extremely helpful in order to obtain a wider picture of processions in Norman South Italy. There is an overwhelming abundance of studies for the late medieval and early modern periods on the island, under Aragonese, later Spanish rule.[39] For the High Middle Ages, some mentions appear here and there but there is currently no

37. Houben, "Between Occidental and Oriental Cultures," 22–28. See also H. Houben, "Religious Toleration in the South Italian Peninsula during the Norman and Staufen Periods," in *The Society of Norman Italy*, ed. A. Metcalfe and G. A. Loud (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 326–28; J. Johns, "Lapidi sepolcrali in memoria di Anna e Drogo, genitori di Grisanto, chierico del re Ruggero," in *Nobiles Officinae*, ed. M. Andaloro, 519–23.
38. Houben, "Between Occidental and Oriental Cultures," 23–24.
39. H. Hills, "Mapping the Early Modern City," *Urban History* 23, no. 2 (1996): 145–70; S. de Cavi, "Corpus Christi in Spanish Palermo. Two Baroque *apparati* by Giacomo Amato for the Duke of Uceda (Viceroy of Sicily, 1687–1696)," in *Festival Culture in the World of the Spanish Habsburgs*, ed. F. Checa Cremades and L. Fernandez Gonzalez (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 226–29.

overarching study.[40] Processions that perhaps witnessed the handling of the staurothekes and other liturgical items certainly took place indoors very regularly. Sicilian laymen, who did not enjoy a free access to the chancel and altar areas of churches where these staurothekes were often displayed, could have only perceived the two sides of the crosses and their messages when they were paraded. This possibly occurred at the forefront of a small procession of clergymen during the Introit or during the Offertory, especially on important dates of the Christian calendar.[41]

It is now the turn to look at performative scenarios outdoors. On these occasions, Christian processions marched across urban topographies of often mixed religious inhabitation, offering to audiences, regardless of beliefs and participation, a vivid image of growing influence, societal cohesion, and local identity. One of the most comprehensive descriptions of a twelfth-century procession in South Italy in the High Middle Ages comes from a document in the Diocesan Archive of Salerno. The text, a fourteenth-century transcription of a twelfth-century record, describes in great detail a procession that occurred every 6 May to commemorate the *translatio* of the body of St Matthew.[42] The remains arrived in Salerno in 954 and were later rediscovered and buried during a ceremony in 1080.[43] From that point onwards, an annual procession commemorating this event was opened by young clergymen, one of whom carried a cross, perhaps a small metal crucifix on top of a *fustis*. Archdeacons and priests followed them, carrying large candlesticks and thuribles. A second cross of similar characteristics was paraded by another deacon, perhaps again mounted on a *fustis*. Abbots of monasteries within the archdiocese and suffragan bishops follow the archdeacons and priests. Then the cathedral canons and officers appeared led by an archdeacon carrying a processional cross without *fustis* that preceded the appearance of the Salerno archbishop. The text emphasises that this third cross was different from the previous two objects. It is therefore possible to imagine the Salerno Staurotheke, which also contained a tooth of St Matthew in addition to the relic of the True Cross, as the focus of attention every 6 May in Salerno at some point after 1080, together with perhaps a chest or casket that hosted the other bodily remains of the Apostle. An illustration in an eleventh-century

40. L. Safran, *The Medieval Salento: Art and Identity in Southern Italy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014), 177–84. See also N. Zchomelidse, *Art*, *Ritual*, *and Civic Identity in Medieval Southern Italy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014).
41. De Blaauw, "Following the Crosses," 333–35. See also D. Kinney, "Expanding the Christian Footprint: Church Building in the City and the Suburbium," in *The Fifth Century in Rome: Art*, *Liturgy*, *Patronage*, ed. I. Foletti and M. Gianandrea (Rome: Viella, 2017), 65–97. For manuscripts and text, see A. Hughes, *Medieval Manuscripts for Mass and Office. A Guide to their Organization and Terminology* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1982), 87–88.
42. G. Vitolo, "Città e Chiesa nel Mezzogiorno medievale. La processione del santo patrono a Salerno (secolo XIII)," *Studi Storici* 41, no. 4 (2000): 973–87.
43. M. L. Vescovi, "Inscribing Presence Script, Relics, Space in Salerno Cathedral," in *Sacred Scripture*, *Sacred Space: The Interlacing of Real Places and Conceptual Spaces in Medieval Art and Architecture*, ed. T. Frese, W. E. Keil, and K. Kruger (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 137–64.

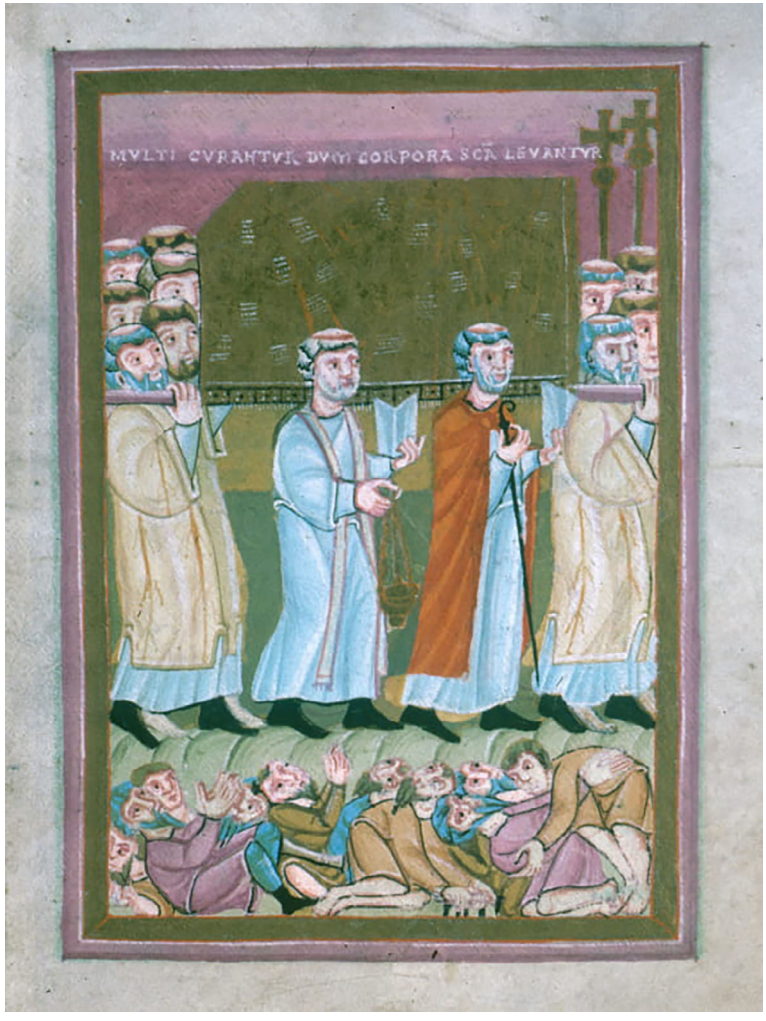

Figure 13 Procession of St Stephen's relics, Echternach Pericopes. (Brussels, Bibliothèque royale de la Belgique, Ms. 9428, fol. 160r). Echternach, c. 1040. (Image: Courtesy of Bibliothèque royale de la Belgique, Service des manuscrits).

illuminated manuscript from Echternach depicts a relic procession in the Ottonian kingdom in a similar manner (Fig. 13).

Other liturgical sources from the Sicilian *regnum* may lack this degree of specificity but remain nonetheless paramount in order to conceive scenarios of performance in which the handling of different processional crosses was a realistic option. The gradual of Palermo Cathedral (now Ms. Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Vitr. 20 4) was created in the second quarter of

the twelfth century.[44] This manuscript contains, among other sections, a series of litanies and tropes, a temporal, and two sanctorals. Some of the individual contents of this gradual clearly suggest that specific services witnessed a procession, probably from the Cathedral of the Assumption towards different churches and landmarks in the Norman city. Folio 33r (page 93 of the digitised manuscript) shows an antiphon "Ad processionem" prior to the celebration of the Epiphany in January. Since the text is mainly an exaltation of the maternal figure of the Virgin, it is plausible to consider that the procession perhaps took the congregation from the Cathedral of the Assumption to one of the many Palermitan churches with a Marian dedication that were founded or mentioned for the first time throughout the century. The construction of La Martorana, roughly five hundred metres away from the cathedral, began in 1143 and was completed by 1151. Other churches are Santa Maria a Valverde (firstly documented in 1118), Santa Maria alla Grotta (1147), or la Pinta (1167).[45] Folio 39r (p. 101), "Ad domenica in Septuagesima" (the ninth Sunday before Easter), also shows an "Ant. ad Processionem." Folio 47r (p. 117) displays a third "Ant. ad Processionem" for "Sabbato in Quadragesima."

The liturgies of Palm Sunday were particularly important in the twelfth-century Archdiocese of Palermo.[46] Folio 80v (p. 184) shows the first item, "Domenica Ramis Palmarum Ant. ad Processionem." It is possible that this procession began at the gates of the walled city, the modern *Porta Nuova* (the route towards Monreale on the hills). The procession then proceeded for approximately three hundred metres across the marble-cobbled *Via Plata Marmorea*, also called the Cassaro (roughly the modern Via Vittorio Emanuele II).[47] Another option is perhaps the *Porta Mazara*, further south along the ancient walls and roughly six hundred metres away from Palermo Cathedral.[48] Folio 83r (p. 189) marks the beginning of another related item with the heading: "Incipiant. Cum venerit ad porta(m) civitati(s) ascendant clericelli sup(r)a porta(m) (e)t claudant(em) porta(m) (e)t illiqu(e)st sup(r)a

44. D. Hiley, *The Liturgical Music of Norman Sicily: A Study Centred on Manuscripts 288*, *289*, *19421 and Vitrina 20–4 of the Biblioteca Nacional*, *Madrid* (PhD Thesis in Music, King's College, University of London, 1981), 1–57. A proposal to relate the textual contents of this and other liturgical Palermitan manuscripts to the mosaic programme of Monreale Cathedral appears in L. M. Evseeva, "Liturgical Drama as a Source of Monreale Mosaics," *Series Byzantina* 8 (2010): 67–84. The digitised manuscript is: http://bdh.bne.es/bnesearch/detalle/2700882

45. P. Oldfield, *Sanctity and Pilgrimage in Medieval Southern Italy, 1000–1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 168–71. See also L. T. White, *Latin Monasticism in Norman Sicily* (Cambridge: Medieval Academy of America, 1938), 317–18.

46. C. Wright, "The Palm Sunday Procession in Medieval Chartres," in *The Divine Office in the Latin Middle Ages: Methodology and Source Studies*, *Regional Developments*, *Hagiography*, ed. M. A. Fassler and R. A. Baltzer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 345–46.

47. F. D'Angelo, "Palermo alla fine del Duecento e inizi del Trecento. Contrade e chiese dei quartieri della città desunte dai documenti d'archivio," in *La città di Palermo nel Medioevo*, ed. F. D'Angelo (Palermo: Officina di Studi Medievali, 2002), 37–39. See also T. Jäckh, "Space and Place in Norman Palermo," in *Urban Dynamics and Transcultural Communication in Medieval Sicily*, ed. T. Jäckh and M. Kirsch (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 67–95; Orazio Cancila, Palermo (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2009); J.-M. Martin, *La vita quotidiana nell'Italia meridionale ai tempi dei Normanni* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1997).

48. Di Giovanni, 57–59.

porta(m).” This passage describes a performative ceremony at one of the gates of the city during Palm Sunday, suggesting the active participation of members of the local ecclesiastical hierarchy. During such an important celebration, it is therefore possible to imagine the handling of one or more of the staurothekes as processional crosses in the manner seen at Salerno.

The gradual of Palermo Cathedral also contains a total of three items that were sung and heard during the Paschal Triduum, which perhaps witnessed a procession or at least some type of splendid public ritual that may have involved the handling of one of these staurothekes. Folio 92r (p. 207) displays an antiphonary “Ante crucem” for Easter Friday, beginning with the words “Dum fabricator mundi mortis supplicium pateretur in cruce, clamans voce magna tradidit spiritum et velum templi divisum est […].” If at least one of these staurothekes was present in Palermo during the mid-twelfth century, it is possible that the clergymen displayed the object on this occasion, the text making such an explicit reference to the crucified Christ. Folio 96v (p. 216) shows instead an antiphon “Ad processionem in Sabbato sancto.” Finally, on folio 108v (p. 240) begins another antiphon “Ad crucem” that perhaps witnessed the enactment on Easter Sunday of a short play around the altar area of Palermo Cathedral (“Sedit angelus ad sepulchrum Domini”), with further lines referring to the “Crucifixum in carne laudeate et sepultum propter vos glorificate resurgentemque a morte adorate.”

A second twelfth-century manuscript from Palermo Cathedral, the *troparium* Ms. Madrid Biblioteca Nacional de España, 289, contains further indications about potential liturgical gatherings. Folio 53r (p. 110) displays the trope for the “Inventione s(an)c(ta)e crucis” service, whereas on folio 73r (p. 150) begins that for the aforementioned feast “In exaltatione s(an)c(ta)e crucis.”[49] Moreover, folio 88r (p. 180) and folio 119v (p. 243) show two items for the Mass “In dedicatione ecclesiae,” which witnessed with certainty a ceremony that took the local clergymen from Palermo Cathedral towards the new building in question, as well as a series of ritual actions (e.g. blessings) around and inside the new church.[50] In addition to manuscripts or thuribles, the local ecclesiastical hierarchy probably decided to carry one or more processional crosses during these important celebrations.[51]

Other liturgical occasions beyond the ones described here certainly occurred. Linda Safran reports Palm Sunday ceremonies in eleventh- and

49. The theme appears carved in stone in one of the capitals of the cloister of Monreale Cathedral. See C. D. Sheppard, “Iconography of the Cloister of Monreale,” *The Art Bulletin* 31, no. 3 (1949): 162. The digitised manuscript in Madrid can be found here: http://bdh.bne.es/bnesearch/detalle/bdh0000045120

50. D. Mehu, “The Colours of the Ritual. Description and Inscription of Church Dedication in Liturgical Manuscripts (10th-11th Centuries),” in *Sign and Design: Script as Image in Cross-Cultural Perspective (300–1600 CE)*, ed. Brigitte M. Bedos-Rezak and J. Hamburger (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 2016), 259–77.

51. Oldfield, *Sanctity and Pilgrimage in Medieval Southern Italy*, 169–71. However, references to a procession celebrating the *dies natalis* of a popular saint in Norman Palermo are missing. A twelfth-century *martyrologium* in the Biblioteca Comunale di Casa Professa (Ms. 2 Qq E 2), the former Norman church of St Michael Archangel, can perhaps reveal in the future more details about the performative cult of saints in the city.

twelfth-century Salento that witnessed crowds gathering at the city gates of Brindisi and Ostuni, where different types of carved crosses symbolically marked the entrance into the walled town.[52] In Sicily itself, the wedding between William II and Joanna of England in February 1177 witnessed a procession between the royal palace and Palermo Cathedral.[53] The text, part of a *Ordines coronationis* in Ms. Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, 678, refers to the presence of two crosses. The text specifies that these two crosses were carried by horses (perhaps on a carriage) before the Norman king and his future bride.

Visual evidence from this period also highlights the prominent role of liturgical crosses as part of processions. The Exultet II roll from Bari's Diocesan Archive depicts a gathering in which one of the clergymen in front of the altar carries a patriarchal cross mounted on a *fustis*. One scene of the contemporary frescos in the Basilica of St Clement in Rome depicts the *translatio* of the remains of St Clement in 868 from the Vatican to this church on the Lateran (Fig. 14). At the forefront of the crowd that approaches the building from the left, after the remains of the saint, appears a clergyman carrying a cross on a tall *fustis*, whereas three smaller crosses appear on the background as banners amidst the crowd.[54]

These two images, in addition to some of the historical records seen before, are indications of the assumptions and limits of a modern understanding of these medieval objects and their use during processions. First of all, it is natural to assume that these staurothekes were only paraded on very important occasions, such as the Easter liturgies, a royal coronation, and the *adventus* or *translatio* of an important relic. The Salerno chronicle describing the procession in honour of St Matthew, the record of the royal marriage at Palermo, and the St Clement fresco also suggest that processional crosses were part of carefully orchestrated hierarchies together with the different ranks of the local Church and civil authorities. Finally, this corpus of evidence also invites consideration of the several ways to carry these objects in addition to a simple *fustis*. Carrying the item between two clergymen or displaying the larger staurothekes on top of a portable structure, were often necessary steps to ensure the preservation of these precious objects.

Crosses, Processions, and the Sicilian Other

The apparent conflicting views of Ibn Jubayr's testimony about the relationship between the Norman state and by far the largest non-Christian group in

52. Safran, *The Medieval Salento*, 189–90.
53. M. Vagnoni, *Dei Gratia Rex Sicilie. Scene d'incoronazione divina nell'iconographia regia normanna* (Naples: Federico II University Press, 2017), 88–90. See R. Elze, "Tre *ordines* per l'incoronazione di un re e di una regina del regno normanno di Sicilia," in *Atti del Congresso internazionale di studi sulla Sicilia normanna*, ed. I. Peri (Palermo: Istituto di Storia Medievale, 1973), 438–59.
54. The mosaic programme of Cefalu Cathedral also displays a procession of priests and deacons carrying small metallic crosses. The aforementioned Carolingian Stuttgart Psalter also contains a depiction of a priest carrying a cross on a *fustis* in a procession towards a church (fol. 118v). See Kitzinger, *The Cross*, *the Gospels*, *and the Work of Art in the Carolingian Age*, 49–50.

Figure 14 *Translatio* of St Clement's remains, Church of St Clement (Rome), late 11th century. (Image: Wikipedia Commons).

Sicily are symptomatic of a much wider historiographical debate. From the times of early Italian scholarship, such as Michele Amari and his *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia* (1854), historians like Hubert Houben, Aziz Ahmad, Graham Loud, Jeremy Johns, and Alex Metcalfe have regularly hypothesised about the evolution and ultimate fate of the Sicilian Muslim community and the gradual process of assimilation that the population experienced throughout the twelfth century.[55] Occasionally, Norman rulers probably encouraged the conversion of high-ranking courtiers to Christianity and, as Jeremy Johns has rightly pointed out, the Greek Church, a predominant force especially in the east of the island, also attracted converts from Islam.[56] These largely undocumented processes probably affected a far less numerous but equally visible minority in Sicily, the Jews.[57] Jewish communities lived in the main urban nuclei of Palermo, Messina, and Syracuse, unlike the Muslim populations that inhabited both major cities but also entire rural areas in the south and west of the island. Historians agree that, despite regular arrivals of

55. M. Amari, *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia*, 3 vols. (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1854). Aziz Ahmad, *A History of Islamic Sicily* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1975). For Houben, Loud, and Metcalfe, see Notes 3, 8, 9.
56. J. Johns, "The Greek Church and the Conversion of Muslims in Norman Sicily?," *Byzantinische Forschungen* 21 (1995): 133–57.
57. N. Zeldes, "The Jewish Presence in Sicily as reflected in Medieval Sicilian Historiography," in *The Italia Judaica Jubilee Conference*, ed. S. Simonsohn and J. Shatzmiller (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 247–59.

"Lombards" from the Italian mainland, Muslims still comprised the majority of the Sicilian population throughout the second half of the century.[58] However, as Ibn Jubayr's account suggests, there was a clear divergence between official policy and ecclesiastical intentions.

The Papacy and the church authorities in Sicily constantly meddled in the relationship between the Norman monarchy and its Muslim subjects. Some episodes exemplified this often aggressive attitude towards Southern Italian Muslims. In 1063, after victory in the battle of Cerami, Pope Alexander II granted absolution for all the Norman warriors that had defeated the armies of the Sicilian emirate.[59] When in 1098 Count Roger I came to the aid of his great nephew, Richard of Capua, St Anselm of Canterbury visited the ongoing siege. Eadmer's chronicle describes a "sea of Arab tents" in Roger's camp.[60] The Anglo-Norman archbishop was also explicitly forbidden from converting Muslims during the campaign.[61]

Tensions came to a head in the mid-twelfth century. Romuald of Salerno stated that, regardless of the previous impression of splendour and mutual understanding, King Roger II "towards the end of his life (d. 1154), having laid aside and abandoned most worldly matters, worked in every way to convert the Jews and Saracens to the faith of Christ, and he made many compelling gifts to converts."[62] Around the same time, the preacher Philagatos of Cerami (d. 1154) described in one of his homilies the interior of the Cappella Palatina.[63] Philagatos stressed the meaning of the marble panels that symbolically isolated the presbytery area before the altar. He argued that these panels protected the performance of the Mass sacrament from the eyes of the "non-consecrated," which for Umberto Bongianino is clearly a reference not only to non-Christians in general, but also to courtiers of Muslim and Jewish background, even if officially converted.[64] The fact is that after 1160 and the death of the last of the three great admirals of the *regnum*, Maio of Bari, more Latin churchmen rose to positions of power, becoming less tolerant towards Muslims and Jews.[65] Alex Metcalfe and other researchers have sufficiently shown how the Norman monarchy, probably in concert with the church, encouraged the conversion of high-ranking Muslims. Norman authorities hoped, Metcalfe convincingly argued, that their personal decision would

58. Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy*, 141–42.
59. Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy*, 95.
60. G. A. Loud, "Introduction," in *The Society of Norman Italy*, ed. Loud and Metcalfe, 3. The source quoted is *The Life of Saint Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, by Eadmer*, ed. R. W. Southern (London: Nelson, 1962), 111.
61. Houben, "Religious Toleration," 322.
62. Romuald of Salerno, *Chronicon sive annales*, ed. C. A. Garufi, *Rerum italicarum scriptores*, ser. 2, VII, Part I (Città del Castelo: S. Lapi, 1935), 233. See H. Houben, *Roger II of Sicily: A Ruler between East and West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 109–10.
63. Giuseppe Rossi Taibbi, *Filagato da Cerami. Omelie per i vangeli domenicali e le feste di tutto l'anno*, Vol. 1: *Omelie per le feste fisse* (Palermo: Istituto siciliano di studi bizantini e neoellenici, 1969), Homily 27.
64. Bongianino, "The King, His Chapel, His Church," 17.
65. Metcalfe also reports a letter by Alexander III in 1167 addressing the Muslim rape of Christian women, which may have been understood as stark opposition by the Papacy to mixed marriages. See Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy*, 204–5.

spark mass conversions on the island.[66] Beyond the evidence from some ecclesiastical sources seen above, and the cases of well-known Muslim individuals such as Abu l'Qasim or Ibn Zur'a (who transformed his mosque into a church after conversion), there is no documentary evidence for conversion ceremonies.[67]

Frankish sources in the Levant talk about non-Christian people actively "asking for baptism."[68] Clergymen certainly needed to proclaim certain formulae during the performance of this sacrament. Italian sources from the early thirteenth century suggest that not even Latin and Greek churchmen agreed on a standard textual procedure.[69] The performance of the actual sacrament required the use of a baptismal font. The Cappella Palatina hosts one in marble that was possibly reserved for special occasions, like baptisms for royal births and high-ranking adults (Fig. 15).[70] Cefalù Cathedral also possesses a carved font in lumachella marble displaying the figures of lions (Fig. 16). Christian materials predating the Normans were perhaps also used. Another important stage of the ceremony was the adoption of a Christian name, Latin in the case of King Roger II's godson "Roger-Ahmad," or alternatively Greek.[71]

High-ranking Christian baptisms and the ceremonies of those who converted from another religion, whether important individuals or entire groups, probably involved the handling of liturgical objects. The iconography of St Ananias of Damascus baptising the pagan Saul of Tarsus, who later became St Paul, appears as part of the mosaic programmes of Monreale Cathedral and the Cappella Palatina (Fig. 17). In both scenes, Saul is inside a large baptismal font in an abstract architectural interior, while Ananias places his right hand on him. The Holy Spirit descends upon Saul and an assistant of Ananias, carrying a long candle, witnesses the scene. Acts 9:11 describes how Ananias initially objected to the conversion of Saul since he had persecuted Christians, but Christ replied by saying that Saul was instead "a chosen vessel into me, which bears my name before the gentiles, their kings, and the children of Israel."[72] Although perhaps circumstantial, the story of Saul recalls the stories of some prominent Muslims in Sicily who converted to Christianity and the background of conflicts between Christianity and Islam during a time of rising tensions.

The potential role of processional crosses in general, and staurothekes in particular, is unclear due to the lack of documentation regarding these ceremonies. A precious liturgical item such as the Cosenza Staurotheke, full of different layers of

66. Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy*, 221.
67. Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy*, 215–16.
68. B. K. Zedar, *Crusade and Mission: European Approaches toward Muslims* (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 1988), 62–63.
69. P. Herde, "The Papacy and the Greek Church in Southern Italy between the Eleventh and the Thirteenth Centuries," in *The Society of Norman Italy*, ed. Loud and Metcalfe, 229–31.
70. Tronzo, *The Cultures of His Kingdom*, 82–83.
71. J. Johns, *Arabic Administration in Norman Sicily: The Royal Diwan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 237–38. Also Johns, "The Greek Church," 144–51.
72. L. Fagin Davies, "The Epitome of Pauline Iconography: BnF Francais 50, The *Miroir Historial* of Jean de Vignay," in *A Companion to St Paul in the Middle Ages*, ed. S. R. Cartwright (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 396–99.

Figure 15 Cappella Palatina's baptismal font, Palermo, 12th century (Image: Wikipedia Commons).

symbolism for learned Christian individuals, was perhaps handled and displayed with pride by the Sicilian clergymen during the conversion of both elites and large groups. At the side of the crucified Christ in the Cosenza cross appeared St John the Baptist, whose task in the Gospels was related to that of the Christian churchmen that led the conversion rites. Without documentary evidence for outdoors baptisms (e.g. on riverbanks), it is first and foremost assumed that these ceremonies occurred inside churches and cathedrals, where baptismal fonts were located.

The processions seen earlier therefore represented the best opportunity for churchmen to display the piety, the meaning of feasts, as well as the importance of the cross as a symbol, to the non-Christians of the Sicilian *regnum*. In the capital, the historic Cassaro or *Via Plata Marmorea*, connected the harbour area to the cathedral and the main city gate. Sources confirm that Muslims used the Cassaro as a place for the exchange of goods.[73] This street witnessed a sprawl of inhabitation sideways during Islamic rule.[74] The two opposite districts, *Hārat al-Masjid* and *Hārat as-Saqāliba*, therefore hosted the majority of the population of the city after the Norman conquest and

73. A. Nef, "Islamic Palermo and the dar-al-Islam: Politics, Society, and the Economy," in *A Companion to Medieval Palermo: The History of a Mediterranean City from 600 to 1500*, ed. A. Nef (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 52.
74. Birk, *Norman Kings and the Rise of Anti-Islamic Critique*, 217–18.

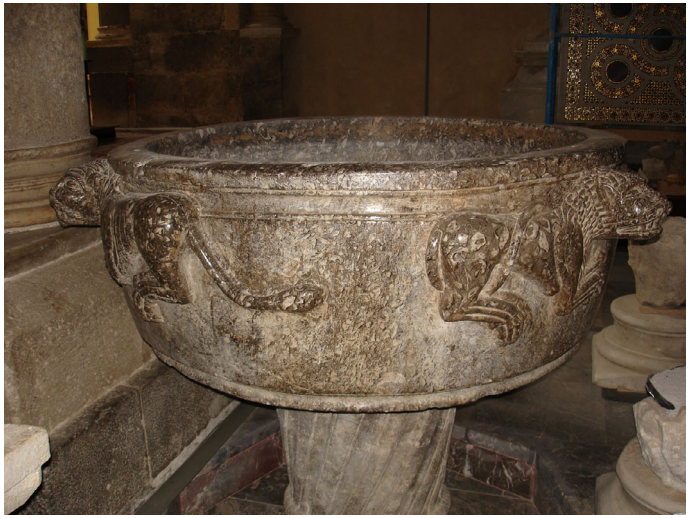

Figure 16 Cefalù Cathedral's baptismal font, 12th century. (Image: Wikipedia Commons).

probably well into the twelfth century. Moreover, the *Al-Halisa* district, by the harbour, was instead inhabited mostly by the city's Jewish community.

Each year, a gradually increasing number of Christians in Palermo attended, among other ceremonies, the Palm Sunday procession that probably displayed the regional church hierarchy across the Cassaro. As part of the procession, as seen in Salerno, there were certainly thuribles, luxurious manuscripts, and crosses, including perhaps one of the four staurothekes. These processions and liturgical arts were constant reminders to non-Christian Sicilians that the tables had turned and that Latin influence was on the rise, ideally seeking to convert them and teach them the ways of a Christian life. Staurothekes epitomised like no other object this aim – the proselytisation through the public performance of the object and the teaching of dogmas and practices, such as the death of Christ on the cross.

The perception of the cross and the growing Christian influence on the island of Sicily were also perceived almost on an everyday basis beyond churches and processions. Examples of the main type of coinage preserved from the reign of Roger II, the *ducale*, display on their obverse a portrait of Christ and on the reverse images of King Roger in full regalia, together with Duke Roger, while both hold a patriarchal cross mounted on a *fustis* (Fig. 18).[75] This Christocentric duality visible in currency embodied the

75. P. Grierson, "The Coinages of Norman Apulia and Sicily in their International Setting," *Anglo-Norman Studies* 15 (1993): 117–32. See also F. Dumas, "Les monnaies normandes (XeXIIe siècles)," *Revue Numismatique* 21 (1979): 84–140.

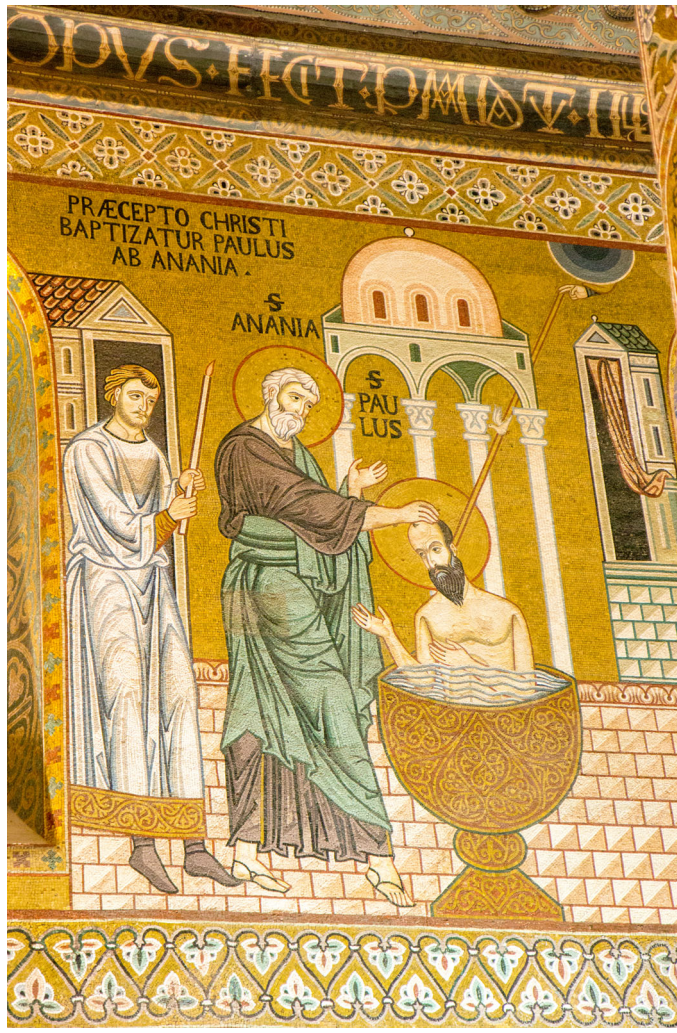

Figure 17 Mosaic of St Ananias baptising Saul, Cappella Palatina, Palermo, c. 1140. (Image: Wikipedia Commons).

union between the Norman monarchy and the church, reminding both Muslims and Jews that they were now on the edges of Sicilian society.

The analysis of these twelfth-century staurothekes has unravelled wider considerations and introduced new hypotheses about the defining influence of Christianity as a public religion in a territory with a non-Christian majority, such as Sicily before the year 1200. These four staurothekes represent an overlooked type of material evidence, whose study has been hindered by the

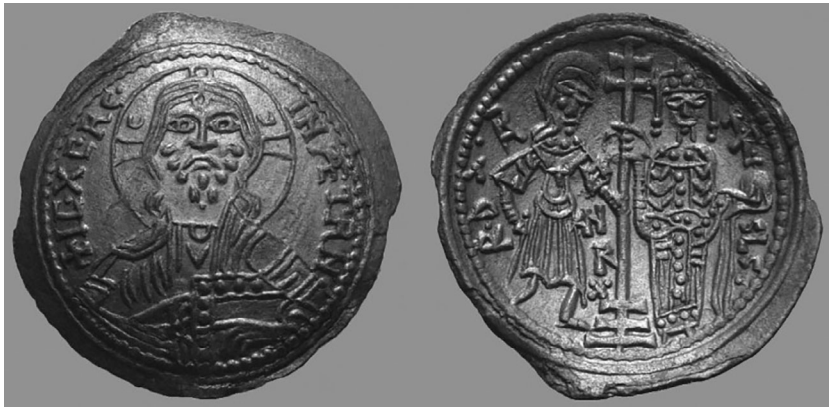

Figure 18 Recto and verso of a Sicilian *ducale*, c. 1140. (Image: Wikipedia Commons).

absence of details regarding patronage. As this contribution shows, a renewed focus on liturgy and social history can do much to address this lacuna. This approach is part of a wider rethink of medieval art history that goes beyond style and comparison. The reconsideration of performative scenarios through the analysis of symbolic images and meanings, physical contexts (mostly urban), and audience particularities, are the keys to this methodological process. In the case of twelfth-century Sicily, the latter point is especially relevant. Previous art historical studies on the Norman *regnum* have normally assumed a homogenous audience fully familiar with Christian dogmas and their representation. Discussions of liturgical arts, as well as public religion more broadly, have to instead constantly remind readers of the different effects that Christian imagery entailed in high medieval Sicily. In this regard, luxury material culture and popular devotion probably became powerful tools for Norman church elites in order to display the validity and perhaps the superiority of Latin Christianity among Greeks, Muslims, and Jews.

The most pressing questions remain the exact locations of these staurothekes after their creation and the reasons that motivated high-ranking patrons to commission them in the first place. A first plausible scenario is to consider these reliquaries as *ex-votos* given by Roger II, William I, or William II to individual Sicilian clergymen. This initiative would have resulted in the creation of a network of ecclesiastical sees in Sicily possessing a first-class relic that gave cohesion to local Christian communities and attracted pilgrims from the island and visitors travelling to or through Sicily. These rituals also served to display an engaging public performance in the face of non-Christians, as well as to attract local Greek Christians, thus unifying liturgical services and ecumenical direction. A second possibility is a concentration of staurothekes in and around Palermo planned by the Norman monarchy in order to increase the prestige of the capital, perhaps following

the model of the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople.[76] If more than one central Palermitan repository is considered (such as Palermo Cathedral), foundations like the Cappella Palatina, la Martorana, Monreale Cathedral, or even Cefalù Cathedral, probably hosted one or more of these staurothekes at a certain point during the twelfth century.

76. R. Wisniewski, *The Beginnings of the Cult of the Relics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 166–73. H. Klein, "Sacred Relics and Imperial Ceremonies at the Great Palace of Constantinople," *Byzas* 5 (2006): 79–99.