

THE MUSEUM SETUP IN THE BENEDICTINE DORMITORY OF MONREALE: THE ARTWORKS OF SANTA MARIA DEL BOSCO AND THE TEXTILE ARTEFACTS OF THE CATHEDRAL, SICILY, ITALY

Maria Concetta di Natale*

Department Culture e Società
University of Palermo, Italy

Maurizio Vitella

Department Culture e Società
University of Palermo, Italy

Keywords: Diocesan Museum in Monreale; textile artefacts; museological project; virtual exhibition.

1. Introduction: the museological project

Among the main functions of a museum is to recreate the original setting of the artwork and reconstruct the environment in which it is placed. In the dormitory of the Convent of the Benedictine Fathers in Monreale the relevant superintendency considered it appropriate to bring together the artworks from the ruined Abbey of Santa Maria del Bosco in Calatamauro not yet included in the exhibition of the Diocesan Museum in Monreale and the precious textile artefacts housed in the sacristy of the Norman Cathedral. The Museum, located in the archbishop's palace, overlooks the Cloister from the great Hall dedicated to San Placido allowing an uninterrupted visit from one exhibition space to another and the fitting reunion of all the works from Santa Maria del Bosco. The artworks of the diocese of Monreale, already exhibited in the diocesan museum have joined others taken from its deposits, thus enriching the halls of the Dormitory. The Regional Superintendence is responsible for the halls, which have been restored using scientific criteria, the result of important museologic and museographic input and a profitable collaboration. My long-desired wish to reunite and exhibit once more all the artworks from Santa Maria del Bosco in the monumental complex of the Cathedral of Monreale, which includes the Diocesan Museum, has been fulfilled. It also constitutes a further point of interest and an additional reason to visit not only the Diocesan Museum of Monreale, but the entire complex of the Duomo.

2. The artworks of Santa Maria del Bosco

A sign that the artworks had been at Santa Maria del Bosco and were then dispersed and reused is provided by a stone portal with wooden doors which, after a short

* Corresponding author: mariaconcetta.dinatale@unipa.it

stay at the National Museum of Palermo, was moved to the cloister of the Palermitan church of the Magione with an insertion that leaves no trace or memory of its original location⁶. The valuable portal, described in 1894 by Father Atanasio Schirò⁷, bearing an Olivetan coat of arms has recently been dated to the beginning of the sixteenth century and attributed to Pietro Belverte. The portal was executed earlier than the door and is decorated with figures of saints, bearing the date 1535 and attributed by Antonio Cuccia to the Spanish sculptor of French origin, Juan de Juni.

Among the artworks of Santa Maria del Bosco exhibited at the Diocesan Museum are some fragments of marble sculptures situated at the entrance (Figure 1) and a glazed terracotta *tondo* depicting the *Madonna con il Bambino* (Figure 2), better known as the Madonna del Bosco, exhibited in the hall dedicated to Renaissance artworks, where it is the main focal point⁸.



Figure 1. Marble fragments from the Abbey of Santa Maria del Bosco in Calatamauro, 16th and 18th centuries, Monreale Diocesan Museum.

The artwork, dating back to the end of the fifteenth century, is mentioned in some archive documents relating to the Benedictine abbey. It is described in general terms in the 1666 inventory as “*un tondo della Vergine SS.ma col suo cerchio solo d’argento*” [1] (transl. a tondo depicting the Virgin, her halo made entirely of silver).

An earlier, more detailed description of the terracotta appears in the delivery report dated June 17th, 1932, when the furnishings of the Nemorense church are handed over to the *pro tempore* archbishop of Monreale, Mons. Ernesto Eugenio Filippi by the Provincial Inspector for the Fund for Religious Worship, *Cavaliere* (knight) Ernesto Moretti. It describes a “*statuetta in maiolica robbiana raffigurante la Vergine con il Bambino Gesù, col fondo smaltato in azzurro: le immagini in bianco adorne di dorature*” [2] (transl. small glazed terracotta statue of the Virgin with the Infant Jesus, in the style of Della Robbia, on a blue smalted background: the white images decorated in gold).



Figure 2. Andrea della Robbia, *Madonna col Bambino*, late 15th century, glazed ceramics, Monreale Diocesan Museum.

In a later record dated 1 July 1934, the artefact was attributed to the school of Andrea della Robbia, an attribution which is still valid today, after being attributed at one point to his brother Luca; the final attribution was made because the statue was “*caratterizzato da motivi descrittivi e sentimentali legati alla gestualità affettuosa della Madonna e del Bambino raffigurato sempre alla sua destra, oltre che per la vivacità espressiva del Bambino e la raffinata bellezza della Madonna che si distinguono dall’austerità e severità dell’opera di Luca Robbia [...] e per l’uso della doratura a freddo maggiormente utilizzata da Andrea*” [3] (transl. characterized by descriptive and sentimental motifs related to the affectionate gestures of the Madonna and the Child who is always depicted on her right, as well as by his expressive vivacity and the refined beauty of the Madonna which distinguish themselves from the austerity and severity used by Luca Robbia in his work [...] and the cold-gilding used mostly by Andrea).

From the same site and exhibited in the same room, come the refined marble tiles depicting the Passion of Christ (Figure 3) attributed to a Sicilian sculptor of the late 17th - early 18th century. The precious artworks were placed in the first chapel on the right of the ancient abbey and, as Father Athanasius Schirò observed, they were executed “*con tale finezza ed espressione d’arte che lo sguardo erra meraviglioso come l’ingegno e la mano dell’uomo arrivano a dare tale movenza all’inerte marmo*” [4] (transl. with such artistic finesse and expression, it was a marvel how the genius and hand of man was able to give movement to the inert marble).



Figure 3. Unknown Sicilian sculptor, *Flagellazione and the Caduta di Cristo sotto la Croce*, third quarter of 18th century, carved marble, Monreale Diocesan Museum.

The countless works of art kept in the monumental complex of Santa Maria del Bosco, included the prestigious bust of Eleonora D'Aragona by Francesco Laurana which, over the centuries has experienced several sad vicissitudes. Today it is one of the masterpieces housed in the Regional Gallery of Sicily of Palazzo Abatellis. The second founding of the abbey Church, aggregated to the order of the Benedictines of Monte Oliveto in 1491, dates back to the years 1583-1588 and was ordered at the behest of the Abbots, Giulio della Cava, Ambrogio da Palermo, Olimpio da Giuliana, Geronimo da Corleone⁹.

Third in chronological order, the construction of the present-day church, started in 1634, was only completed in the two-year period from 1777-1779 and saw the participation of famous architects, such as Vanvitelli and Marvuglia¹⁰. The nave continued to be embellished with gilding in the stuccos until 1781. In 1794, due to the expulsion of the Olivetan Fathers, the Augustinian fathers took over, but they would suffer the subversive laws of 1866¹¹.

The church also sparkled with "*marmi eccellenti di Carrara, di verde, diaspro, e giallo antico, di sardoniche, carnirole, di Porto venere e jalino diafano e rilucente intrecciati a vaghi disegni*" [5] (transl. excellent marbles from Carrara, in green, jasper, and old-fashioned yellow, carnegneule, from Porto Venere and clear ialino and brightly shining braids in vague patterns) and great agate slabs extracted from the feudal territory of Giancavallo¹², a variety of marbles also noted in numerous archival documents. To make the high altar of the eighteenth-century church, for instance, the Palermitan *marmorari* (marble workers) Ignazio and Geronimo Mosca¹³ used agate and jasper from Giuliana of different colours and "*tutte quelle fette di pietra agata che attualmente stanno segnando li quattro maestri segatori in Giancavallo*" [6] (transl. all those pieces of agate that the four master stone cutters are sawing in Giancavallo).

The monastic church has fortunately preserved some noteworthy marble tombstones that are now on display in the museum. They include those from the 16th-17th

century church, respectively belonging to the Azzolina family and that of the rector Giuseppe Manna, laid down in 1620 by one of his relatives, Caterina Baronio, and the 18th century tombstone in various marbles, of the family of the canons, Candes and Donato¹⁴. The tombstone used for the burial of the monks, characterized by inlaid elements that incorporate the coat of arms of the Order and below which is an inscription engraved on a drape-shaped cartouche, can be attributed to the time of the Olivetan Refoundation¹⁵ and is attributed by Zalapi to the Muscas, who probably made it between 1770 and 1771.

Girolamo Musca is also the author of the fragments of polychrome marbles enriched by *rocaille* decorations from the altar of the Beato Bernardo of the monastic church, executed by the Palermitan marble worker between 1774-1776. Instead, the fragment of the altar balustrade in polychrome marbles from the presbytery area of the sacred building dates back to the late 18th - early 19th century.

The abbey church was also preciously enriched by numerous sculptures and paintings, some of which have been traced to different locations by Mariny Guttilla¹⁶. Three paintings, part of a series of four artworks related to the eighteenth-century "Refoundation" period, which today are displayed in the museum, were commissioned from the painter Ippolito Ferrante, as recorded in a payment dated 8th August 1765: *Sacrificio di Isacco, Melchisedec e Giale e Sisar*. Also on display at the same site is the painting mentioned in the 1934 delivery report of the furnishings of the *Nemorense* church described as "*vescovo alla presenza d'un imperatore*"[7] (transl. bishop in the presence of an emperor).

Still housed at the Archbishop's Palace is the *Santa Rosalia guidata dagli angeli*, painted in 1766 by the artist Vito D'Anna (1718-1769), with signature and date, which presents the Palermitan virgin in pilgrim's clothes, crowned with roses and accompanied by two angels who guide her on the way to the Quisquina. The painting, probably commissioned by a private individual, as emerges from the documentary research by Angheli Zalapi, was taken from the painter's house to Santa Maria del Bosco where a chapel was dedicated to the patron saint of the nearby center of Bisacquino and of the Palermo, later embellished with a "*d'avanzale [...] d'agata*" (transl. ledge [...] in agate), which has, unfortunately, been lost.

Other interesting paintings from the Benedictine abbey are kept in the Regional Gallery of Sicily in Palazzo Abatellis. Among them are *Il beato Bernardo Tolomei alla peste di Siena*, an art work signed by Mariano Rossi, which was probably a companion piece to the painting of Saint Francesca Romana by the same Rossi; the *Assunzione della Vergine* of the Roman painter Pietro Paolo Panci; the *Assunzione in cielo di santa Scolastica tra i santi Benedetto, Mauro e Placido* by Pietro Angeletti, a pupil of Stefano Pozzi, with the same subject as the canvas painted by Mariano Rossi for the monastic church of the Benedictine Order of St. Nicholas of Bisacquino.

Temporarily housed in the Cathedral of Monreale is the *Madonna della cintura con Sant'Agostino e santa Monica*, the so-called *Madonna della consolazione* by Salvatore Lo Forte and Giovan Battista Carini.

Another painting from the ancient abbey depicting the Holy Family is preserved at Villa Whitaker (seat of the Prefecture). In the delivery report of 17th June 1932, the artwork is generally attributed to the workshop of the Postiglione, but was probably executed by Raffaele, the most accredited of the brothers. The refined alabaster sculpture of the *Madonna del Rosario tra i Santi Domenico and Benedetto* by a sculptor from Trapani of the late 16th - early 17th century is also housed at the Villa.

The numerous decorative wooden elements must have been of great artistic value. One such example is the choir, restored in 1844 by the Agostiniani Fathers¹⁷, which was commissioned on March 28th, 1763 from the carpenter Giuseppe Pezzano (or Persano)¹⁸ after a public tender with participants such as Giuseppe Zappulla¹⁹ and Rocco Ribaudò²⁰. The latter is the author of the main door of the church and the lost confessionals executed in 1766. The choir, created on the design of the architect Giuseppe Venanzio Marvuglia, was dismantled and placed in the right wing of the former convent, but must have been similar to the one still existing in the Palermitan church of San Giuseppe ai Teatini²¹. An ancient photographic reproduction also testifies to the elegance of the sacristy furniture of the abbey of Santa Maria del Bosco di Calatamauro made in 1777 by the woodcarvers Giuseppe and Francesco Chiofalo da Partanna, and Domenico di Lorenzo, based on the design of a Marabitti, probably Giuseppe²², with the participation of the sculptor from Trapani, Pietro Luparello²³, who probably also made the statues of the Saints resting on shelves: Bernardo da Chiaravalle, Biagio, Benedetto, Bernardo Tolomei, Mauro and Anselmo²⁴.

The Olivetan fathers had always paid great attention to liturgical furnishings which, for the most part, have unfortunately gone missing. It is therefore disheartening when comparing the many lists of sacred silverware that appear in the inventories and the numerous documentary annotations²⁵; from the artworks made in 1606 by the goldsmith Pietro di Capua to those made in 1615 by the silversmith Francesco Dixidomino²⁶. Artists who created artworks for the abbey in the eighteenth century include Pietro Magrì, whose activity is documented in Chiusa Sclafani (a town near Palermo) and worked for the Benedictine abbey in 1735, and the Palermitan Francesco Nicchi, who was there in 1748²⁷.

Other famous silversmiths from Palermo participated in enriching the collection of silver artworks in the second half of the eighteenth century and was followed by the definition of the new church. In the years 1775-1776, Felice di Filippo²⁸ provided “*sei corone di piangia d’argento del quadro della Sagra Famiglia*” [8] (transl. six silver-plated crowns of the picture of the Holy Family). In 1770, Michele Messina²⁹ made “*due cornacopj d’argento da situarsi innanzi la macchinetta della Vergine Santissima*” (transl. two silver cornucopias to be placed before the machine of the Blessed Virgin) and also provided “*il rame dorato ed oro di zecchino per il tabernacolo dell’altare maggiore della chiesa di detto monastero tutto fondato di getto*” [9] (transl. gilded copper and pure gold for the tabernacle of the high altar of the said monastery church, all jet cast). In 1777, Antonino Barrile³⁰ was given the task of manufacturing “*una croce con tre monti d’argento di Palermo, bollato di pezzo in pezzo, e due rami di ulivo allato di detti monti che formano l’armi della Religione olivetana di detto venerabile monastero*” (transl. “a cross with three mountains made from silver in the Palermo mint, stamped piece by piece, and two olive branches next to the said mountains that form the coat-of-arms of the Olivetan Order of the said venerable monastery), for the high altar³¹, subsequently providing also six silver reliquaries, including that of Santa Francesca Romana, “*un discolo e piange d’un messale*” [10].

The hypothesis of relocating the artworks to the original location for which they had been conceived and where they responded to specific historical-artistic and liturgical-devotional functions was impossible, even for a temporary exhibition; and any hypothesis to recompose the whole as it was originally, in harmony with the restored architectural container, is utopian. The surviving works of art that have been recovered and already destined for the diocesan Museum of Monreale, are now exhibited in the

dormitory of the cloister (Figure 4). However, for the research and the overall recombination of the monument not to stop and yield positive results, thanks to the possibilities offered by digital technology, an ephemeral virtual recontextualization of the existing works of art can be envisaged. Inside this virtual reconstruction the objects would all be repositioned in the architectural building as it is today and, using modern instruments, projected in their original position and inside the halls of the convent dormitory which overlooks the cloister of the Duomo of Monreale. Although the work in the church is incomplete and its restoration is ongoing, the works of art that once admirably complemented the architectural structure, are also incomplete or missing. However, the opportunities to virtually enjoy the monumental complex, are manifold.

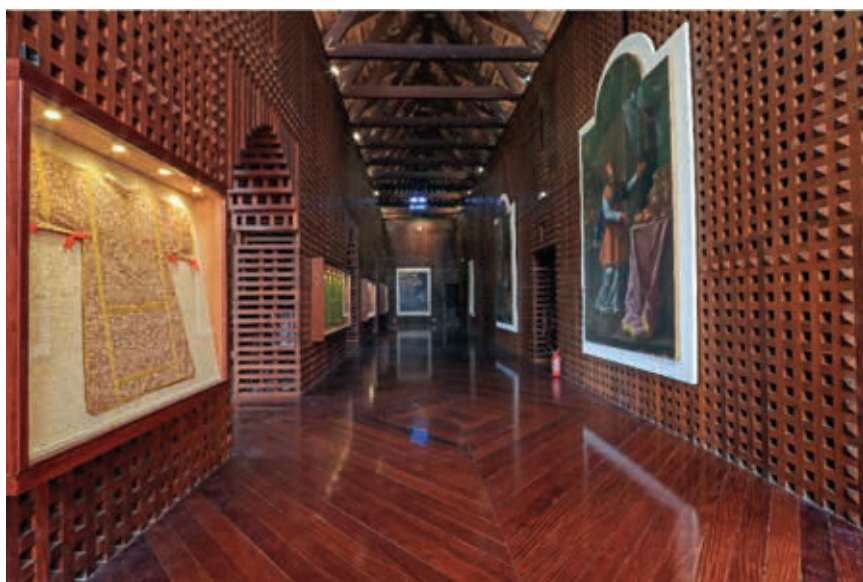


Figure 4. Monreale, former Benedictine dormitory, new museum setup (photo by Dario Di Vincenzo).

After presenting an initial overall view of the church in its present state, a series of virtual images could follow showing the same view complete with works of art, including paintings and sculptures, presented on their original altars. This kind of virtual reconstruction is possible thanks to the detailed descriptions obtained from printed texts, manuscripts and archival research. The recombination of the marble fragments on display at the Diocesan Museum of Monreale, in particular, could play a significant part in presenting the Chapel of the Passion with its bas-reliefs related to Christological scenes. It would be interesting to show, first of all, the actual fragmentary state of the Chapel's elements followed by a virtual picture showing successive images that gradually recombine the marble fragments, finally repositioning them in the chapel adorned with the remnants of the stuccoes that were once part of the whole decoration. The church could thus be virtually repaved in the same way, replicating the small remnants of majolica tiles still *in situ* several times. The tiles were made in 1762 by the potters from Burgio, Rosario Rosso (Russo) and Giuseppe Virgadamo, while those made at

an earlier date were probably produced by Palermitan manufacturers and in part taken from the chapels (in *cornu evangelij*), adorned with large vegetal-shaped decorations, exhibited in the dormitory of Monreale. Some valuable samples from the second half of the sixteenth century, with virile figures and a sailing ship, the work of majolica makers of that time from Sciacca, are still kept in the chapel of San Michele, situated on the first floor of the monastic building, adjacent to the abbatial apartments. The best majolica makers were employed to work at the abbey, such as the brothers, Vito and Leonardo Lo Bue, who were there in 1606 and active in Sciacca and Palermo³². Another example of a majolica floor with phytomorphic decoration, the work of seventeenth century masters from Sciacca and still in place in the aforesaid chapel, could also be represented virtually, to testify to the variety of artefacts the center produced. The majolica masters from Palermo and Sciacca were replaced in the late eighteenth century by workers from Burgio, who produced geometric and phytomorphic decorated floors; these could also become the subject matter for further virtual renderings.

It would also be of extreme interest to see a virtual image of the previously mentioned valuable glazed terracotta, on the original altar inserted "*in un'edicola ornata da quattro colonnette di jalino*" [11] (transl. in an aedicula adorned with four small jalino columns). The work of art was once adorned with silver crowns, made in 1716, as evidenced in a photographic reproduction kept in the diocesan archive of the Norman town.

There would nevertheless be considerable gaps and missing pieces in many works of art whose memory remains only in the long lists found in the ancient, dusty, but precious, inventories. Perhaps at a later date, in some cases, a virtual presentation for the most significant artworks can be created in which there are informative texts and where possible, also give indications specifying, when identifiable, their original location and their liturgical function, as well as the history of its devotion through the centuries.

By following a virtual path through the monumental complex, it would be possible to provide essential historical news about the structure and surviving artworks, in addition to those that are only remembered in documentary sources. An in-depth analysis, if requested by the user, could also include details about the authors, painters and sculptors, the stonecutters, marble workers and carpenters, the goldsmiths and silversmiths, the majolica workers and even the embroiderers. The importance of the decorative works of art of the church and the liturgical furnishings already preserved in the sacristy could re-emerge by providing a description of the richness and variety obtained from the documentary research. This could then be complemented by examining archival indications and studies on the surviving artworks which, in the past, has often led to modest craftsmen, skilled masters and great artists being remembered after centuries of obscurity³³. The incredible imbalance between the richness of the liturgical furnishings and the sacred vestments described in documentary sources and the scarceness of surviving artefacts can once again be aided by digital technology; in this case, by reconstructing, even if only graphically, the styles of the furnishings listed in the different inventories. The richness of the sacred silverware, furnishings and surviving liturgical vestments in the area of the Diocese of Monreale can also provide examples similar to those noted in the inventories of the abbey of Santa Maria del Bosco, most of them produced by skillful Palermitan masters and could be used to supply a picture of the missing objects in the Dormitory.

3. The textile artefacts

The textile artefacts selected for the new museum exhibition in the former dormitory of the Benedictine complex confirm the wealth of silk heritage that exists in Sicily. They represent yet another testimony of the multicultural climate that has distinguished this specific sector of the decorative arts which, at times, has been enriched by precious imports and at others by original designs that have a strong character that is typically insular. Two tunics dating back to the late sixteenth century are a sign of Sicily's central Mediterranean dimension. They are owned by the Norman cathedral and were originally part of the liturgical garments belonging to Bishop Ludovico Torres II, head of the diocese from January 22nd, 1588, to July 8th, 1609. The green coloured dalmatic proposes a chromatic variation of the purple vestment already on display at the Diocesan Museum of Monreale³⁴ and on which a coat of arms with five towers is applied. The sacred robe has a design of identical structure, - resembling "mesh netting"- in addition to the same weave of warps and wefts that give life to a brocatel with overshot designs. The pattern which decorates the fabric has a symmetrical design, organized in an intense composition that crowds the fabric, consisting of a chessboard-like alternation of decorations with cross-shaped contours or a polylobed conformation. This original and characteristic construction, as well as the chromatic solution, with its bright tones, denotes a strong islamic influence, identifiable in the vigorous stylization of vegetal patterns, combined with an energetic graphic rendering. In addition, as Roberta Civileto has noted, the presence of the polylobed mesh and the star-shaped figure echoes "the oldest textile production in Granada, known as Alhambra style, characterized by geometrical compositions, intertwined polygons, octagons and a succession of bands"³⁵.

The other tunic (Figure 5), with a white background must also be attributed to Iberian manufacture.



Figure 5. Spanish manufacture, tunic (tonacella), second half of 16th century, overshot lampas textile with two wefts, Monreale, former Benedictine dormitory, Duomo.

The extremely interesting design module, dating from the second half of the sixteenth century, is also a net of meshes. Arranged in a chessboard pattern, they are made up of four-lobed contours formed by acanthus-shaped vines whose branches, with their curvilinear pattern, form a convex pointed arch. The lattice pattern is filled with stylized botanical species on which two birds fly opposite each other. Each tangent point in the mesh is marked by a crown with an open and lilled pediment. This setting for the pattern recalls designs found on fabrics attributed to Spanish manufacture, such as the 16th century fragment of the historical Museum of Textile in Lyon studied by Donata Devoti³⁶. The presence of the birds facing each other is a fascinating element and an ornamental motif of ancient middle eastern tradition commonly used in the Islamic world. The contextual presence of the birds, interspersed by stylized phytomorphic elements, is an iconographic element that is largely used in the repertory of ornaments applied to various decorative art objects produced in the arab *Tiraz*, symbolically interpreted as an expression of goodwill due to the presence of the birds, symbols of power and regality, and the botanical element, to be interpreted as the tree of life³⁷. Both sacred robes can therefore be identified as attesting to that *Mudejar* repertory that contaminates Western decorative systems with Islamic preexistences: the geometrical appearance of the green robe and the birds in the white robe are a clear expression of the persistence of a Muslim heritage which engages with the reticular layout of western stamp, in an original and successful conjunction.

The other vestments included in the exhibition are an evident manifestation of post-Counter-Reformation triumphalism and attest to the ostentatious opulence shown in the way the ecclesiastical buildings were adorned and the Eucharist was celebrated between the 17th and 18th centuries. The two embroidered chasubles, one a polychrome, (Figure 6A), the other in silver thread on a blue background (Figure 6B), entirely of Sicilian craftsmanship, honor the mastery of local embroiderers, accustomed to interpreting what was proposed by the contemporary fabrics produced at that time. The chasuble, decorated using needle painting embroidery³⁸ stands out for its refined floral elements and the lively chromatic effect that comes from the contrast between the blue and the red inserted in the gold.

The technique is one of the peculiarities of Sicilian polychrome embroidery, often re-proposed through the use of a single pattern to which small variations were made both in the drawing and in the use of threads. In this regard, the same embroidery pattern is evident in another chasuble of the Diocesan Museum of Monreale³⁹ in which, instead, a gold thread prevails. This analogy confirms what has already been highlighted in other contexts by Elvira D' Amico⁴⁰ regarding the circulation of preparatory cartoons that were used to prepare needlework embellishments, with decorative variants, to be applied to different liturgical vestments. The other sacred robe, which stands out for the refined contrast between the blue background and the bright moon-like shimmer of the silver thread, confirms the derivation of the decorations from the repertory of designs used for the fabrics: the Sicilian workers, inspired by the patterns of the precious brocade fabrics imported from France, knew well how to take out the decorative details and blend them into an original and sumptuous whole. A close look at the embroidery reveals that the characteristic gigantism of the floral elements has its ascendant in the so-called *Revel* fabrics produced in Lyon, which established themselves on the European market in the first thirty years of the eighteenth century.



Figure 6. (A) Sicilian manufacture, chasuble (*pianeta*), first half of 18th century, satin embroidered with polychrome silk threads, Monreale, former Benedictine dormitory, already at the Diocesan Museum deposit. (B) Sicilian manufacture, chasuble (*pianeta*), first half of 18th century, *gros de tours* (ribbed silk fabric) embroidered with silver thread, Monreale, former Benedictine dormitory, already at the Diocesan Museum deposit.

Four altar-frontals complete the exhibition of textile artifacts, once used to enrich the altars in particular solemnities. Two of them come from the church of the Trinity in Monreale, annexed to the College of Mary, an ecclesiastical building with a particular octagonal plan. Their original provenance suggests a monastic manufacture, as was often the prerogative for these valuable artifacts. Both artefacts are enriched by sumptuous embroidery which, following a symmetrical and specular arrangement in a horizontal direction, occupies the entire surface of the underlying fabric. However, in the altar-frontal embroidered in a pictorial manner (Figure 7) a division of the space into two sections is visible: an upper one, to simulate the rich fold of a hypothetical altar tablecloth with scalloped perimeter; and a lower one, occupied by various floral typologies whose stylization is clearly inspired by the bizarre decorative motifs that adorned the fabrics of the first twenty years of the eighteenth century.

The same inspiration is also perceived in the other altar-frontal (Figure 8), characterized by the strong chromatic contrast between the yellow taffeta in the background and the exuberant embroidery in silver thread. In this case, the sinuous development of the branches, with which botanical species of a fanciful rendering intersect, seems to be directed towards elements that are a prelude to the Rococo style.

Finally, the other pair of frontals in *ciselé* velvet (Figure 9), characterized by the same design with a large central vase and proposed in the variants of the liturgical colours green and red, affirms the attention reserved for the precious high altar of the Monreale Cathedral. Built between 1768 and 1775 by Luigi Valadier, a genius of 18th century goldsmith art whose fame resounded internationally, the holy silver table was commissioned by the Archbishop, Francesco Testa⁴¹. The execution of the two valuable silk

artefacts is to be attributed to the munificence of the high prelate: an annotation made in 1767, in a 1763 inventory⁴² reports that “(...) *un Paliotto in velluto cremisi riscagnato e fatto a disegno con il fondo d’argento per l’Altare Maggiore. Più altri quattro paliotti di velluto riscagnato cioè uno bianco con fondo d’oro, altro verde con fondo d’oro, altro violaceo con fondo d’oro ed altro nero con fondo d’argento (...)*” (transl. an altarpiece in crimson ciselé velvet and designed with a silver background for the High Altar. Plus four other ciselé velvet frontals, that is, one white with a gold background, another green with a gold background, another purple with a gold background and another black with a silver background) were made at the expense of Archbishop Testa. Therefore, the documentary indication suggests a dating of the frontals between 1765 and 1767 and, considering the Roman origin of the stunning silver altar, it is reasonable to assume an Italian manufacturing area, also by virtue of the high quality of the execution.

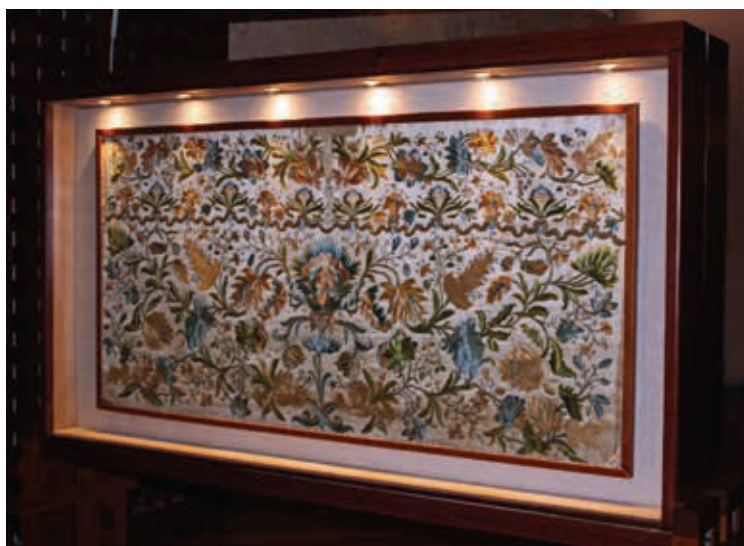


Figure 7. Sicilian manufacture, frontal, first half of 18th century, satin embroidered with polychrome silk threads, Monreale, former Benedictine dormitory, already at the Church of the Trinità al Collegio di Maria.

4. Conclusions

The current exhibition, set up in the Benedictine dormitory of Monreale, enhances an important corpus of artworks, enriching the enjoyment of visitors to the great monumental complex. However, the artefacts in the textile collection, for obvious reasons of conservation, will be subject to periodic rotation, thus offering the possibility of using the great collection of precious silk artefacts kept in the Diocesan Museum’s deposit and in the Cathedral’s sacristy. Instead, it is hoped that the number of artefacts from the abbey of Santa Maria del Bosco will increase in number, not only with the addition of the furnishings at present kept in other institutions, but also by considering the use of technological devices which, though only virtual, will make the rich patrimony once owned by the Olivetan monks, known to a wider public.



Figure 8. Sicilian manufacture, frontal, first half of 18th century, taffetas embroidered with silver thread, Monreale, former Benedictine dormitory, already at the Church of the Trinità al Collegio di Maria.



Figure 9. Roman manufacture, frontal, 1765-1767, voided velvet with one pile warp, ciselé, in overshot weave, Monreale, former Benedictine dormitory, Duomo.

Notes

¹ The traveller Ibn Gyubair, in 1184, described the Palazzo Reale in Palermo and, in particular, what one presumes was its "green room": "[...]We went through squares, gates, royal courtyards and saw splendid palaces, well-laid out exedras, gardens and rooms for public officials, things to dazzle one's eyes and astonish one's mind... apart from other things we noticed a hall in a large courtyard surrounded by a garden and flanked by porticoes. The hall takes up the whole of the courtyard, to the extent that we marvelled at its size, the height of the belvederes. We discovered that this was the place where the king usually dined with his retinue. Opposite were the aforementioned porticoes and the offices where the magistrates, public officials and the finance agents sat [...]".

² The authors wish to thank Würth srl most heartily for their cooperation in consenting the use of images taken from the site archives, as well as the restoration-site operations management and the sole project manager.

³ A temporary entrepreneurial association (ATI) was set up between the firms "Martino Solito restauratore s.r.l." (group chief), "Consorzio C.B. ART" of Marina Furci, "Studio C.R.C. S.r.l." of Paolo Pastorello, Carla Tomasi and Sergio Salvati.

⁴ This opening was attributed to transformations undergone by the northern nave between 1786 and 1795, for the construction of an access stairway to the Astronomical Observatory; see [4].

⁵ In 1891, on the occasion of the *Esposizione Nazionale* held in Palermo, the pavilions designed by Ernesto Basile housed three wooden models of the ceiling, today conserved at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Palermo. In 1893 Alexis Pavlosklij published the first thorough and precise analysis of the stylistic features of the ceiling, as well as an Islamic attribution for the pictorial cycle.

⁶ Cuccia A. (2006), *La porta lignea di Calatamauro, 1535. Ipotesi del viaggio in Italia di Juan De Juni*, in Marchese A.G. (Ed.), *L'abbazia di Santa Maria del Bosco di Calatamauro, tra memoria e recupero*, introduction by C. Naro, Palermo: Provincia Regionale, pp. 253-277. Also see Cuccia A. (2009), scheda I. 4-5, in Guttilla M. (Ed.), *Tesori ritrovati 1968-2008 storia e cultura artistica nell'abbazia di Santa Maria del Bosco di Calatamauro e nel suo territorio dal XII al XIX secolo*, s.l.: Di Nicolò Edizioni, pp. 84-87, with previous bibliography.

⁷ Schirò A. (1894), *Il monastero di Santa Maria del Bosco di Calatamauro in Sicilia. Memorie e documenti*, Palermo: Tipografia e legatoria del Boccone del Povero, p. 52.

⁸ Reginella M. (2001), scheda I,11, in *Gloria Patri. L'arte come linguaggio del sacro*, Monreale-Palermo: Curia Arcivescovile di Monreale - Regione Siciliana, pp. 66-67; Mazzè A. (2006), *C'era una statua nel Bosco... La Terracotta robbiana della "Madonna col Bambino"*, in Marchese A.G. (Ed.), *L'Abbazia di Santa Maria...*, pp. 245-252; Margiotta R.F. (2006), *Le arti applicate nell'Abbazia di Santa Maria del Bosco di Calatamauro. Note storiche e documenti*, in Marchese A.G. (Ed.), *L'Abbazia di Santa Maria...*, pp. 300-301; G. Davi (2009), *Le robbiane di Sicilia: la Madonna col Bambino di Santa Maria del Bosco* e scheda I.3, in Guttilla M. (Ed.), *Tesori ritrovati...*, pp. 82-83. On the patrimony of decorative art of the ancient abbey see also Di Natale M.C. (2009), *Per un nuovo splendore a Santa Maria del Bosco. Il patrimonio nascosto di Arti Decorative: proposte per un itinerario espositivo*, in Guttilla M. (Ed.), *Tesori ritrovati...*, p. 16-21, 23- 27, catalogue to which to refer to for the records of the artworks and the documentary information reported in the paper by Angheli Zalapì (*Il cantiere olivetano della chiesa nuova: fonti e documenti*) and the related appendix.

⁹ See Arcadipane N., Balletta S., Miceli L. (1991), *Le pergamene del monastero di santa Maria del Bosco di Calatamauro (1264-1763)*, Palermo: Ila Palma, p. 17; P. Olimpio da Giuliana (1995), *Memorie antiche del monastero di santa Maria del Bosco. Manoscritto del 1582 postillato da Torquato Tasso*, A.G. Marchese (ed.), Palermo: Ila Palma, pp. 104-105. Also see Schirò A. (1894), *Il monastero...*, pp. 264, 281.

¹⁰ Guttilla M. (2006), *Santa Maria del Bosco: Collezione pittorica e riferimenti culturali nel tardo Settecento*, in Marchese A.G. (Ed.), *L'Abbazia di Santa Maria...*, pp. 283-298, with previous bibliography; Zalapì A. (2009), *Il cantiere olivetano...*, in Guttilla M. (Ed.), *Tesori ritrovati...*, p. 70.

¹¹ A. Schirò (1894), *Il monastero...*, pp. 290-299.

¹² A. Schirò (1894), *Il monastero...*, p. 285.

¹³ About the Musca see Ruggieri Tricoli M.C. and Pizzuto G. (2014), in Di Natale M.C. (Ed.), *Arti*

decorative in Sicilia. Dizionario biografico, vol. II, Palermo: Novecento, *ad vocem*.

¹⁴ For the artworks see E. D'Amico, soon to be published.

¹⁵ Guttilla M. (2009), *La palma e la corona. Cultura artistica del secondo Settecento a Santa Maria del Bosco*, in Guttilla M. (Ed.), *Tesori ritrovati...*, pp. 36-37.

¹⁶ Guttilla M. (2009), *La palma e la corona...* and *Dipinti inediti o poco noti del Settecento tra Contessa e Bisacquino da Filippo Randazzo a Mariano Rossi*, in Guttilla M. (Ed.), *Tesori ritrovati...*, pp. 32-47.

¹⁷ Schirò A. (1894), *Il monastero...*, p. 289. On the church furnishings also see Zalapi A. (2009), *Il cantiere olivetano...*, in Guttilla M. (Ed.), *Tesori ritrovati...*, pp. 67- 69.

¹⁸ On the Pezzano see Palazzotto P. (2001), *Per uno studio sulla maestranza dei Falegnami di Palermo*, in Di Natale M.C. (Ed.), *Splendori di Sicilia. Arti decorative dal Rinascimento al Barocco*, exhibition catalogue, Milano: Edizioni Charta, p. 697.

¹⁹ On the Zappulla, Palermitan carpenters related to the Marvuglia family, see Ruggieri Tricoli M.C. - De Marco B. (2014), in Di Natale M.C. (Ed.), *Arti decorative...*, II, *ad vocem*.

²⁰ Zalapi A. (2009), *Il cantiere olivetano...*, in Guttilla M. (Ed.), *Tesori ritrovati...*, 2009, p. 68. Also see Appendix (2009)...., in Guttilla M. (Ed.), *Tesori ritrovati...*, pp. 220, 222, 223.

²¹ Zalapi A. (2009), *Il cantiere olivetano...*, in Guttilla M. (Ed.), *Tesori ritrovati...*, 2009, p. 68.

²² A Giuseppe Marabitti is reported for paintings on wood and gilding at the palace of the prince of Belmonte in Palermo, where he was directed by Giuseppe Venanzio Marvuglia, an architect active in the construction site of Santa Maria del Bosco in those years. See Ruggieri Tricoli M.C. and De Marco B. (2014), in Di Natale M.C. (Ed.), *Arti decorative...*, II, *ad vocem* Marabitti.

²³ On the artist see Sarullo L. (1994), *Dizionario degli artisti siciliani*, vol. III, *Scultura*, Patera B. (Ed), Palermo: Novecento, *ad vocem*.

²⁴ Zalapi A. (2009), *Il cantiere olivetano...*, in Guttilla M. (Ed.), *Tesori ritrovati...*, p. 68.

²⁵ From the documentary research and the discovery of some valuable silver liturgic furnishings by Margiotta Rosalia Francesca (2006) (*Le arti applicate nell'Abbazia...*, in Marchese A.G. (Ed.), *L'Abbazia di Santa Maria...*, pp. 299-312) the presence of important silversmiths' artworks is clear, as well as the privilege for the Palermitan goldsmiths and silversmiths, due not only to the geographical position of the Abbey but also to the fame of the skilled masters. For the commission of silver works of art destined for the Nemorense monastery also see Mendola G. (2001), *Inediti d'arte nella Diocesi di Monreale*, in *Gloria Patri...*, p. 24; Zalapi A. (2009), *Il cantiere olivetano...*, in Guttilla M. (Ed.), *Tesori ritrovati...*, 2009, pp. 68- 69.

²⁶ Mendola G. (2001), *Inediti d'arte...*, in *Gloria Patri...*, p. 24. On the silversmiths also see Margiotta R.F. and Barraja S. (2014), in Di Natale M.C. (Ed.), *Arti decorative...*, II e I, *ad vocem*.

²⁷ See Margiotta R.F. (2006), *Le arti applicate nell'Abbazia...*, in Marchese A.G. (Ed.), *L'Abbazia di Santa Maria...*, pp. 300-301, 305-306. Also see Di Natale M.C. (2009), *Per un nuovo splendore...*, in Guttilla M. (Ed.), *Tesori ritrovati...*, p. 25. On the work of Nicchi see S. Barraja (2014), in Di Natale M.C. (Ed.), *Arti decorative...*, II, *ad vocem*.

²⁸ On the artist see Barraja S. (2014), in Di Natale M.C. (Ed.), *Arti decorative...*, I, *ad vocem*.

²⁹ On the artist see Barraja S. (2014), in Di Natale M.C. (Ed.), *Arti decorative...*, II, *ad vocem*.

³⁰ See Barraja S. (2014), in Di Natale M.C. (Ed.), *Arti decorative...*, I, *ad vocem*. The artist was active at that time also in the nearby Bisacquino. See Margiotta R.F. (2008), *Tesori d'arte a Bisacquino*, Quaderni di museologia e storia del collezionismo, collana diretta da M.C. Di Natale, 6, premessa di M.C. Di Natale, Caltanissetta: Salvatore Sciascia Editore, p. 90.

³¹ Appendix (2009)...., in Guttilla M. (Ed.), *Tesori ritrovati...*, p. 236-239. Also see Zalapi A., *Il cantiere olivetano...*, in Guttilla M. (Ed.), *Tesori ritrovati...*, p. 69.

³² For the family of the majolica masters Lo Bue see I. Navarra, *La maiolica siciliana dal '300 al '600*, Sciacca 2008, that reports previous bibliography and more recently Ajovalasit L. (2014), in Di Natale M.C. (Ed.), *Arti decorative...*, *ad vocem*.

³³ Mendola G. (2001), *Inediti d'arte nella Diocesi di Monreale*, in *Gloria Patri...*, p. 24; Margiotta R.F. (2006), *Le arti applicate nell'Abbazia...*, in Marchese A.G. (Ed.), *L'Abbazia di Santa Maria...*, p. 308; Zalapi A. (2009), *Il cantiere olivetano...*, in Guttilla M. (Ed.), *Tesori ritrovati...*, pp. 68- 69.

³⁴ Civileto R. (2001), scheda 19, in Di Natale M.C. (Ed.), *Splendori di Sicilia. Arti decorative dal Rinascimento al Barocco*, Milano: Charta, p. 562; Sciortino L. (2011), *Monreale: il sacro e l'arte. La committenza degli Arcivescovi*, Bagheria: "Plumelia" Edizioni, p. 70.

- ³⁵ Civiletto R. (2003), *Teixits espanyols a les esglésies sicilianes*, in Cantelli G. – Rizzo S. (Eds.), *Magnificència i extravagància europea en l'art tèxtil a Sicília*, Palermo: Flaccovio, p. 199.
- ³⁶ Devoti D. (1993), *L'arte del tessuto in Europa*, Milano: Bramante, cat. 107.
- ³⁷ Bagnera A. (1994), *Il motivo dei volatili affrontati all'albero della vita nei tessuti islamici*, in Lucidi M.T. (ed.), *La seta e la sua via*, Roma: Edizioni De Luca, p. 151.
- ³⁸ The artwork was on display in 2000 at the exhibition *Splendori di Sicilia*. Civiletto R. – Vitella M. (2001), *scheda 94*, in Di Natale M.C. (Ed.), *Splendori di Sicilia. Arti decorative dal Rinascimento al Barocco*, Milano: Charta, p. 622.
- ³⁹ Civiletto R. – Cantelli G. (2003), *scheda n. 92*, in Cantelli G. – Rizzo S. (Eds.), *Magnificència i extravagància europea en l'art tèxtil a Sicília*, Palermo: Flaccovio, pp. 788-789.
- ⁴⁰ D'Amico Del Rosso E. (1997), *I paramenti sacri*, Palermo: Assessorato Regionale dei Beni Culturali, p. 66.
- ⁴¹ Vitella M. (2008), *L'altare del duomo di Monreale*, in T. Verdon (Ed.), *L'arte cristiana in Italia. Età Moderna e Contemporanea*, Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo, pp. 156-157.
- ⁴² Sciortino L. (2011), *Monreale: il sacro e l'arte. La committenza degli Arcivescovi*, Bagheria: "Plumelia" Edizioni, p. 145.

References

- [1] Margiotta R.F. (2006), *Le arti applicate nell'Abbazia di Santa Maria del Bosco di Calatamauro. Note storiche e documenti*, in Marchese A.G. (Ed.), *L'abbazia di Santa Maria del Bosco di Calatamauro, tra memoria e recupero*, introduzione di C. Naro, Palermo: Provincia Regionale p. 300.
- [2] Archivio Storico Diocesi di Monreale, Fondo Governo Ordinario, sez. 9, serie 31.1, busta 790.
- [3] Reginella M. (2001), *scheda I,11*, in *Gloria Patri. L'arte come linguaggio del sacro*, Monreale-Palermo: Curia Arcivescovile di Monreale - Regione Siciliana, pp. 66-67. Also see Davì G. (2009), *Le robbiane di Sicilia: la Madonna col Bambino di Santa Maria del Bosco* e *scheda I.3*, in Guttilla M. (Ed.), *Tesori ritrovati 1968-2008 storia e cultura artistica nell'abbazia di Santa Maria del Bosco di Calatamauro e nel suo territorio dal XII al XIX secolo*, s.l.: Di Nicolò Edizioni, pp. 82-83.
- [4] Schirò A. (1894), *Il monastero di Santa Maria del Bosco di Calatamauro in Sicilia. Memorie e documenti*, Palermo: Tipografia e legatoria del Boccone del Povero, p. 283.
- [5] Schirò A. (1894), *Il monastero di Santa Maria del Bosco di Calatamauro in Sicilia. Memorie e documenti*, Palermo: Tipografia e legatoria del Boccone del Povero, p. 285.
- [6] Zalapì A. (2009), *Appendice documentaria*, in Guttilla M. (Ed.), *Tesori ritrovati 1968-2008 storia e cultura artistica nell'abbazia di Santa Maria del Bosco di Calatamauro e nel suo territorio dal XII al XIX secolo*, s.l.: Di Nicolò Edizioni, pp. 230-231.
- [7] The artwork has been identified by Lisa Sciortino in the deposit of the Galleria Regionale della Sicilia di Palazzo Abatellis.
- [8] Zalapì A. (2009), *Appendice documentaria*, in Guttilla M. (Ed.), *Tesori ritrovati 1968-2008 storia e cultura artistica nell'abbazia di Santa Maria del Bosco di Calatamauro e nel suo territorio dal XII al XIX secolo*, s.l.: Di Nicolò Edizioni, p. 228.
- [9] Zalapì A. (2009), *Appendice documentaria*, in Guttilla M. (Ed.), *Tesori ritrovati 1968-2008 storia e cultura artistica nell'abbazia di Santa Maria del Bosco di Calatamauro e nel suo territorio dal XII al XIX secolo*, s.l.: Di Nicolò Edizioni, p. 232.

- [10] Zalapì A. (2009), *Appendice documentaria*, in Guttilla M. (Ed.), *Tesori ritrovati 1968-2008 storia e cultura artistica nell'abbazia di Santa Maria del Bosco di Calatamauro e nel suo territorio dal XII al XIX secolo*, s.l.: Di Nicolò Edizioni, p. 240.
- [11] Schirò A. (1894), *Il monastero di Santa Maria del Bosco di Calatamauro in Sicilia. Memorie e documenti*, Palermo: Tipografia e legatoria del Boccone del Povero, p. 284.

Biographical notes

Maria Concetta Di Natale, Full Professor since 2003 in Museology and History of Collecting; she has taught since 1982 as Associate Professor at the Faculty of Letters at the University of Palermo, History of Applied Arts and Jewellery, History of Medieval Art, History of Modern Art, Theory of Restoration. On October 6th 2015 she was elected Director of the Department of Culture and Society, University of Palermo, Italy.

She has written many scientific essays on 14th-16th century Sicilian painting and miniatures and on 14th-19th century jewelry and the applied arts, such as *Gioielli di Sicilia*, a monograph that for the first time reconstructs the history of Sicilian jewels. She has managed the setup of many exhibitions and related catalogs. In 2006 she founded and currently directs the Observatory for decorative Arts in Italy “*Maria Accascina*”, a research instrument that publishes an online scientific journal. Since 2011 she is Director of the Diocesan Museum of Monreale.

Maurizio Vitella, Associated Professor of History of Modern Art at the Department of Culture and Society of the University of Palermo, Italy. In 1996 he obtained a PhD in Industrial design, Figurative and Applied Arts at the Politecnico of Milan. Between 1999 and 2002 he obtained a specialized qualification in “Identification, analysis and screening of fabrics” / “Conservation and restoration of ancient fabrics” at the Foundation for *Arte della Seta Lisio* in Florence.

He teaches History of Art in Sicily and in the Mediterranean Area on the Master Degree in History of Art and History of Modern Art, the Degree Course for the Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Heritage, DAMS, and Cultural Heritage: knowledge, management and enhancement, at the University of Palermo.

His research areas cover decorative arts, in particular, sacred jewelry and textile artefacts and the artistic period of the Counter Reformation and its regional development. From 2010 until 2015 he has been Vice-president of the Italian Association of Ecclesiastical Museums.

Summary

The recent decision to convert the Benedictine Dormitory in Monreale into an exhibition site offers the opportunity to enjoy the whole monumental complex where the wonderful cloister is the core attraction. It is on this site that the Norman Cathedral stands, brightly decorated with golden mosaics. The new exhibition has gathered together the artworks from the ruined abbey of Santa Maria del Bosco in Calatamauro and added them to the artefacts already exhibited at the Diocesan Museum. They include marble gravestones from the 16th-17th century church and those dating to the 18th century; one stone is in polychrome marble of the family of the canons, Candes and Donato;

another was used for the burial of the monks from the period of the Olivetan re-foundation, characterized by the Order's coat of arms and attributed to Girolamo Musca. There are also majolica tiles from the chapels in *cornu evangelij* (left side of the altar) adorned with large vegetal-shaped decorations, provided by Palermitan manufacturers in the mid-eighteenth century. They are found next to the remnants of the majolica tiles still *in situ*, executed in 1762 by the potters from Burgio, in Sicily. Rosario Rosso (also Russo) and Giuseppe Virgadamo. Also commissioned after the re-foundation of the holy temple are the four artworks by the painter Ippolito Ferrante, three of which, *Sacrificio di Isacco*, *Melchisedec* and *Giale e Sisar*, are on exhibition in the prestigious museum. Alongside these artworks are noteworthy textile artefacts made between the second half of the 16th and second half of the 18th centuries some of which are linked to the munificent figures of archbishops such as Ludovico II Torres and Francesco Testa.

Riassunto

La recente destinazione del dormitorio dei Padri Benedettini di Monreale a sede espositiva offre la possibilità di fruire dell'intero complesso monumentale che ha come fulcro lo splendido chiostro. Su esso si affaccia il Duomo normanno, sfavillante di tessere auree che compongono gli aulici mosaici. Il nuovo contesto espositivo raccoglie opere provenienti dalla distrutta abbazia di Santa Maria del Bosco di Calata-mauro, che vanno ad aggiungersi ai manufatti già esposti presso il Museo Diocesano. Ci si riferisce alle lapidi marmoree della chiesa cinque-seicentesca a quelle settecentesche, una in marmi di diversi colori della famiglia dei canonici Candes e Donato, l'altra per la sepoltura dei monaci del periodo della rifondazione olivetana caratterizzata dallo stemma dell'Ordine, ascritta a Girolamo Musca; alle mattonelle maiolicate provenienti dalle cappelle in *cornu evangelij*, ornate da decori vegetali ad ampio disegno, fornite da maestranze palermitane intorno alla metà del XVIII secolo, che affiancavano gli esigui resti di mattonelle maiolicate ancora *in situ*, eseguiti nel 1762 dai ceramisti di Burgio Rosario Rosso (Russo) e Giuseppe Virgadamo. Commissionate successivamente alla rifondazione del sacro tempio sono la serie di quattro opere del pittore Ippolito Ferrante, tre delle quali esposte nella prestigiosa sede museale, raffiguranti *Sacrificio di Isacco*, *Melchisedec* e *Giale e Sisar*. A tali opere sono affiancate, nel percorso espositivo, pregevoli manufatti tessili realizzati tra la seconda metà del XVI secolo e la seconda metà del XVIII: alcuni legati alle munifiche figure di arcivescovi Ludovico II Torres e Francesco Testa.