



CONVIVIUM

Exchanges and Interactions in the Arts of Medieval
Europe, Byzantium, and the Mediterranean
Seminarium Kondakovianum, Series Nova



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Europe, Byzantium, and the Mediterranean

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edited by **Serena Romano** & **Elisabetta Scirocco**
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Mediterranean Dialogues

across Time and Space

Serena Romano & Elisabetta Scirocco

This new issue of *Convivium* is the third miscellany of the journal founded in 2014 and which has now arrived at six numbers and its first Supplementum. We would like to recall here how the rule governing *Convivium* since its outset has been that of alternating the two issues published each year: one of these is thematic, and the other is a miscellany. The reason for this editorial policy is easy to explain: on the one hand, the thematic volumes intend to offer a focus on broad problematic areas, with the intention of providing a sharp and updated tool for all those interested in these problems. On the other hand, the “free” issues are configured in a more traditional way, based on the articles submitted from time to time that are always subjected to the peer-reviewing rule – not just a simple obligation for us, but above all a guarantee of objectivity and quality. And so, since the birth of the journal, this second format allows us to maintain contact with the widest possible scientific community and offers the opportunity to test the waters of our discipline and to bring together the most varied stimuli emerging from the world of research.

The freedom that we assure the authors in terms of subject, geographical areas and methodological approaches remains firmly attached to the pillars that have supported our journal since its creation and which are expressed in its title: the axis of the movement, exchanges and contacts, and the focus on the Mediterranean roots of our culture.



Around these nodes, we hope that this issue of *Convivium*, and those that will follow, will continue to attract a wide range of scholars and touch on an increasing number of questions, problems and geographical areas, stimulating reflection also on issues that seemingly stray from those strictly evoked in the journal's title.

Having laid down the basic criteria, we believe that the articles contained in the issue presented here speak for themselves: the choice is wide both geographically and chronologically, and, of course, methodologically. The opening essay by Avinoam Shalem, dedicated to the Grand Tour of the twenty-two year-old Meyer Schapiro in the eastern Mediterranean, seemed a perfect way to us to enter the world of *Convivium* through the front door. With his modern "medieval pilgrimage", the young Schapiro travelled in the 1920s through France, Spain, Italy, Greece, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and Turkey: the direct experience of a Mediterranean route crossing the boundaries of the discipline and its traditional interpretative categories. While Schapiro's drawings analyzed by Shalem enable us today to glimpse inside the construction of the art historian's epistemology, this example of micro-history stimulates a critical reflection on highly topical issues inside and outside the academic world, such as the existence and the value of a shared Mediterranean culture.

Mediterranean themes are also the subject of the two essays by Stefano D'Ovidio and Anastasia Moskvina, dedicated to two major Late Antique complexes associated with a baptismal function, and their decoration. In reconstructing spaces and functions of the basilica of San Giorgio Maggiore in Naples and the church dedicated to St. Stephen at Umm er-Rasas, the authors propose two different approaches: one seeking to recompose the weaves of history by sewing together their material evidence with textual and iconographic sources, and the other more markedly based on archaeology and the reading of the traces of function in space. This ideal dialogue between the heart of Jordan and the Italian peninsula has its reverberation in the *Human flight on a fabulous superbird* which Lev Kapitaikin follows backwards, starting from an extraordinary work of multicultural synthesis, the ceiling of the Palatine Chapel in Palermo, and proposing a new interpretation of the meaning and genesis of these images in the Iranian and central Asian traditions. This contribution well represents those "exchanges and interactions" which *Convivium* has focused on from the beginning, and with which we inaugurate another new feature, in the spirit of the flexibility characterising our journal, for what is published here is the first part of the essay submitted

by the author; the second one, the conclusion of this flight, will be published in the next “free” issue.

The search for the origins and paths of a specific iconography is an aspect tackled by other contributors to this issue. Athanasios Semoglou has dedicated himself to the analysis within the Eastern painting tradition of an unusual version of the Transfiguration in the post-Byzantine world with Elijah and Moses transported by angels, whose first known appearance is to be found in the icon of the Pereslavl Zalesky Cathedral (ca. 1403). Laura Zamparo and Ilaria Molteni have concentrated their attention on illuminated manuscripts, once again with a special sensitivity for exchanges and interactions. While the recovery of the Late Antique frontispiece with angels emerges in the study of Zamparo with all the evidence we may expect from the Ottonian era, the route followed by Molteni to track down the *mise en page* of chivalric novels of Italian origin is more tortuous: it is like an underground river that emerges from a Late Antique spring and flows through Byzantium and Norman southern Italy, passing from historiated chronicles to the Greek and Latin classics, and finally spilling out to give birth to the heroes and courteous scenes of the French romances in the manuscripts produced in Genoa between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

Serena Romano’s essay on Filippo Rusuti touches on another of *Convivium*’s areas of particular interest, historiography, rekindling attention on an artist whose dynamic and “international” development between Rome and France has concealed his true significance. A new photographic campaign on the only work signed by Rusuti, the mosaic on the façade of Santa Maria Maggiore, which is published here for the first time (underscoring the care *Convivium* takes with the quality of its color images), and the inspection of the restoration work carried out on the mosaics allow to pay it greater justice, and to revive the issue of the role the artist played in late-thirteenth-century Rome: in the dialogue between the two major aspects of his figurative culture, the recovery of antique techniques and motifs, and the inclusions of the latest Frenchified Gothic culture.

This contact with the substratum of Antiquity is something that has never ceased to enliven the mental and visual experiences of European cultures in the Mediterranean basin, together with the dialogue between these same cultures, between north and south, between east and west. These are the themes which gave rise to the *Convivium* adventure; this issue, it seems to us, shows their continuing, and growing vitality.

