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Modes and methods of power consolidation in the
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Arborea in the 14th century

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Modes and methods of power consolidation in the Mediterranean courts: the case of the *Giudicato* of Arborea in the 14th century

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Abstract

Symbols of power and the use of images to achieve political objectives have been the subject of an increasing number of studies, through decades of scholarship. In this regard, the coats of arms, as well as gold objects, paintings and sculptures are of particular interest not only as status symbols and artistic manufactures *per se* but also as examples of products commissioned by the élites, often sovereigns, to consolidate their own consensus. During the 14th century, there was a number of important personalities who exploited images as a visual mode to consolidating the authority. Among these were the King of Aragon Pedro *el Ceremonioso* and the King of Naples Robert of Anjou, both two widely researched as study cases. The present research focuses on Mariano IV, ruler of the *Giudicato* of Arborea, and his relations with other contemporary homologues during the mid-Fourteenth century, when Sardinia was *de facto* entering within the territorial control of the Crown of Aragon.

Keywords

Commissioners; Power; Sardinia; Crown of Aragon; Kingdom of Naples.

Riassunto

Le rappresentazioni del potere e l'uso delle immagini con scopi politici è oggetto oramai da anni di un crescente numero di studi. Stemmi, oggetti di oreficeria, dipinti e sculture sono presi in esame non solo per il loro *status* di oggetti d'arte ma anche come prodotto della volontà di committenti facoltosi, spesso sovrani, che li utilizzano per accrescere il consenso intorno a loro. Il Trecento registra importanti personalità che utilizzano le immagini come forma di consolidamento visuale della loro autorità. Tra questi Pietro *il Cerimonioso*, sovrano della Corona d'Aragona, e Roberto d'Angiò, re di Napoli, costituiscono dei casi - studio ampiamente esaminati. In questo saggio si vogliono offrire alcune riflessioni relative alla figura di Mariano IV, sovrano del Giudicato d'Arborea, in rapporto ai governanti a lui coevi, in un momento storico, la metà del XIV secolo, nel quale la Sardegna sta entrando *de facto* nei territori della Corona d'Aragona.

Parole chiave

Committenti; Potere; Sardegna; Corona d'Aragona; Regno di Napoli.

1. *Power in the Giudicato of Arborea: symbols and use of images*

A modern analysis of historical facts and the material culture of the time provide a highly systematic outline of Sardinia in the 1300s; there were a number of key figures whose charisma emerges not only from historical sources but also from artifacts and relics that have recently been focused in their specific historical context (Usai, 2018). Fourteenth century Sardinia has been involved in the clash between the Crown of Aragon and the *Giudicato* of Arborea¹, the latter continuing to bear witness to the institutional fabric formed in the previous centuries². In addition to the latter political contrasts, another part of the jigsaw was the action of Pisan and Genoese noble families³, who were established in the northern and southern parts of the island and unwilling to cohabitate with the Catalans⁴.

Particularly interesting, for the political and cultural outcomes of both the reigns, were the respective courts, where *Pedro* – latterly known as *el Ceremonioso* – and Mariano and Giovanni, sons of the *giudice* Ugone II, grew up and were raised. They were chiefly responsible, either directly or indirectly, of the development of works that served to convey clear messages connected with their ideology of power. Mariano IV, specifically, played a fundamental role as a leader during a critical moment of medieval history in Sardinia and beyond⁵. He was probably born in 1319 and was sent to Barcelona with his brother in 1323, to seal the alliance with the Crown. At the Catalan court, the two offspring of the *giudicale* Arborea⁶ family had an education suitable to their rank and were treated as members of the ruling family. In the years between 1331 and 1332 the

¹ The passage from a Byzantine periphery to an autonomous, subdivided entity known as *Giudicati* is certain only from the second half of the XI century. Its formation has been profoundly debated by the scholarship. The first witness of the existence, in Sardinia, of a four analogue dignitaries, the *giudici*, is included in the letter of Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085) written in Capua October 14th 1073, where the Pope warned Orzocco of Cagliari, Orzocco of Arborea, Mariano of Torres and Costantino of Gallura and their populations to respect the Catholicism and to come back to the Roman Church: Schena - Tognetti, 2011, p. 10, pp. 31-32 doc. I-3. On the four *Giudicati*'s development see Solmi, 1917; Brook - Casula - Costa - Oliva - Pavoni -Tangheroni, 1984; Casula, 1994; Meloni, 2002, pp. 1-32; Ortu, 2005; Zedda - Pinna, 2007; Gallinari, 2010, pp. 147-187; Schena, 2013, pp. 41-54; Serreli, 2013, pp. 63-82.

² For more information on the four *giudici*-ruled areas, see Solmi, 1917; Brook - Casula - Costa - Oliva - Pavoni - Tangheroni, 1984; Casula, 1994; Meloni, 2002, pp. 1-32; Ortu, 2005; Zedda - Pinna, 2007, pp. 27-118; Serreli, 2013, pp. 63-81.

³ On the noble powers in Sardinia, see Soddu, 2017.

⁴ On the various aspects of the Catalans in Sardinia see, at least, Oliva - Schena, 2014; Ortu, 2017.

⁵ Meloni, 1993, pp. 41-55; Gallinari, 2009, pp. 149-183; 2013 and 2018, pp. 65- 73.

⁶ The terms of *giudicato* and *giudici*, to frame respectively the polities and their rulers in Sardinia from XI to XIV centuries, does not have a corresponding English word. For this, they will be formatted in *Italic*.

young Mariano received the castles of Goceano and Marmilla from his father Ugone, a provision ratified by the Catalan king in 1332 (Conde y Delgado de Molina 2005, p. 372-374, c. 308); between 1333 and 1335 Alfonso IV conceded some tenures of the Principality to Mariano and his brother Giovanni, among which were the village of Molins del Rey and the castle of Gelida. In 1336 Mariano married the Catalan noblewoman Timbors de Rocabertí and was appointed as knight⁷.

The long stay of Mariano and Giovanni in the Court of Barcelona allowed them to first-hand witness its customs and ceremonies. Back in Sardinia, they would apply the same habits in their tenures, trying to replicate them.

A set of documents written between 1336 and 1362 by Catalan notaries and preserved at the *Arxiu Històric de Protocols de Barcelona* (Lusci, 2014, pp. 135-136; Usai, 2018, pp. 345-348) revealed details of daily practices of court. The sons of Ugone II, Pietro, Giovanni and Mariano together with his wife *Timbors* are all often mentioned in the notary Acts of the time. For example, among notes a list of the expenses for the wedding banquets of Mariano and his brother Giovanni, both celebrated in Barcelona, is written in an accounts book among with the purchases of meat and other foods. Also the preparation of their return to Sardinia is mentioned (Lusci, 2014, p. 140). There is even a reference to the payment of multi-coloured woollen cloths as well as other valuable objects destined as presents to the family of the hereditary prince.

In 1338 the *domnikellu* Mariano was given the title of count of the 'Goceano' and Lord of the Marmilla and a few years later, perhaps in 1341 or 1342, he returned to Sardinia, becoming *giudice* in 1347⁸.

By 1362, when relations with the Crown of Aragon had become strained, it is believed that a series of objects belonging to Mariano's wife and described in detail in a Notary Act, arrived from Barcelona. Among the goods listed were two salt cellars, one decorated with a winged serpent, the other with an unrecognizable animal; four silver plated swords and a belt all decorated with silver; twenty-one sacramental objects with a silver *Agnus Dei* image imprinted on each of them, in addition to a series of other silver objects. The latter included a chalice with base, two jugs, twelve bowls as well as four helmets, "two woollen cloth bancals showing the house of Arborea's family emblem,

⁷ The *giudicale* family of Arborea joined Catalonia since the half of the XII Century, by the wedding of the ruler Barisone and Agalbursa of Cervera Bas, daughter of the Count of Barcelona Ramon Berenguer I. Thanks to the union, the *giudici* of Arborea became the Viscounts of Bas, until the end of their offspring. The wedding also determined the development of their Coat of Arms, with the union between the Tree of Arborea and the Catalan Coat: D'Arienzo, 2015, p. 333.

⁸ On the figure of Mariano IV consult the works of Carta Raspi, 1934; Oliva, 1987; Serreli, 2003, pp. 43-52; Mattone, 2008 with previous bibliography; Sanna, 2008; Soddu, 2008, pp. 39-71; Lusci, 2014, pp. 135-162; Soddu in press, pp. 15-16.

other pieces of cloth and two fur-covered canvasses”⁹ (Lusci, 2014, p. 144). It is thought likely that Mariano participated in jousting tournaments, as the swords and helmets would seem to indicate. As Rosanna Lusci affirms “these objects, in addition to others already mentioned, are the kinds of goods and objects that a noble family (such as this one from Arborea) of the time would count among its possessions” (Lusci, 2014, p. 145; Usai, 2018, pp. 345-349).

The image of the young prince Mariano (**fig. 1**) painted on a polyptych in Ottana (Nuoro) and dating back to the second quarter of the 14th century, remains one of island’s most interesting artwork relics from the 1300s¹⁰. The *giudice*¹¹ is portrayed kneeling with his hands clasped, at the foot of a painting of the *Madonna and child*. The inscription at the base of the throne on which Maria and the infant Jesus are sitting, proclaims Mariano as *D[omi]n[u]s Gociani et M[amille]*, a title which is then changed in 1338 to *Comes de Guciani* (Zurita, 1668, p. 466; Soddu, in press, p. 20). It is this specific year that this author hypothesizes as the date of the portrait of the future *giudice* in the polyptych in Ottana, the same year in which he took the title of count. I believe that Alessandro Soddu makes a fair assumption when he says that if Mariano had already been a count when the polyptych was painted, his title would have been indicated, rather than with one that would at the time have been obsolete¹². Although Sylvester was officially head of the Diocese from 1339, his symmetrical positioning in relation to Mariano does not preclude dating the polyptych to 1338 rather than the traditional estimate that places it between 1339 and 1344 (Usai, 2018, pp. 170-182).

⁹ “Item tradidistis nobis ex alia parte quatuor elm[o]s abtos et bonos a iunyr et duos bancallos panni lane cum signis Arboree. Item unam peciam panni de preseto virmillio (sic) sive rubeo et aliam peciam panni meli- narum lividis et duas pannas de vayres. Item unam peciam panni de preseto virmillio (sic) sive rubeo et aliam peciam panni meli- narum lividis et duas pannas de vayres”: Barcelona, AHPB, Pere Martí, *Llibre comù, 1362 maig 6 - 1362 juliol 28*, ff. 77v-78v in Lusci, 2014, pp. 155-156.

¹⁰ The painting is a *tempera* on a panel with gold background and is divided into three main sections: the central section contains saints Nicholas and Francis, who are foregrounded and positioned in two acute-arched niches, almost two single windows. The work was quite clearly commissioned by Mariano, who was *giudice* at the time, together with the bishop of Ottana, Sylvester, both pictured at the foot of the Virgin’s throne at the top of the painting. The central section contains saints Nicholas and Francis, while the side sections show eight stories from their lives. For more details see Usai, 2018, pp. 170-187.

¹¹ Mariano is dressed in red, with a lined vair fur cloak resting on his shoulders, the usual attire for people of rank. His long sword rests at his side held firm by a belt; swords were symbols of royalty and an essential accessory for any knight. With his full head of blonde hair, the young man’s face perfectly represents a portrait of a nobleman, raised in Barcelona and well versed in customs, traditions, social practices and institutions of the Catalan court: Usai, 2018, pp. 170-182.

¹² My sincerest thanks go to friend and colleague Alessandro Soddu for our regular exchanges of opinion on the subject and for his precious suggestions.

It is not easy to establish how much influence the layman commissioner of the work had on the choice of details of the polyptych. If the Franciscan Sylvester, the then bishop of Ottana did indeed have a role in deciding what details should be included in the painting, it is also probably fair to assume that the *donnikellu* wanted his say in how he would be represented in the work that he had at least in part helped to finance. It is therefore conceivable that it was Mariano himself who suggested what details the painting should contain, perhaps using as a model one or more of the paintings he had seen at the court in Barcelona during his long years of residency in the Catalan city. One example that can be cited by way of comparison, given that its analogous chronology places it in the same cultural setting that produced the Ottana polyptych, is the effigy of Enrique de Trastámara, the king of Castille and León between 1369 and 1379, whose figure appears in the panel painting *Virgen del Tobed*, dated to between 1359 and 1362 (Silva Maroto, 2013, pp. 16-19). Though not yet king, Enrique is depicted at the feet of the Virgin with an already crowned head, together with his wife Juana Manuel of Castile and two children. The future sovereign wanted his future status to be portrayed, even though he was not king yet. He is shown kneeling, with his hands clasped together and a sword at his side, an essential addition to confirm his social status. This is not the place to do any formal comparison between the two works, thus it could be pointed out how, from a cultural and conceptual perspective, the portrait of Mariano belongs positively to the category of laudatory artistical portraits (Usai, 2018, p. 348).

The portraits of some of the *giudici* from the House of Arborea, located in the presbyteries of two churches in state territory, are examples of this mode of self-representation and ostentation of power, motivated in particular by a period of political and institutional crisis¹³.

The most well-known of these relief sculptures would seem to represent Eleanor of Arborea with her long hair resting on her shoulders; it was identified in one of the four corbels (**fig. 2**) that support the vault of the presbytery in the church of Saint Gavino in San Gavino Monreale (South Sardinia) (Casula, 1985; Spiga, 1992; Cannas, 2005, pp. 445-460). The church is situated near the residential castle of the same name located on the border between the *Giudicato* of Arborea and the former homologous of Cagliari. The original structure,

¹³ In Sardinia as elsewhere, the XIV century saw radical transformations and transfer of power in political and institutional hegemonies. During the middle period of the 14th century, most of the ruling powers in the western Mediterranean underwent a change of command: in France the Capetians handed the scepter of power over to the Valois; in Naples the Angevins had (in 1266) already taken over from the Hohenstaufen; in Castile, the Trastámara consolidated their power: Molinas Figueras, 2013, p. 224. In such a volatile context, celebrating the antiquity of one's lineage and the continuity of rulers was a way to consolidate and affirm power, at least by visual means.

which dates back to the second half of the XIV century, has preserved the quadrangular plan presbyterium with its ribbed cross vault¹⁴ (fig. 3). In addition to Eleanor, the supports on which the ribs rest also reproduce the images of her husband Brancaloneo Doria, her father Mariano IV with crown and sceptre (fig. 4) and Ugone III with his daughter Benedetta (Casula, 1984, pp. 9-28; Casula, 1985, pp. 74-85; Coroneo, 1993, p. 283). Likewise, the monastic church of Saint Claire in Oristano also contains figures that seem to represent the ruling family (fig. 5). Figurative representations found in the apse are presumed to be of Mariano II, *giudice* between 1250 and 1291, Pietro III and his wife Costanza of Saluzzo e, and again Mariano IV¹⁵ (fig. 6). These anthropomorphic representations have round heads encased in tiny bodies from which disproportionately large hands sprout from the rest of the figure (Usai, 2011, pp. 84-85). The assumption that these relief sculptures must indeed represent members of the *giudici* House finds confirmation in the fact that producing such works was common practice at the time in the main courts of Europe (Vitolo, 2016, p. 247).

One detail to note regarding the examples studied of busts of important personalities in Sardinia is that they have crowns on their heads. The church of Saint Claire in Oristano, for example, houses a number of emblems of the royal house, such as uprooted trees and the coat of arms of the Crown of Aragon¹⁶. In addition to ashlar on the façade, above the main doorway, inside the church there are friezes decorated with alternating sequences of the crests of the rulers and phytomorphic motifs; they are positioned both on the intrados and on the external wall of the arch that leads into the presbyterium. The crest of the royal house also appears on Costanza of Saluzzo's tombstone, formerly located in the cloisters of the convent but housed today inside the main body of the church

¹⁴ Although the building has undergone several alterations, it preserves evidence of its medieval origins due to the artefacts found during archaeological excavations, which date back to the XIII and XIV centuries: Salvi, 1991, pp. 223-237; in addition, inscriptions found pinpoint the *post* and *ante quem* of construction, to be between 1347 and 1388. The earliest date is inscribed on an ashlar, while the latest is on an inscription painted on the plaster. Both are in the presbytery, the only part of the building that still conserves its original medieval forms: Coroneo, 1993, p. 283; Cannas, 2005, p. 456-458.

¹⁵ For biographical summaries of the people cited, see respectively Sanna, 2008 (Mariano II); Schena, 2015 (Pietro III and Costanza of Saluzzo); Mattone, 2008 (Mariano IV) available at <[www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/\(Dizionario biografico\)>](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/(Dizionario biografico)>).

¹⁶ The Arborea *giudici* had both official state and personal crests. The state emblem was an uprooted tree in a silver field. In the second half of the XIII century, it is likely that the members of the Bas-Serra House, (Casula, 1984, p. 41), had already added their own emblem (the coat of arms of the Crown of Aragon) to the state crest, placing one beside the other. Mariano IV initially continued to use the state emblem and the personal crest with the coat of arms of Aragon side by side, over or below the uprooted Tree. Only later, with the evolution of the political situation and the straining of relations with the Catalan court in 1353, did he remove the coat of arms to leave only the uprooted tree: Casula, 1984, pp. 50-51.

(Tasca, 1986, p. 61; Coroneo, 1988, pp. 69-107). Crests were also painted on some the corbels on the building's original wood covering (fig. 7), but have now been repositioned in the choir (Usai, 2018, p. 83) (fig. 8).

The assumption that the *giudici* of Arborea wanted to depict themselves in a religious building gains further credibility in virtue of the fact that documented sources generally confirm the link between the island's rulers and, in particular, the church of Saint Claire in Oristano by the middle of the 14th century¹⁷. The Writer did several analyses of this particular church and its paintings¹⁸.

In spite of some difficulties regarding chronological accuracy and the various historical phases in the life of this church, the considerable amount of documentation dating back to the XIV century helps to clarify several questions. A series of Papal missives serve to reveal how in the 1300s the church was regularly attended by the ruling family: by an Act dated 30th June 1345, the Pope granted the *giudice* Pietro III right of entry to the monastery, specifying that this also included the pre-existing church of Saint Vincent Martyr, of which traces were found when restoration work on the flooring was undertaken during the 1980s (Pau, 1994, p. 27). Costanza of Saluzzo, wife of the *giudice* Pietro III, bequeathed the "villa de Molins del Rey" in Catalonia, to the monastery in Oristano (Pau, 1994, pp. 30-33). When her husband died, Costanza secluded herself in the clarian monastery where she was afterly buried, as her tombstone testifies (Tasca, 1986, p. 61; Coroneo, 1988, pp. 69-107; Usai, 2018, p. 83). Another Act of considerable importance was promulgated by Mariano IV in 1368; the act granted the Clarian nuns a perpetual endowment of 260 lire, therefore binding also to the sovereigns' heirs, and further confirming the ruling house's devotion and strong connection with the Monastery (Usai, 2011, pp. 77-99; Usai, 2018, pp. 85-86).

As regards Sardinia, the grand patron of the monastery of Oristano (among other buildings) was Mariano IV of Arborea. Recent studies have revealed just how influential his political actions were, and in the opinion of this author, how

¹⁷ This author is not convinced of Maria Cristina Cannas' suggestion that the effigies in the two relief sculptures located on the north flank of the church of San Pantaleo in Dolianova (South Sardinia) are of Mariano II of Arborea and of a bishop. Built between the XII and XIII centuries, the church contains rich decorative displays which are today only partially visible due to the decay of the stone. The figure in question does indeed have crown on his head and a staff in hand, but the lack of further details suggest it is prudent to exercise caution. On this particular church, see Coroneo - Serra, 2004, pp. 221-231; Usai, 2018, pp. 61-80; Usai - Nonne, 2018, pp. 497-504. For her interpretation of the relief sculptures, see Cannas, 1992, pp. 220-221 and 2005, pp. 452-453.

¹⁸ The church was either founded or restored from 1343 onwards and due to restoration work in the 20th century, today has a longitudinal plan, with two side chapels and a quadrangular plan presbyterium surmounted by ribbed cross vaults. The naves and aisles have a similar covering, though built in modern times. A choir leans against the façade and houses some of the wooden corbels of the original trussed roof. The gabled façade is surmounted by a small belfry at the top: Usai, 2018, pp. 81-86.

important his actions were in terms of cultural development as well. Although he had a strained relationship with his brother Giovanni, with whom he grew up and was raised in Barcelona, together they were responsible for two major works such as the above-cited Ottana Polyptych and the pictorial cycle at Nostra Signora de Sos Regnos Altos in Bosa¹⁹ (fig. 9).

It is not certain which one of the two brothers formally commissioned the Bosa's paintings, because the proximity to the events which would result in a conflict between Mariano and Giovanni and the latter imprisonment in 1349. We know that Giovanni lived in Bosa for 10 years with his wife from Barcelona, Sibilla de Montcada, who was allowed to remain in the castle after her husband had been imprisoned; we also know that Mariano IV took possession of the castle and made it one of its headquarters until his death. It is clear then that both brothers considered the church and the castle to be hugely important (Tasca, 2000, pp. 1018-19). The pictorial cycle has been the subject of numerous studies²⁰, which have highlighted the role played by the iconographer, who made a series of specific choices concerning the themes to be dealt with.

Given the particular nature of the choices made, it seems very likely that the patron-commissioner (Brenk, 1994, pp. 203-18)²¹ was a religious person, while the person to finance the work was more likely to be a layman, probably Giovanni of Arborea. However, with regard to the pictorial cycle in Bosa, it is difficult to explain the inclusion of certain figures such as *Saint Constantine* and *Saint Helen* on the counter-façade. The explanation previously given by art critics (Poli, 1999), that the central theme of the paintings was Franciscan mysticism, is not totally convincing. While Constantine and Elena on the counter-façade clearly belong to the iconography of the period, this author has recently advanced a different hypothesis on the whole pictorial cycle, using a series of specific events as the key to a new interpretation. In 1342, thanks to two separate Papal Bulls – *Gratias agimus* and *Nuper carissime* – the Franciscans obtain guardianship of Holy Sites, requested by the Neapolitan Royals, Robert of Anjou and Sancha of Majorca. As a result, the sanctuaries and the chapels of

¹⁹ The pictorial cycle extends around three walls (northern, southern and western) in the church of Nostra Signora de Sos Regnos Altos, situated inside the Castle of Serravalle (also known as Malaspina) in Bosa, in a series of juxtaposed paintings. Until 1349, the castle was the seat of the *Signoria* of Giovanni of Arborea, brother of Mariano and powerful feudal lord in the island. On this subject, see Tasca, 1999; 2000, pp. 1013-1043, and 2013; Biccione - Vecciu, 2013, pp. 341-364; Milanese, 2016, p. 301; Soddu, 2016, p. 292. On the Malaspina *Signoria* in Sardinia see also Soddu, 2005, 2014b and 2017; Cioppi, 2006, s.n.p.

²⁰ More recently, see Usai, 2018, pp. 29-34 with further bibliographical references.

²¹ More detailed studies of various aspects can be found in *Committenti*, 1992 and in the more recent Quintavalle, 2011. Among studies on distinct geographical areas or aspects, see also Tosco, 1997; 2003, pp. 20-26 and 2009, pp. 25-54 and 2012; Pace, 2000 and Gardner, 2015.

Monte Sion as well as the basilica of Saint S epulchre come under the guardianship of the Minors of Saint Cenacle (Golubovich, 1918, pp. 559-563; Cardini, 2015, pp. 57-66).

The guardianship of the places associated with the life and the passion of Christ are inseparably bound to the great veneration that the followers of Saint Francis had for the Cross of Christ, since according to their traditions, stigmata had manifested on the body of Saint Francis on September 14th, the day of the exaltation of the Holy Cross (Piras, 2004, pp. 305-315; Baert, 2013). This may then have been the event that inspired the creator of the Pictorial cycle to want to celebrate the Franciscan order and their connection with Holy Sites. In point of fact, inside the church are paintings of the *Adoration of the Magi*, set in Bethlehem, the *Coena Domini*, but also Helen, who found the Cross of Christ, and Constantine, who represents the true root of Christianity (fig. 10).

The event seems to be further celebrated through the glorification of the Angevin sovereigns, by means of the newly sainted Ludovico of Toulouse, brother of Robert of Anjou. It also appears that the person who financed the pictorial cycle wanted to leave a personal mark, as the presence of Saints Lawrence and Francis and probably Nicola would seem to indicate. These are the names of Giovanni of Arborea's brothers, who accompanied Pedro *el Ceremonioso* into war during the period in question (Ortu, 2017). It would therefore seem plausible to date the pictorial cycle in Bosa to between 1342 and 1343, years in which Giovanni was the most powerful feudal Lord in the island, faithful to the *Ceremonioso* and very much attached to the Franciscans, as family tradition dictated²².

Much of the additional decorative work carried out on the church of Saint Claire in Oristano during the 1360s was possible thanks to the generosity of Mariano IV; the recently discovered and restored paintings in the church quite probably date back to this period²³. Mariano also had a hand in the production of other works, such as at Saint Peter of Zuri (Ghilarza - Oristano), where mural paintings were once visible (though now lost) and at Saint Anthony Abate in Orosei (Nuoro), where family crests are still visible on the plasterwork²⁴. He was most likely involved in decorative artwork at a lesser-known monument,

²² This interpretation was first suggested by Usai, 2018, pp. 53-55, with further bibliographical references.

²³ Only two of the original paintings from the whole pictorial cycle that was intended to decorate the inside of the Church still remain and are now in the second chapel to the right. One shows the Madonna and child on a throne and figures to the side, on the left, and a *Crucifixion* on the right: Usai, 2018, pp. 88-93.

²⁴ For a detailed analysis of the questions relating to these two monuments, see a recent work published by this author: Usai, 2018, pp. 81-132.

i.e. the church of Saint Lawrence in Silanus (Nuoro)²⁵. On the north and south walls of the church are fragments of paintings which although known to critics, have never been studied in detail (Serra, 1990, p. 31). Although Renata Serra has dated them to the first half of the 13th century, they are more likely to belong to the mid-14th century (Usai, 2018, pp. 132-135) and were part of a district curatorial property transfer from the Marghine area to Prince Mariano²⁶.

The area of Marghine was a territory that the future Mariano IV purchased and which remained in his possession. As stated previously, it seems evident that much of the island's decorative artwork during the 1300s was carried out in monuments recently purchased by sovereign and noble authorities, almost as a territory-marking strategy. The paintings in Bosa date back to when the Malaspina castle passed under the control of the House of Arborea; the same goes for the paintings in Saint Anthony Abate in Orosei. Indeed, these paintings provide us with a clear visible indication of the evolution of political power. It was tangible evidence of how Mariano IV wielded his power as a communicative force; his formative years in Barcelona at the court of the sovereigns of the crown of Aragon educated him in the importance of the methods of affirming power, which the court of Arborea adopted from the second quarter of the 1300s onwards. The ex-novo decoration of buildings acquired through territorial acquisitions, the displaying of dynastic coats of arms, the self-representation in Ottana's polyptych can be interpreted, today, as "an effective means, suitable for communicating the elements constituting that power, but without any theoretical claim to legitimacy" (Lucherini, 2015, p. 298).

2. Some comparisons: Crown of Aragon and Kingdom of Naples

Trying to expand the vision to much better structured political realities of the Mediterranean, as Paola Vitolo has noted between the thirteenth and fourteenth century such initiatives having a strong symbolic impact were designed to celebrate the prestige of dynasties, their strength and their holiness. The placing of royal graves inside the abbey of Westminster, in London, or Saint - Denis, near Paris, or even the construction of the Sainte Chapelle, in the latter city, bear witnesses to the clear link between these reigning dynasties and their religious devotion:

²⁵ Standing near a limestone quarry, the Church was built using volcanic stone, and has a single rectangular nave with an east-facing apse and a wooden roof covering: Delogu, 1953, pp. 140-141 and Coroneo, 1993, pp. 154.

²⁶ In 1331 the Arborea Ugone II gave his son, the prince Mariano, the castle of Goceano and the *curatorias* of Dore, Anela, Marghine, Costavalle, Nuoro: Soddu, 2008, p. 48.

souverains et princes trouvèrent des arguments efficaces et des symboles de légitimité, auxquels ils firent surtout appel en temps de crise dynastique et de tensions internes, en les réinterprétant souvent avec beaucoup d'originalité²⁷.

Until the third decade of the 14th century, the Crown of Aragon had never even planned the building of Royal tombs, probably due to lack of funds that had all been destined to the costs of war campaigns and territorial conquests. It was only during the reign of Pedro *el Ceremonioso* (1336-1387) that already deceased members of his dynasty were removed and brought to a place befitting their regal status. In fact, over a period of three decades the sovereign commissioned the gradual construction of a royal pantheon in the monastery of Poblet, where the remains of Alfonso *el Casto* and Jaime *el Conquistador* were laid to rest and came to be considered as relics to be treasured (García Marsilla, 2000, p. 571). A succession of people took over the direction of building works. Pere de Guines, Aloi de Montbrai, Jaume Cascalls, Jordi de Déu all maintained close relations with the monarch, who often intervened directly in making choices concerning the building work (Molina Figueras, 2013, p. 235). It was the start of a communications strategy designed to send visual messages and create propaganda. For example, instead of earth burials, above-ground sepulchres were built, all the same height and all showing their royal insignias that highlighted the close links between the various dynasties. In 1337, the importance of the royal sepulchre of Poblet was sanctioned by the donation, to the monastery, of the chronicles of the counts of Barcelona and the Kings of Aragon. Poblet consequently became a central symbol of the dynasty, echoing its glorious past and acting as a guardian of its historical memory (García Marsilla, 2000, p. 573). Joan Molina Figueras states that

ningún monarca mostró mayor interés por la preservación de la gloriosa memoria del linaje como Pedro IV. Dan fe de ello las crónicas que escribió e hizo escribir a sus colaboradores (desde la dedicada a su propio reinado a las que versaban sobre la historia dinástica) así como los múltiples sermones de cortes, cartas y discursos públicos en los que se rememoraban las heroicas gestas de sus antecesores²⁸.

²⁷ "Sovereigns and princes found effective arguments and symbols of legitimacy, to which they mainly appealed in times of dynastic crisis and internal tensions, often reinterpreting them with great originality": Vitolo, 2016, p. 248 with further bibliographical references.

²⁸ "No monarch showed greater interest in the preservation of the glorious memory of the lineage as Pedro IV. The chronicles that he wrote and made write to his collaborators (from the one dedicated to his own reign to those that dealt with dynastic history) as well as the multiple sermons of courts, letters and public speeches in which the heroic ones were remembered deeds of his predecessors": Molina Figueras, 2013, p. 220.

Pedro *el Ceremonioso* was thus a staunch promoter of a propaganda campaign aimed at glorifying the Aragonese monarchy, through the use of rhetoric and grandiloquence (Corrao, 1994, pp. 133-156). The preservation and spread of its dynastic heritage, considered to be the pillar on which to base this campaign of grand celebration, became almost an obsession for the sovereign, who exercised strict control over all activities connected to this very purpose. This is how we should interpret Pedro IV's personal involvement in many of the inscriptions dedicated to him and his predecessors (Molina Figueras, 2013, p. 220). Letters sent by the court chancellor's office and the Royal House's purchase orders contain annotations made by the sovereign himself, while the task of writing court sermons and solemn speeches, clearly intended as propaganda, was supervised step by step by the monarch himself (Gimeno Blay, 2006, pp. 145-146). It was mainly through the authoritative displays of pomp and ceremony, royal spectacles and the use of emblems that the memory of the royal dynasty was kept alive (Molina Figueras, 2013, p. 221). With this in mind, it is therefore not surprising that two extraordinary works of glorification of the monarchic power were carried out in the central years of the fourteenth century: the aforementioned royal pantheon in the church of the monastery of Poblet and the series of alabaster effigies, of the eleven counts and of the eight count-kings of Barcelona, already in the *Palacio Reyal* (Molina Figueras, 2003, pp. 193-213). Records of the sculptures entrusted and undertaken by Aloi de Montbrai between 1340 and 1342 (Rubió i Lluch 1908) can only be found in documented records at the time. There is no description detailing the forms of these effigies, which took several decades (until at least 1360) to complete. However, it emerges from some documents that their ultimate location was to be in recesses or capitals of the recently finished *Salón del Tinell*²⁹ a vast hall inside of the Royal Palace, with a rectangular plan marked out clearly by diaphragm arches (Molina Figueras, 2013, p. 222).

As we have already noted, in the mid 1300s the Aragonese-Catalan Crown consolidated its legitimacy by means of celebrating the history of its lineage in order to strengthen its authority with the passing of power from one generation to the next (Cingolani, 2007, p. 2012). With the commissioning of a series commemorative sculptures of its rulers, already displayed in the *Salón del Tinell*

²⁹ Today the Hall is bare with no ornamental decorations. It is difficult to imagine how the effigies might have been arranged inside, though perhaps following the chronological order of rulers or perhaps according to similar characteristics of each ruler. As for the model that was followed in designing this space, the most plausible hypothesis is a connection with the hall of the *Palais de la Cité* in Paris, decorated during the time of Phillip the Fair with a series of sculptured effigies of recent monarchs: Bennert, 1992, pp. 46-58.

at the Royal Palace in Barcelona, the monarch Pedro *el Ceremonioso* manifests the Dynasty's continuity, which was in itself a basis to strengthen the Crown's legitimacy and prestige. The visual impact of the sculptures on those that beheld them must have been highly effective (Molina Figueras, 2013, p. 223).

Meanwhile, between 1310 and 1340 in Naples, the Angevin royals Robert and Sancha contributed to the financing and construction of the church of Saint Claire (ex-Corpus Christi or Holy Host), built next to a double Franciscan monastery: "Elle fondit dans une perspective unique la célébration de la dynastie angevine et une dévotion sincère et profonde à l'Eucharistie, que la reine Sancia avait héritée de sa tradition familiale et qui était l'un des traits les plus remarquables de sa religiosité" (Vitolo, 2016, p. 251)³⁰. Although known to have been selected as the dynasty's royal pantheon, it is still not clear whether it was originally intended as such or if that function was attributed to it later.³¹ By the will of Pedro *el Ceremonioso*, the above-cited Poblet monastery, today occupied by Cistercian monks, became a nerve centre for conserving and continually celebrating the memory of the Catalan-Aragonese sovereigns (Molina Figueras, 2013, p. 233).

3. Final notes

Back to Sardinia, trying to sum up the main points of this essay, while the ideological models may be Iberian, the material cultural influences of the Italian peninsula remain evident throughout the 1300s. The master craftsmen who were employed to decorate the buildings throughout the island are relatively advanced compared to the contemporary work in central Italy. The mural paintings of Nostra Signora de Sos Regnos Altos in Bosa and Saint Claire in Oristano are a testimony of this. Although to a lesser extent if compared to areas like Tuscany, there were also panel paintings in the island at this time³². Despite the lack of material traces, written sources state the arrival, in Sardinia, the presence of Iberian art works and artists (Usai, 2019, pp. 48-54).

The Arborean family likely encouraged the arrival of artists, craftsmen and prized works of art in the island³³. In the case of the Ottana polyptych at least,

³⁰ "She founded in a unique perspective the celebration of the Angevin dynasty and a sincere and profound devotion to the Eucharist, which Queen Sancha had inherited from her family tradition and which was one of the most remarkable traits of her religiosity".

³¹ On this topic, see the opinions of Lucherini, 2011, pp. 477-504 and Vitolo, 2014, pp. 232-233.

³² In addition to the Ottana polyptych, already mentioned, we refer to panel paintings such as the *Trittico dei Libri* and the *Madonna with Child*, today in Sassari, to the *Crucifixion* of Ardara, to the *San Domenico* in Ploaghe. For a more detailed overview of this subject, see Usai, 2018, pp. 138-218.

³³ There is documentary evidence of the presence at the court of Mariano IV of the court painter known as "messer Morrone" otherwise unknown (Armangué i Herrero - Cireddu Aste - Cuboni, 2002, pp. 262-

they succeeded in celebrating their own personal authority by creating models of self-representation, to which the highly original busts in San Gavino Monreale and Oristano bear testimony.

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288). Far more well known was *Pedro el Ceremonioso's* painter, Ferrer Bassa, who produced a number of altarpieces for the king's palaces and mural paintings for the Royal chapel of *San Miguel de Pedralbes* (García Marsilla, 2000, p. 598).

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5. Pictures



Fig. 1. Ottana (Nuoro), Polyptyc with the saints Francis and Nicholas, detail of *domnikellu* Mariano (from Serra 1990, p. 65).



Fig. 2. San Gavino Monreale (South Sardinia),
Saint Gavino, shelf of the presbytery (p. author).



Fig. 3. San Gavino Monreale (South Sardinia),
Saint Gavino, inside (p. author).



Fig. 4. San Gavino Monreale (South Sardinia),
Saint Gavino, shelf of the presbytery (p. author).



Fig. 5. Oristano, Saint Claire, presbytery (p. author).

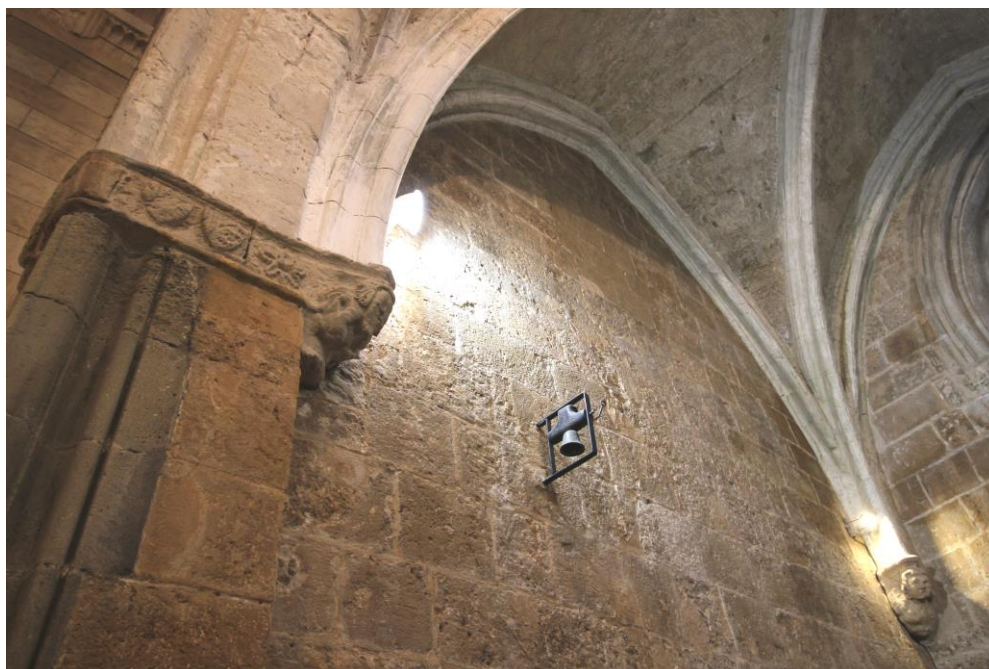


Fig. 6. Oristano, Saint Claire, presbytery, detail of the coats of arms (p. author).



Fig. 7. Oristano, Saint Claire, detail of wooden shelf with painted coat of arms (p. author).

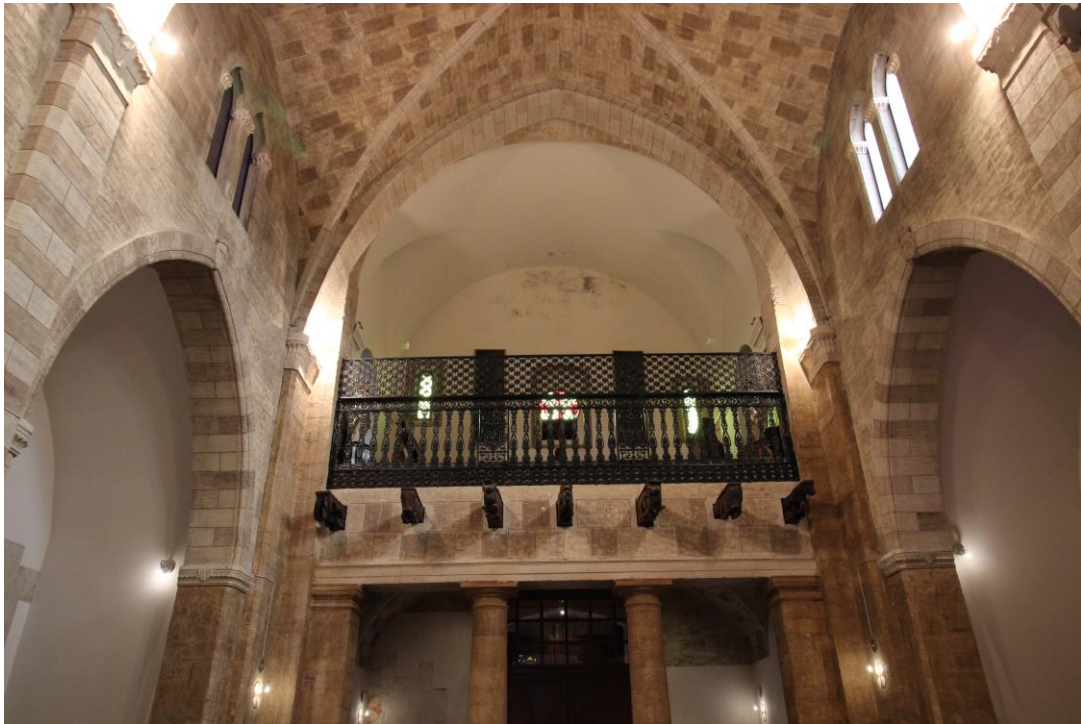


Fig. 8. Oristano, Saint Claire,
choir with wooden shelves (p. author).



Fig. 9. Bosa (Oristano), Nostra Signora de Sos Regnos Altos (p. author).



Fig. 10. Bosa (Oristano), Nostra Signora de Sos Regnos Altos, inside, detail of the counter-facade paintings (p. author).

6. *Curriculum vitae*

Nicoletta Usai is a contract lecturer in Medieval Art History on the Bachelor degree in Cultural Heritage Science at Department of History, Human and Educational Sciences of the University of Sassari. Her research activities in Medieval Art involve also the Department of Modern letters, languages and cultural heritage of the University of Cagliari. Her main research interests concern Medieval painting and architecture with particular focus on Sardinia, the Upper Tyrrhenian region and the Iberian Peninsula.

