

## 3 Sessions at ICMS (Kalamazoo, 9–12 May 19)

54th International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, May 9–12, 2019

Deadline: Sep 15, 2018

Licia Buttà, Universitat Rovira i Virgili Tarragona, Spain

3 Sessions at ICMS: 54th International Congress on Medieval Studies

Title: The Restoration of the 14th-century Painted Ceiling of the Sala Magna in Palazzo Chiaromonte-Steri in Palermo (3 linked sessions)

Organizers: Licia Buttà (Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Tarragona), Costanza Conti (Università di Palermo) and Antonio Sorce (Università di Palermo)

Sponsored by Italian Art Society

The restoration of the 14th-century wooden ceiling of the Sala Magna in Palazzo Chiaromonte-known as Steri-began in September 2017. The ceiling was crafted between 1377 and 1380, as attested by the inscription that runs along two sides of the ceiling between beams and lacunars, in which the name of the patron is also mentioned: the powerful and noble ruler of Palermo-Manfredi Chiaromonte (d. November 1391). The surface area of the wooden ceiling measures 23 x 8 meters. The iconography is displayed uninterrupted on the three sides of the 24 beams and on the 100 coffered lacunars. After the fall of the Chiaromonte family, the palace was first occupied by King Martin I, the Humane (29 July 1356 - 31 May 1410), then by the Viceroys of Aragon, and the House of Bourbon. Between 1601 and 1782 it became the Palace of the Inquisition and later the halls of the palace were used as the Court of Appeal. Today the building is home to the rectorate of the University of Palermo. The three linked sessions seek to be a fruitful occasion to study the ceiling of the Sala Magna in Palazzo Chiaromonte-Steri and medieval painted ceilings in the Mediterranean in general, in terms of conservation as well as visual culture through a multidisciplinary perspective.

### I. Intermateriality, Conservation and Digital Humanities

The outstanding interweaving of decorative and narrative images, that includes courtly Arthurian romance, Carolingian and classical tales, and Biblical allegories, is being brought back to life and revealing new and exciting information. Thanks to a complex twofold process that involves the disassembly and restoration of hundreds of painted panels that covered the beams and the reinforcement of the support structures attacked by xylophagous parasites, day by day we discover new data; how the ceiling was made, the technique used by the painters, and the different crafts employed. These discoveries add new significance to the general concept exposed in this highly symbolic architectural space. The session will deal with the most relevant results of the process of restoration and also aim to discuss the key role of digital restoration for a deeper knowledge of this and similar artefacts.

## II. Narrating power, Showing Chivalry: For a Visual Cultural History of Late Medieval Sicily

The chivalric world represented on the beams of the main hall ceiling on the first floor of the palace was conceived in order to enhance the figure of the powerful patron Manfredi. The iconographic types of courtly love, along with the narrative development of emblematic stories belonging to the literary repertoire shared with the main medieval European courts, show the figure of Chiaromonte interwoven with images of noble virtues, distinctive of self-representation mechanisms of the noble elites. The paintings on the ceiling stand as faint shadows of a literary tradition that helped bring about the relationship between adventure and war narration, and that of courtly love. The images are therefore aimed at the construction of a rhetorical discourse around the prince and his virtues, and are an invaluable resource for the history of art as well as for the cultural history of Sicily at the end of the Middle Ages. Speakers are encouraged to consider not only the iconographic, but also other aspects of the visual strategy of the ceiling, exploring semiotic, textual, anthropological content in order to better understand medieval political and social thought in Palermo-a key Mediterranean city ruled by the Chiaromonte family under the Crown of Aragon.

## III. The Sala Magna's Ceiling in Context: Medieval Painted Ceilings in the Mediterranean

The third session aims to discuss the singularity of the Sala Magna as compared to other painted ceilings in the Mediterranean region. Recently an increasing number of medieval painted ceilings have been studied. The wooden roofs in the territories of the ancient Crown of Aragon, in Provence and Langdoc or the rich Sicilian heritage in its Arab-Norman declination merely confirm the need of looking at the decoration of these artefacts as vehicles for the circulation and transmission of a Mediterranean visual culture. We encourage speakers to present papers on the intertextuality of the repertoire used to decorate the roofs in religious as well as civic space, and on the migration of images from different media, namely ceramics, manuscripts, and ivories, to the architectural decorative space.

To propose a paper, please send an abstract of no more than 250 words, together with a completed Participant Information Form (<https://wmich.edu/medievalcongress/submissions>), by September 15 to Licia Buttà ([licia.butta@urv.cat](mailto:licia.butta@urv.cat)), Costanza Conti ([costanza.conti@unipa.it](mailto:costanza.conti@unipa.it)) and Antonio Sorce ([antonio.sorce@unipa.it](mailto:antonio.sorce@unipa.it)). More information about the Congress can be found here: <https://wmich.edu/medievalcongress>.

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As sponsored sessions by American Art Society all participants must be IAS members by the time of the conference <http://italianartsociety.org/member-support/online-membership-renewal/>

Information about ICMS travel awards is found: <http://www.wmich.edu/medievalcongress/awards> (deadline Nov. 1).

Information about IAS travel awards is located: <http://italianartsociety.org/grants-opportunities/travel-grant-information/> and <http://italianartsociety.org/grants-opportunities/iassamuel-h-kress-foundation-international-conference-travel-grants/>

Reference:

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<<https://arthist.net/archive/18834>>.