

## Pisa and the Mediterranean (Firenze, 18–26 Sep 09)

Eva Mussotter

Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz - Max-Planck-Institut

Summer School, September 18 - 26, 2009

Pisa and the Mediterranean.

Concept and Organisation: Gerhard Wolf, Hannah Baader, Avinoam Shalem

During the Middle Ages, Pisa was one of the most important port cities of the Mediterranean, in permanent competition with Genoa and Venice. In fact, Pisan politics mingled religious, economic and military interests.

The Maritime Republic had invaded Muslim Palermo in 1063, Mahdyia in 1087 as well as Jerusalem in the first crusade, had expelled the Muslims from the Balearic Islands (1113-1115), captured Sardinia, but at almost the same time was also stipulating treatises, e.g. with the ruler of Tunis in 1157, and was apparently using the crusade to establish trading posts in the coastal cities of Syria, Lebanon and Palestine. It installed larger or smaller colonies in Antioch, Acre, Jaffa, Tripoli, Tyre, Joppa, Latakia, Jerusalem, Caesarea, Cairo, Alexandria and last but not least in Constantinople.

An inscription on the cathedral façade declares that the building was made possible by the riches that the Pisans had looted during the course of the invasion of Palermo. Another inscription confirms that this sanctuary, being white like snow, is without a prototype. Stressing its pure whiteness, the inscription evokes a concept of renewal, typical of the second half of the 11th century. In the following two centuries this concept stimulated not only the construction of the cathedral, but the whole ensemble of the famous Piazza dei Miracoli, made of light marble from the nearby Apuan Alps and designed on an extreme monumental scale. Situated at the North Western corner of the old town and enclosed on two of sides by the city wall, the Piazza dei Miracoli is one of the most extravagant sacred topographies in the Christian culture of the Middle Ages, beginning with the cathedral, followed by the baptistery (1152), the bell tower (1173) and finally concluded by the Campo Santo (begun in 1278, finished after 1350).

Architectural and decorative forms as well as constructive aspects of the ensemble not only relate to Byzantium, Catalonia and Southern France, but

also to the Muslim world of the Eastern Mediterranean, North Africa and Al Andaluz, including the Great Mosque in Cordoba. Pisan art can thus be studied in its particular ability to amalgamate different formal elements in an astonishingly unique and unified structure. The innovative artistic and intellectual climate in Pisa includes new forms of technological and scientific knowledge. The most famous case is that of the mathematician Leonardo Fibonacci who wrote the groundbreaking treatise *De Libro Abaci* (1227) referring to Indian and Arabian arithmetics which, according to his introduction, he learned in an abacus school in his early youth in Bejaia in Algeria. where his Father served as a notary of the Pisan republic.

The summer school in Pisa will investigate how one of the leading Mediterranean port cities of the Middle Ages responded to its heterogeneous cultural experiences intellectually and artistically. The seminar will discuss the architecture of the Piazza dei Miracoli, the sculpture of the Pisani, the frescoes of the Campo Santo and other monuments of the city. It will also include an excursion to Sardinia to visit major medieval monuments of the island which was temporarily under Pisan dominion.

Finally, as counter-evidence, the situation from 1063 to ca. 1320/50 will be compared with the later development after the Florentine capture of Pisa in 1406. In the wake of the modern concepts of territoriality, the Medici archdukes tried to separate religious and commercial interests within their state more clearly: turning Pisa into the realm of the military religious Order of Santo Stefano and at the same time founding a liberal commercial harbour in Livorno. While expressly accepting the diffusion of holy books of all religions in Livorno, the Medici, with Pietro Tacca's monument for Ferdinand I, concurrently made use of new ways of claiming cultural supremacy in the public space.

The Summer school welcomes students and younger scholars, including graduate students, doctoral candidates and scholars who are embarking on post-doctoral research. The number of participants is restricted to thirteen and each is expected to contribute to the success of the course not only by presenting a paper but also by actively participating in discussions, which will be held in English, Italian and German. Applications and papers are welcome in all three languages. Accommodation will be paid by the Institute, which will also reimburse participants for half of their travel costs and provide a per diem.

Applications should include a curriculum vitae and a letter of recommendation. Graduate students not yet involved in dissertation research should attach a summary of their course work. For pre- and post-doctoral applicants, a brief summary of their research project (250-300 words) is requested. Topic suggestions will be provided but all

participants are encouraged to include their own proposal (250-300 words), which we will try to include in the program.

Applications should be sent to Prof. Dr. Gerhard Wolf, Director, Kunsthistorisches Institut - Max-Planck-Institut, Via Giuseppe Giusti 44, I- 50121 Firenze, Italy before May 10, 2006. The envelope should be marked with "Summer school 2009", applications by e-mail are also welcome to the address: mussotter@khi.fi.it. Notifications of acceptance will be sent by the end of May.

Reference:

STIP: Pisa and the Mediterranean (Firenze, 18-26 Sep 09). In: ArtHist.net, Apr 20, 2009 (accessed Jan 19, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/31524>>.