

CAROLINE BRUZELIUS

A NOTE ON TWO DYNASTIC MONUMENTS
IN THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY ST. DENIS
AND STA. MARIA ICONAVETERE IN FOGGIA

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CAROLINE BRUZELIUS *

A NOTE ON TWO DYNASTIC MONUMENTS
IN THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY
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In 1985 I revived to Sumner Crosby's proposal that the vast double-aisled transept of thirteenth-century St.-Denis was a dynastic necropolis designed as a monumental setting for the ambitious and innovative program of royal tombs placed in the crossing in the 1260s (fig. 1).¹ The reconstruction of the nave and the insertion of the monumental transept would thus have had multiple purposes: they completed Suger's interrupted project and replaced the old Carolingian nave, which had been described by Suger himself as in poor condition a century before. The nave and transept would also have been designed to create a spacious setting for a representational program of genealogical tombs, a family tree of Capetian rulers that emphasized Louis IX's direct descent from the Carolingian and Merovingian dynasties. At the same time the sculptural program highlighted the tombs of Louis VIII and Philip Augustus, whose burials were directly behind the main altar.² Because completion of the transept was probably delayed by taxation for Louis IX's crusade of 1248 and the absence of the king in the Holy Land (Louis returned to France only in 1254, after the death of Blanche of Castille), the tombs were completed

* Duke University.

¹ SUMNER MCKNIGHT CROSBY, *L'abbaye royale de Saint-Denis*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1953, p. 64; CAROLINE ASTRID BRUZELIUS, *The Thirteenth-Century Church at St.-Denis*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1985, esp. pp. 34-36, 135. There is a substantial bibliography on the tomb program at St.-Denis and the practices of royal burial: ALAIN ERLANDE BRANDENBURG, *Le roi est mort. Étude sur les funérailles, les sépultures et les tombeaux des rois de France jusqu'à la fin du XIII^e siècle*, Genève-Paris, Droz, 1975, pp. 68-86; GEORGIA SUMMERS WRIGHT, *A Royal Tomb Program in the Reign of St. Louis*, «The Art Bulletin», LVI, 1974, pp. 224-243; and the numerous publications of ELIZABETH A.R. BROWN on the burials of the French kings.

² On this cfr. WRIGHT and BRANDENBURG, as well as GABRIELLE SPIEGEL, *The Cult of Saint Denis and Capetian Kingship*, «Journal of Medieval History», 1, 1975, pp. 43-69.

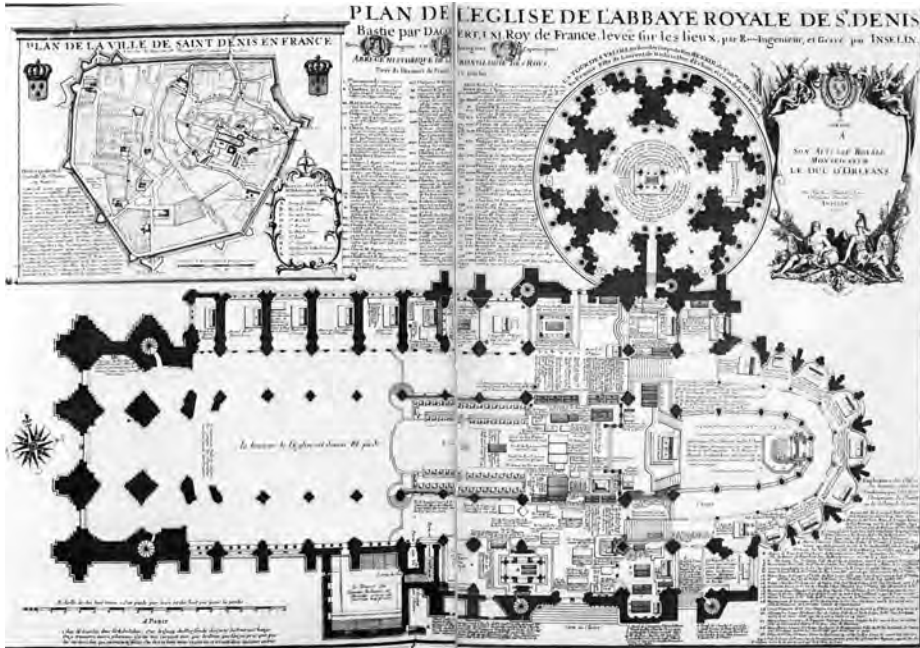


Fig. 1. - Plan of the Abbey in 1706, from DOM MICHEL FÉLIBIEN, *Histoire de l'abbaye royale de Saint-Denis en France*, Paris, 1706.

and installed only in the 1260s, when construction of the south transept arm was finished.³

The royal tombs at St.-Denis were placed in a spatial topography of salvation between the relics of Denis and his companions in the apse, and the monastic community in a choir located in the eastern bays of the nave.⁴ The bodies of the kings and queens were thus embraced by salvific forces: the relics of the patron saints of France and the royal family on one side, and the intercessory prayer of the monks on the other. The spacious vol-

³ BRUZELIUS 1985, pp. 124-127. On the Crusade of 1248, cf. WILLIAM CHESTER JORDAN, *Louis IX and The Challenge Of The Crusade: A Study in Rulership*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1971, pp. 79-80.

⁴ Elizabeth M. Hallam in 1982 emphasized the importance of intercessory prayer by religious communities for the selection of royal burial sites: ELIZABETH M. HALLAM, *Royal Burial and the Cult of Kingship in France and England, 1060-1330*, «Journal of Medieval History», 8, 1982, pp. 359-379. She also points out that in the thirteenth century there was growing interest in the "image and panoply" of monarchy (p. 367). Also BRANDENBURG 1975, p. 101.

umes of this great double-aisled transept was emphasized on the interior by magnificent rose windows, and on the exterior by large-scale transept facades and towers on the four corners. These components brought attention to the grandeur of this royal necropolis inside and out (figg. 2, 3 and 4).

A theory that connects the tomb program to the double-aisled and monumental transept cannot be proven. No documents attest a deliberate intention to memorialize or commemorate the lineage of the royal family. As is well known, however, the architectural and sculptural ensemble at St.-Denis is in line with numerous efforts in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries to create dynastic memorials in Europe and the Mediterranean, as at the Cistercian convent of Las Huelgas, founded in 1187 by Alfonso VIII of Castille as both burial and coronation church. The role of the religious orders in promoting and supporting these enterprises cannot be underestimated; this type of undertaking was a mutually beneficial enterprise. For the royal families, monastic communities provided continuity, tradition, and the on-going power of intercessory prayer, while for the religious communities, the ostentation of royal tombs brought exceptional authority and prestige.

Recent studies have revitalized this discourse by bringing to light new evidence that enhances our knowledge and understanding of royal and imperial memorials in the thirteenth century. One of the most stimulating of these analyses is a recently published volume on the church of Santa Maria Iconavetere in Foggia (Apulia), which returns to Fritz Jacob's proposal in 1968 of an octagon over the crypt.⁵ In 1222, Foggia had been chosen by Frederick II as *regalis sedes inclita imperialis*. The church, along with much of the medieval city of Foggia and its imperial residence (the *domus*), were almost entirely destroyed in the earthquake of 1731, however, after which Sta. Maria Iconavetere was substantially rebuilt. The older collegiate church, which (as far as we know) consisted of a nave flanked by aisles, was expanded in the 1240's by Frederick's builders with a monumental raised octagon between the nave and the apse (figg. 5-6).⁶ The octagon was

⁵ FRITZ JACOBS, *Die Kathedrale S. Maria Icona Vetere in Foggia. Studien zur Architektur und Plastik des 11.-13. Jahrhunderts in Süditalien*, thesis submitted at the University of Hamburg, 1968. Jacobs' proposal on Foggia has been re-examined and revived in a series of essays published as *Federico II e la riedizione dell'Iconavetere a Foggia*, Maria Rosa Rinaldi, Francesco Gangemi (ed.), Pescara, ZIP Adv, 2014, pp. 11-46 (Mezzogiorno Medievale, IX).

⁶ The issue of the discontinuities and chronology at Foggia are addressed in *ibid.*, the essays by Pistilli and Gangemi. For the different phases and chronology of construction, cfr. the essay by PIO FRANCESCO PISTILLI 2014, pp. 19-31. Sta. Maria Iconavetere was profoundly reconstructed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in part as a result of the earthquake

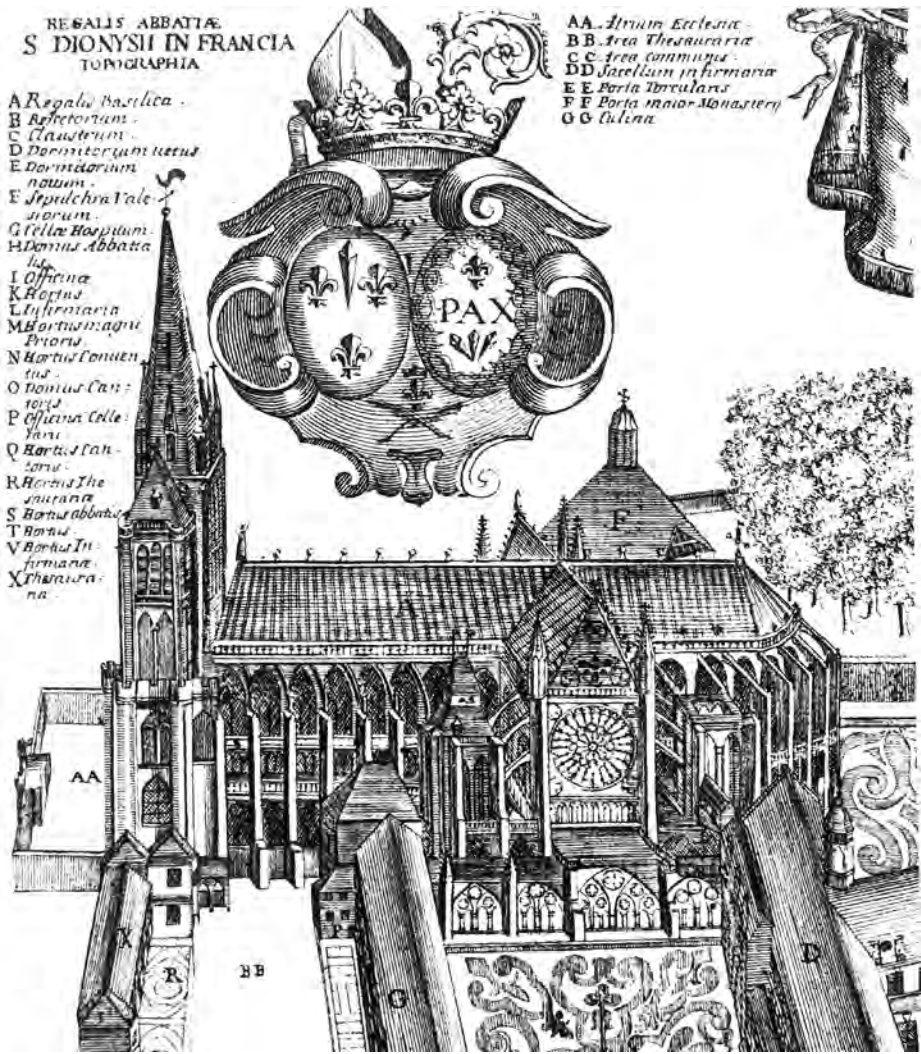


Fig. 2. - View of the Abbey Church of St.-Denis from the south: *Monasticon Gallicanum* Monasticon Gallicanum [Collection de vues topographiques représentant les monastères de l'Ordre de Saint-Benoît, Congrégation de Saint-Maur], MICHEL GERMAIN – ACHILLE PEIGNÉ-DELACOURT – LÉOPOLD DELISLE, Paris, Georges Chamerot, 1877, detail, Plate 66.

contained within a rectangular transept with aisles or chapels on both north and south sides, and three apses with the same proportions facing east. The aisles or lateral chapels of the transept, and the walls of the eastern apses would thus have buttressed the weight and thrust of a central octagonal dome, as indicated in Figure 5. According to seventeenth and eighteenth century descriptions, the octagon was fifteen steps above the level of the nave pavement.

The renewal of Jacob's proposal of the octagon at Foggia forms part of an important new (2014) collection of essays on the church of Santa Maria Iconavetere, its structure and decoration.⁷ The essay by Pistilli analyzes the thirteenth-century piers in the crypt as

foundations for the raised and centrally planned and domed octagon on an upper level. Yet even before Jacobs' reconstruction, it had not escaped historians that the east end of Iconavetere and its dome were reminiscent, or indeed even a deliberate citation of Charlemagne's palatine chapel.⁸ The Carolingian emperor provided a prestigious and exalted model for his twelfth and thirteenth century successors, especially in times of conflict, and it is no surprise that he and his dynasty were evoked in the imperial city



Fig. 3. - Interior view of St.-Denis (© C. Bruzelius).

of 1731, a process that eliminated the three-aisled nave, the octagon, and the different levels of the pavement.

⁷ Cfr. above, note 6.

⁸ Cfr. GANGEMI 2014, p. 33. Cfr. his note 9, p. 42, which summarizes the bibliography on this issue and notes that this hypothesis must be considered with caution.

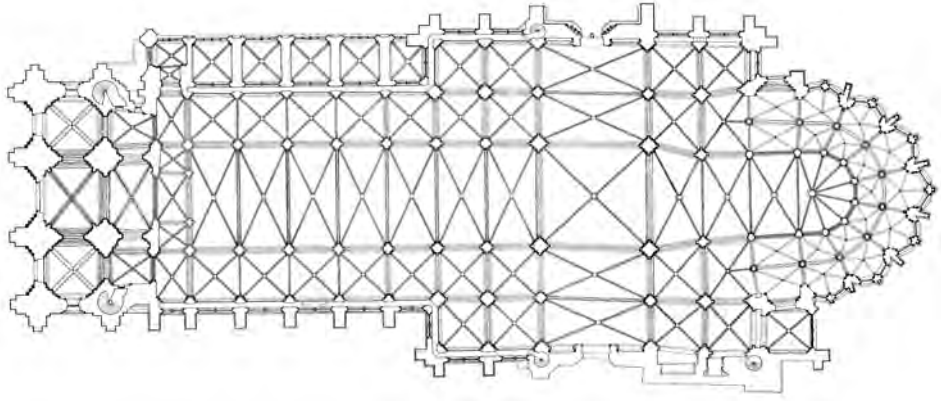


Fig. 4. - Plan of the church, after C. BRUZELIUS, *The Thirteenth-Century Church of St. Denis*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1985.

of Foggia. Charlemagne's legacy had been forcefully kept alive by Frederick Barbarossa, who in 1165 arranged for the emperor's canonization and the translation of his remains; Barbarossa also exalted the emperor's rule as the model for his own administration.⁹ Fifty years later Frederick II had himself crowned in Aachen in 1215 and re-interred Charlemagne's remains in a reliquary casket of gold and silver, the emperor working himself alongside the laborers who were installing the shrine.¹⁰

Reference to Charlemagne's palace and chapel was surely in the thoughts of Frederick II and his entourage with the designation of Foggia as new imperial residence. Could the collegiate church, with its precious and ancient icon of the Virgin, and the elegant marble columns of the crypt, have been intended as an imperial chapel, possibly even a burial site? There has been discussion and controversy on the last point: in his will, however, Frederick specified burial in the Cathedral of Palermo, where his remains rest today.¹¹ One might also ask whether the idea of an octagon at

⁹ HALLAM 1982, p. 362. On the complex issue of the Foggia octagon as a palatine chapel, and possible site of burial, cfr. GANGEMI 2014, pp. 33-45: 43 note 9. The concept of an octagon at Foggia was noted as early as the 1840s by WILHELM SCHULZ *Denkmäler der Kunst des Mittelalters in Unteritalien*, F. von Quast (ed.), Dresden, Eigentum des Verfassers 1860, I, pp. 209-213 and ÉMILE BERTAUX, *L'art dans l'Italie méridionale. Aggiornamento dell'opera di Émile Bertaux*, 1904, Adriano Prandi (ed.) Rome, École française de Rome, 1960, II, pp. 644-645.

¹⁰ DAVID ABULAFIA, *Frederick II. A Medieval Emperor*, London, Penguin, 1988, pp. 120-121.

¹¹ On this, cfr. MARIA ROSA RINALDI, *Nuovi dati sulla Collegiata*, in RINALDI GANGEMI 2014, pp. 16-17, n. 31, in which she cites the seventeenth century description of Calvanese of an

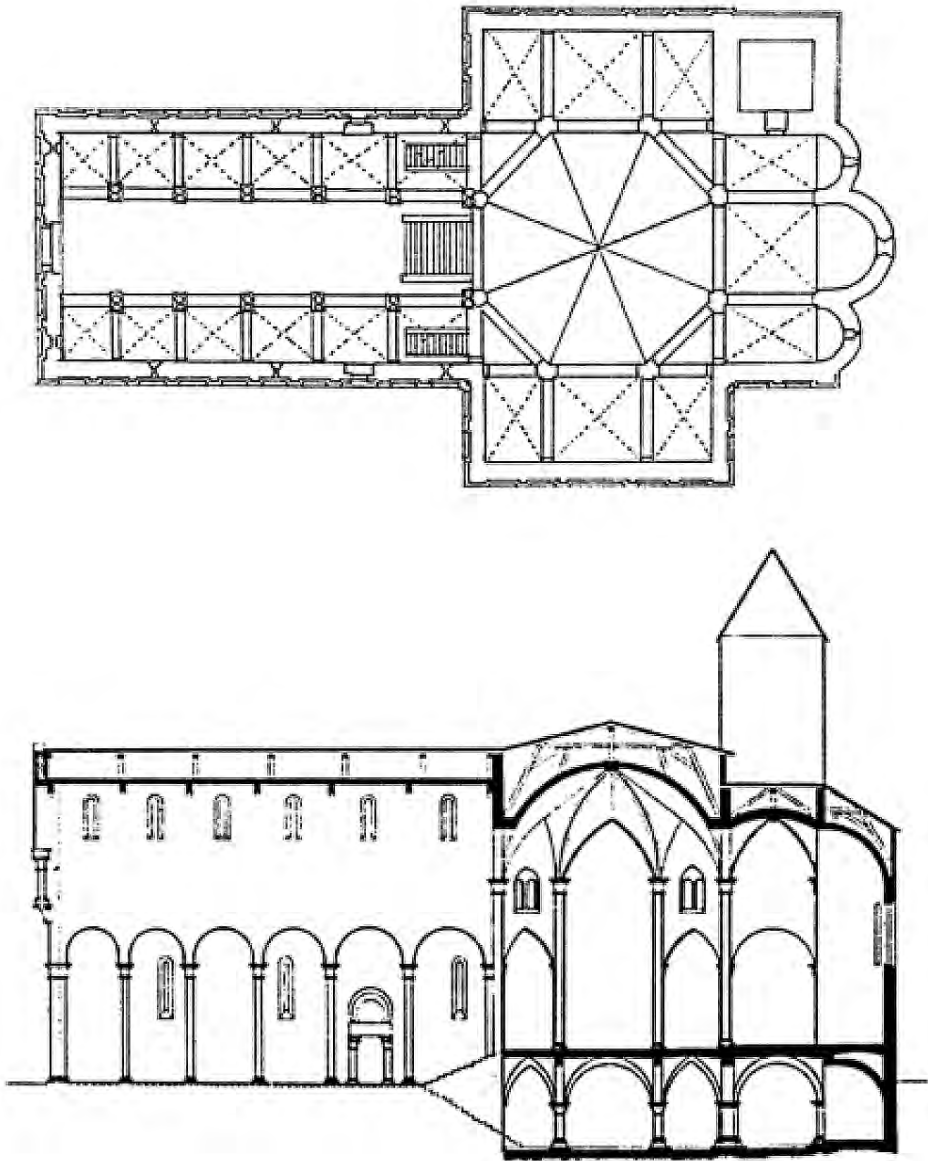


Fig. 5. - Reconstruction of the plan and elevation of Santa Maria Iconavetere, Foggia, by FRITZ JACOBS, published in *Federico II e la riedizione dell'Iconavetere a Foggia* (Mezzogiorno Medievale, IX), ed. Maria Rosa Rinaldi and Francesco Gangemi, 2014, p. 21.



Fig. 6. - View of the city of Foggia, Biblioteca Angelica 1214 c. 40r (1583), with the church of Santa Maria Iconavetere, after *Federico II e la riedizione dell'Iconavetere a Foggia* (Mezzogiorno Medievale, IX), ed. Maria Rosa Rinaldi and Francesco Gangemi, 2014, p. 25.

Santa Maria Iconavetere was generated by the Emperor himself, or by the ambitious and far-thinking religious community at the church? As demonstrated in the 2014 volume, the affinities between what remains at the canonical church of Foggia, Castel del Monte, and Frederick's *palatium* at Lucera, indicate that work on the church was directed by Frederick's master builder, Riccardo.

The insertion of large scale centralized structures (the square of St.-Denis, the octagon at Foggia) within transepts added to older churches that contained important relics is a striking feature of both sites. In each instance, the monumental intervention was intended to enhance dynastic allusions. If we can agree that buildings "speak" to us of aspirations, grandeur, authority and continuity, and that buildings with these specific types of features are profoundly political gestures, then we may also consider whether the two churches deliberately evoked and exalted the reigning dynasty and the lineage of the past.

imperial sarcophagus on the exterior of the church. However, Frederick's parents, Henry VI and Queen Constance, were buried in Palermo Cathedral, and Frederick II himself had the porphyry sarcophagi brought to Palermo from Cefalù in 1215. Cfr. JÓSEF DEÉR, *The Dynastic Porphyry Tombs of the Norman Period in Sicily*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1959, pp. 16-23 (Dumbarton Oaks Studies, 5). In any event, it is well known that the Archbishop of Palermo was present at the deathbed of Frederick.

We might conclude by asking why this phenomenon may have taken place at both sites in fourth and fifth decades of the thirteenth century. Could it be that the two rulers, Louis IX of France and Frederick II Hohenstaufen, or their advisors, deliberately adopted monumental architectural structures to affirm authority in the face of rivals, internal or external in Frederick's case, including, perhaps the hegemonic papacy? The answer to this question is well beyond the confines of this brief essay, but perhaps worthy of consideration at some future time.

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