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In *Conflict, Commerce, and an Aesthetic of Appropriation in the Italian Maritime Cities, 1000-1150*, art historian Karen Rose Mathews focuses on the visual culture of the eleventh through the mid-twelfth centuries in order to demonstrate the distinct identity created through the relationship between commerce and conflict in the Italian cities of Amalfi, Salerno, Pisa, Genoa, and Venice. Mathews uses the movement of *spolia*, “reused architectural elements, objects, and styles from past and foreign cultures,” as a medium through which to explore how a unique Mediterranean identity formed as a result of these cities’ engagement in trade and warfare (p. 1). She argues that her work fills a historiographical gap since it focuses on the eleventh and twelfth centuries, while most other works on *spolia* study the thirteenth century. Mathews opens her work with an introduction that establishes the main theoretical and methodological foundations for her study, which is followed by four geographically centered chapters, and ends the book with the summary conclusion. She ultimately seeks to argue that “a distinct artistic style based on an aesthetic of appropriation developed in these cities to depict the complementarity of these two endeavors”—conflict and commerce (p. 4).

Chapter 1 is the only section of the book that focuses on the Italian South. Titled “Local Traditions and Norman Innovations in the Artistic Culture of Southern Italy” and focusing specifically on Amalfi and Salerno, this chapter argues that the Normans, as foreigners to the Mediterranean, used *spolia* to develop an identity that showed a continuity with the ancient past but reinforced Norman politics and culture. The Normans did so by adopting trading and patronage traditions from local Campanian wealthy merchants, which allowed them to assimilate and throw off their highly militaristic and barbaric reputation. Additionally, Norman use of particularly Roman *spolia* “placed the Normans in an illustrious lineage of great rulers and created a visual link to antiquity” (p. 71).

In chapter 2, “Emulation of and Appropriation from Byzantium in Venetian Visual Culture,” Mathews demonstrates how Venetian competition with the Eastern Empire resulted in a visual appropriation of Byzantium in Venice. Through the Crusades, Mathews successfully shows that the *spolia* with which Venetians returned home was not from the Holy Land but rather a “collection of holy martyrs, confessors, and bishops stolen from the Greeks” (p. 108). This was to shift the focus to Venice from their cultural rival, the Byzantine...
Empire, while maintaining good relationships with Muslim trading partners, causing a duality in the formation of Venetian identity between the “marginal” role of Muslim interaction with Venetian merchants and the *spolia* of crusading through the Eastern Empire (p. 109). This created a similar Mediterranean identity in Venice as was created in Amalfi and Salerno in chapter 1, and both, as Mathews demonstrates, were created at the intersection of commerce and conflict.

In chapter 3, “The Interplay of Islamic and Ancient Roman *Spolia* on Pisan Churches,” Mathews argues that Pisa used far more Islamic objects in forming its Mediterranean identity than other Italian maritime cities. By using Islamic contemporary objects acquired through trade and blending them with ancient Roman *spolia*, Pisan artists and patrons were able to capture the interplay between military campaigns and to protect commercial interests with Muslims who were both adversaries and trading partners.

In the last chapter, “Rivalry with Pisa and Spolia as Plunder of War in Medieval Genoa,” Mathews argues that similar to the Pisan patrons and artists, Genoese elites tried to adapt a “civic style” that displayed their Mediterranean identity as both a crusader and a trader. She writes, “Thus Genoa defined its visual culture in terms of violent and aggressive appropriation that combined holy plunder seized in crusade campaigns with styles and forms from a rival republic” (p. 192).

In her conclusion, Mathews shows how *spolia* continued to be used throughout the Italian maritime cities and eventually became central to Italian civic and cultural art. She states, “The Italian maritime republics developed and deployed the *spolia* style in civic architecture at a pivotal moment in the history of these cities, providing their merchant warriors with a flexible but powerful visual vocabulary to display mercantile prowess, political might, cultural integration, and knowledge of their neighbors, competitors, adversaries, and trading partners across the Mediterranean Sea” (p. 196).

Mathews provides a compelling argument for the formation of a unique Mediterranean identity in Amalfi, Salerno, Venice, Pisa, and Genoa, and successfully demonstrates how elites in these cities used *spolia* to reflect this identity created at the intersection of conflict and commerce. There are, however, some issues with how she theoretically frames this “Mediterranean identity.” Mathews never qualifies what she means when she refers to a “Mediterranean identity” itself; therefore, how “unique” the identities formed in these Italian maritime cities were cannot be quantified. A term like “Mediterranean identity” is exceedingly broad and includes a myriad of cultures formed within the Mediterranean basin. Mathews must clearly stipulate which part of the Mediterranean she is using as the point of reference to contrast with the six maritime Italian cities in order to demonstrate how the identity they formed was unique. Several times throughout the book, Mathews also uses the term “Pan-Mediterranean,” yet she never qualifies that term either, nor does she distinguish it, if it needs to be distinguished, from simply a “Mediterranean identity.” Since she does not make this distinction, it hampers the way she discusses “Mediterranean” or “Pan-Mediterranean” identity because it flattens the depth she has already provided. The end result makes it appear as though there is only one static identity that can be broadly applied to the entire Mediterranean basin, with the exception of these six maritime cities.