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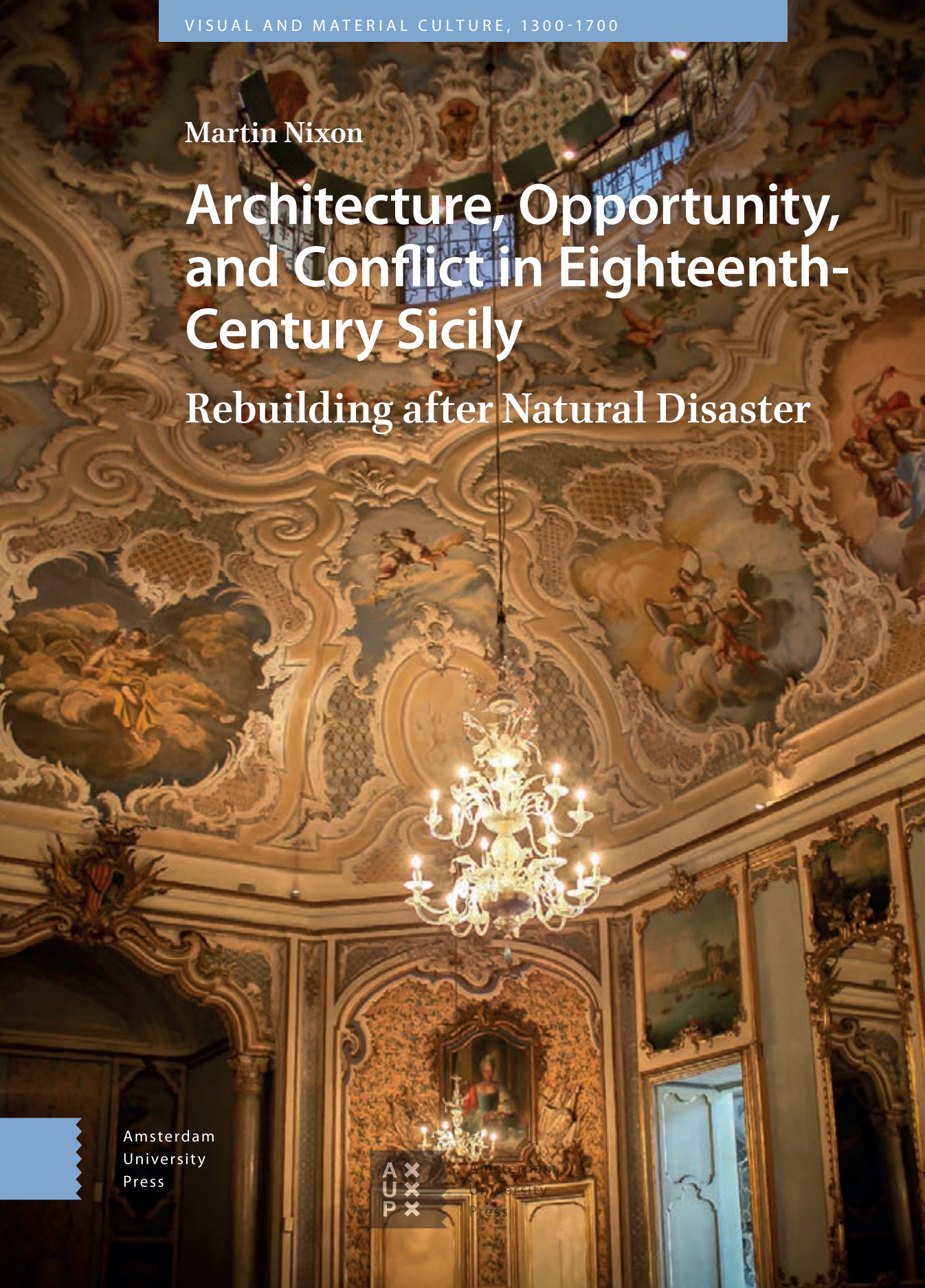
Martin Nixon

Architecture, Opportunity, and Conflict in Eighteenth-Century Sicily

Rebuilding after Natural Disaster



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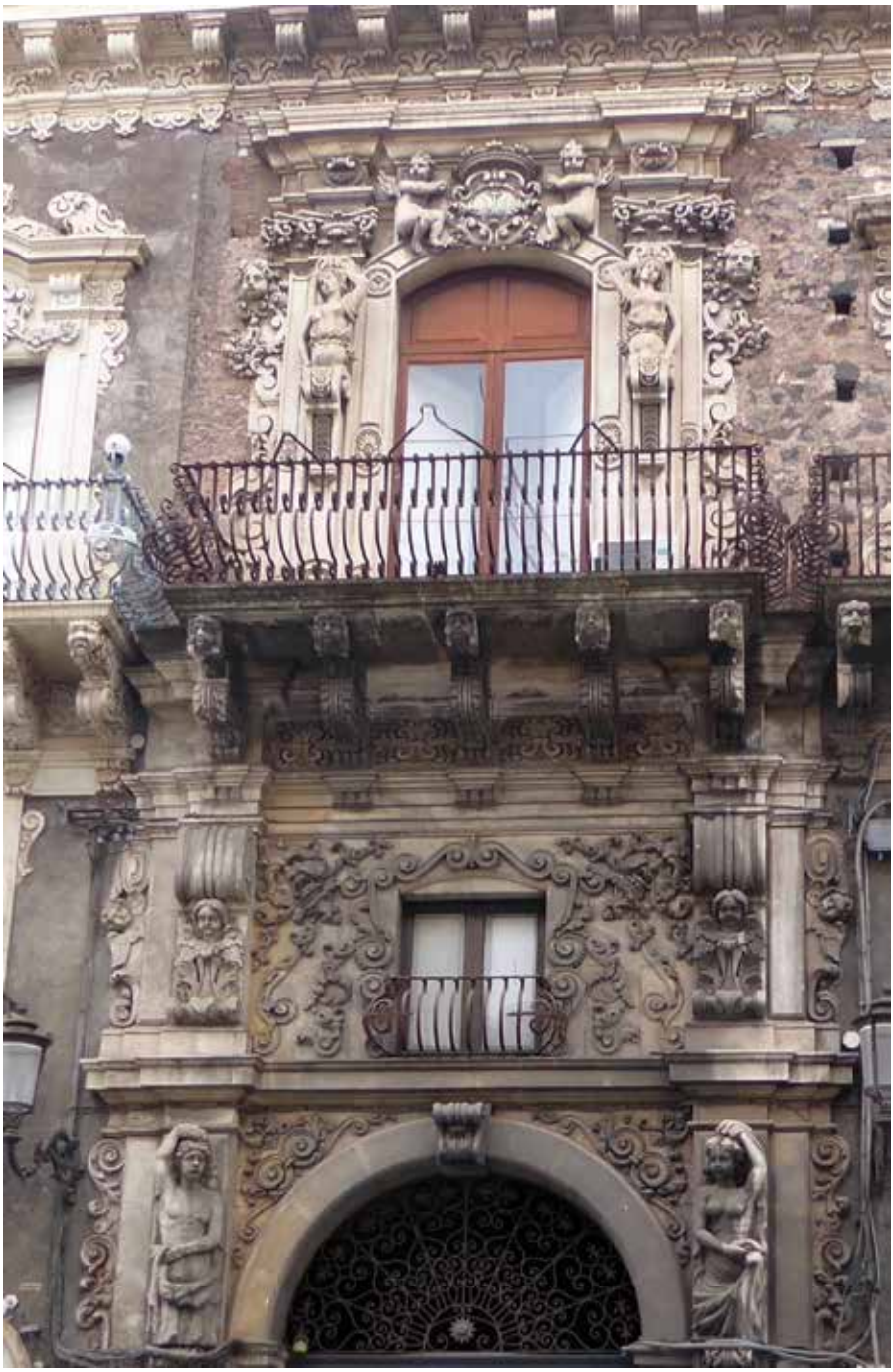

Fig. 0.1. Detail of the facade of the Palazzo Massa di San Demetrio, Catania. Alonso de Benedetto. Begun 1694.

Introduction

The Val di Noto Rebuilding: Disaster and Opportunity

Fig. 0.2. Balconies of the Palazzo Nicolaci, Noto. Architect unknown. 1737.

In January 1693, one of Italy's most powerful recorded earthquakes struck the Val di Noto area of south-eastern Sicily.[1] There were two shocks, one on 9 January and another on 11 January. The earthquake killed approximately 60,000 people, slightly more than one in five of an estimated population of

1 Sicily was divided into three areas known as *vali*. *Val* probably derives from the Arabic *waliya*, or administrative region. The Val di Noto covers the present provinces of Catania, Syracuse, Ragusa, and parts of Caltanissetta and Enna.

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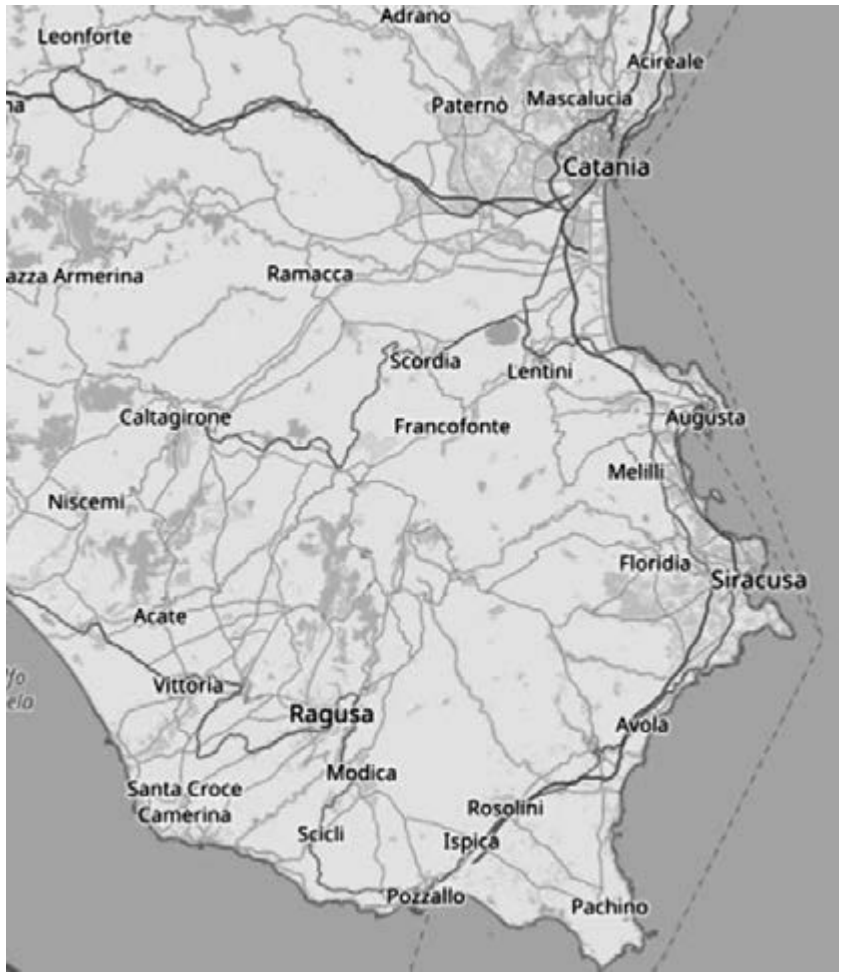

Fig. 0.3. Map of the Val di Noto area of south-eastern Sicily. Image from Open Street Maps. https://www.openstreetmap.org/#map=9/37.3068/14.3193

around 260,000. Some eyewitnesses described the horror as God's visitation on the people, with portents appearing before the earthquakes.[2] Connecting the earthquake with divine castigation, the author of one report to the

2 The estimated number of deaths range between approximately 50,000 and 70,000. Eyewitness accounts include Burgos (1693), Bonaiuto (1694), Bottone (1695), Guglielmini (1695), Privitera (1695), and Tortora (1712). See also the bibliography in Caruso, Perra, and Trigilia (1994): 109–119. On portents, Vincenzo Bonaiuto mentions a great flame or bright light in the sky on the evening before the first earthquake on the ninth of January. On the following day, the air was dark and yellow, presaging the second earthquake of the eleventh of January. Bonaiuto (1694): 3–4.

Spanish king, Sicily's colonial ruler, claimed that 'the processions and bitter penitences being made have no parallel anywhere in the world'.[3]

Around 60 towns were affected overall. Catania, the area's largest city, lost over 80 per cent of its population. Of the other large towns, Ragusa lost half its population and Syracuse and Noto lost a quarter. Catania and Noto were completely destroyed, and Ragusa, Syracuse, and Modica suffered significant damage. Medium-sized towns, such as Avola and Scicli, and many smaller centres were also left in ruins.[4] Looking back on these events 70 years later, Arcangelo Leanti's *Lo stato presente della Sicilia* (Palermo, 1761), a compendium on the history and geography of the island, concludes:

> The horrible earthquake of 1693 was without any doubt the biggest and will always be the most memorable in the annals of this island. It resulted in the great tremor, and especially in the Val di Noto the ruin of many cities and lands, to the number of 60, and the deaths of 70,000 people.[5]

Rebuilding after earthquakes is part of the history of many Sicilian towns, but the reconstruction of so many centres after 1693 was a major architectural undertaking.[6] The amount of new construction is comparable to such projects as Saint Petersburg, built between 1703 and the 1720s, or the rebuilding of Lisbon after the 1755 earthquake.[7] The Val di Noto reconstruction resulted in hundreds of new buildings and townscapes, and completely new locations for eight towns.[8] Its effects continued far into the eighteenth century. Many buildings rebuilt after 1693, such as the Palazzo Biscari in Catania, the Palazzo Nicolaci in Noto, or the cathedral of Modica, were only completed 60 or more years later. Although eight of the rebuilt towns

3 *Relación de los considerables daños que han causado los temblores en el Reyno de Sicilia los días 9 y 11 del mes de enero en 1693* in Tobriner (1982): 226.

4 The report to the Spanish king *Relación de los considerables daños que han causado los temblores en el Reyno de Sicilia los días 9 y 11 del mes de enero en 1693* lists the affected towns. Archivo General de Simancas, Estado 3507, no. 14, 11 January 1693. Huet reports over 50 towns affected. Huet in Nocera, ed. (1983): 15. Tobriner estimates the population in 1693 as 261,085 and the total fatalities as 59,700 Tobriner (1982): 207.

5 Leanti (1761), vol.1: 6.

6 In the century before 1693, there was an earthquake in Modica in 1613. In 1669, a major eruption of Etna covered areas of Catania with lava. Boscarino (1997): 35.

7 'Taken together, the reconstruction of the cities of the Val di Noto constitutes one of the most impressive achievements of urban planning in early modern Europe.' Neil (1998): 471. Nonetheless, as will be noted in this introduction, the rebuilding should not be seen as a centrally planned project.

8 Stefano Piazza in Muti, ed. (2008): 38. Boscarino (1997): 43.

are part of a UNESCO heritage area, the remarkable architecture resulting from this rebuilding is little known outside Sicily.[9]

The research for this book began from thinking about the scale of this rebuilding of so many towns and how little-known it was outside Sicily. It soon became clear, however, that although the amount of rebuilding made it seem as though it was one of the largest architectural projects of the eighteenth century, there was no overall programme. Each town and each patron rebuilt separately, and there is no evidence of collaboration between the towns.[10] The Spanish government's policy of maintaining a system of defensive garrisons around Sicily against a possible attack from the Ottomans or from European rivals such as France provides the only situation where the towns were considered in relation to each other.[11] Each town has its own history of coercion, compromise, rivalry, and opportunity, and there is no standard urban layout that the rebuilt towns followed.

Of the 57 affected towns listed in Stephen Tobriner's study of Noto, 24 towns now have a grid layout, Avola and Grammichele have a hexagonal plan, and the remaining 31 have no geometric layout.[12] There was no blueprint or adaptable modular system for the rebuilding. An irregular layout for post-earthquake street plans, such as in Modica or Ragusa Ibla, means that the rebuilding mainly replicated the pre-earthquake street plan, although in towns such as Vittoria a grid layout existed before the earthquake anyway. Rather than an exercise in purportedly rational and centralised 'Enlightenment era' urban planning, the crisis of the rebuilding was shaped not only by the urgency of re-establishing order but also by local opportunism and ambition.

9 In 2002, Noto, Modica, Caltagirone, Militello Val di Catania, Palazzolo Acreide, Scicli, Ragusa, and the historical centre of Catania were chosen to form the UNESCO *Late Baroque Towns of the Val di Noto* world heritage site. See the proposal for UNESCO inclusion by the *Centro Internazionale di Studi sul Barocco* (undated).

10 Stephen Tobriner notes: 'Never once do the documents record efforts of citizens from one city coming to the aid of another, more stricken, community'. (1982): 207.

11 For example, the new town of Avola was fortified. The new town of nearby Noto was not, because Avola would defend it. Overall, it is more accurate to talk not of reconstruction but of separate reconstructions in the Val di Noto. On the Ottoman threat, see Koenigsburger (1997) 61–64 and Trigilia in Fagiolo and Trigilia, eds. (1987): 146–147. The threat to Sicily from Spain's European rivals is shown by the land and sea battles fought against France when France supported the 1674 Messina uprising. Mack Smith (1968): 226–230. Stefano Piazza calls the rebuilding 'a constellation of micro-stories'. 'This vast territory contains in reality a constellation of micro-stories generated both by the experiences of personality, education and different orientations, and by the unfolding of an artistic debate within urban centres possessing deep cultural roots and their own creative energies.' Piazza in Muti, ed. (2008): 29.

12 Tobriner (1982): 207.

This book includes a discussion of geometrically planned towns and symmetrical aristocratic palace facades but does not interpret this architecture in terms of some kind of spirit of rational Enlightenment—or, by contrast, as evidence of a Rococo or *ancien régime* decadence. Instead, the central focus is on how the rebuilding enabled and validated its patrons' ambitions across changing circumstances, and how new forms of architecture might perpetuate the same political and economic inequalities.[13] In her recent book on contemporary urbanism and her hopes for the rebuilding of Syrian towns after the current tragedy, Marwa Al Sabouni poses the important question: 'What does a building or city give, and to whom? What does it take, and from whom'?[14] These questions underlie the writing in this book. Cities and buildings are not a passive outcome of supposedly impersonal historical or stylistic processes. They are at the same time objects and agents of transformation, and their construction is of course driven forward by those who position themselves to benefit from it.

I do not attempt to discuss all of the towns, nor do I attempt an overarching chronology of the entire rebuilding.[15] Instead, I employ five case studies to discuss architecture's role in negotiating and maintaining aristocratic status. The Val di Noto rebuilding took place within a fundamentally unequal feudal political system, but this system was not static. Families could rise and fall, and merchants and government officials could buy their way into the aristocracy. The eighteenth-century rebuilding in Sicily saw uprisings and invasions, changes of colonial ruler, famine, riots, earthquakes, pestilence, the threat of pirates and slavery, and the continued decline of the Mediterranean as a centre of European economic and political power. The case studies in this book allow different ways into the complication and contingency of the time, and into how the architecture of the rebuilding operated within the self-presentation, ambitions, and fears of its patrons.

13 The intentions of patrons are in any case unknowable, and any search for intentionality is itself problematic. Michel Foucault argues that an analysis 'should refrain from posing the labyrinthine and unanswerable question: "Who then has power and what has he in his mind? What is the aim of someone who possesses power"'? and instead look at how material outcomes maintain or change power relations. Foucault (1980): 97.

14 Al Sabouni (2021): 77–78.

15 Scholars have already established a chronology of the rebuilding of many towns. See Muti, ed. (2008), Giuffrè (2007), and Boscarino (1997) for general surveys. See Dato (1983) and Aymard and Giarrizzo, eds. (2007) on Catania; Tobriner (1982) and Dufour and Raymond (1990) on Noto; Flaccavento (1982), Flaccavento, Nifosì, and Nobile (1997), and Nifosì (1997) on Ragusa; Nifosì (1998) and Barone (1998) on Scicli; Dufour and Raymond (1993) and Gringeri Pantano (1996) on Avola; and Cantone (1998) on Grammichele.

The case studies are linked by the broad themes of opportunity and conflict. In the re-siting and re-creation of Avola and Grammichele into hexagonal towns discussed in the first case study, we see the assertion of autocracy and a reestablishment of aristocratic power after the chaos of the earthquake. In the rebuilding of Noto, there are complicated aristocratic alliances and family connections. In Scicli and Ragusa, the new architecture can be related to local aristocratic rivalry and also to fear of the Other in the form of Muslim slavers or an uprising by the general populace. In the Palazzo Biscari in Catania, the ballroom is central to the maintenance and performance of aristocratic distinction. In the palaces of Ragusa, there is the celebration of luxury and the fear of the famished mob. In all of these cases, I show how architecture was central to the status and ambitions of its patrons as well as being essential to the family's public face.

The case studies include most of the principal towns in the Val di Noto and the commissions of aristocrats of different ranks. I discuss the architecture from the level of a whole town to parts of a town, single buildings, and parts of buildings and their decoration. Chapter One serves as an orientation to the time and place of the Val di Noto rebuilding. Chapter Two, on Avola and Grammichele, works on a large scale to consider urbanism in the creation of two entirely new towns. Chapter Three discusses the main square of Noto and its palace facades, and Chapters Four, Five, and Six discuss parts of palaces in Catania, Scicli, and Ragusa. These different scales allow an investigation into the rebuilding on a broad level of urbanism as well as a discussion of the distinctive ornament of the Val di Noto architecture. Three chapters focus on the commissions of three of Sicily's most powerful families; the Aragona Pignatelli, patrons of Avola; the Carafa Branciforte, patrons of Grammichele; and the Paternò Castello of Catania. The other chapters focus on aristocrats who competed for political influence in Noto, Scicli, and Ragusa.[16]

The first chapter provides an introduction for the reader before moving on to the architectural case studies. At the time of the 1693 earthquake, Sicily was a Spanish possession, but in the subsequent 50 years it passed through Savoyard, Austrian, and Bourbon rule. The Sicilian aristocracy provided some political continuity against this background of changing rulers, but there was always the fear of new wars and of insurgency resulting from famine. This first chapter discusses the political system within which

16 In the 1620s, the Moncada Aragona Paternò, the Branciforte, and the Tagliaviva Aragona had respectively 48,088, circa 30,000, and 23,240 vassals. These were the highest numbers in Sicily. Piazza (2005) a: 11–12.

the colonial viceroy and the aristocracy worked and gives an overview of Sicily's agricultural economy and the various sub-areas of the Val di Noto at the time of the earthquake. It also outlines the government response to the earthquake and government attempts to coordinate the rebuilding. This aims to provide context and introduce some important themes before the reader turns to the case studies.

Chapter Two, the first of the case studies, focuses on the unusual hexagonal layouts of Avola and Grammichele, the only hexagonal towns in Italy. In these locations, the feudal owners rebuilt an entire town on a new location and according to a purportedly rational layout. The towns reasserted the patron's dominance after the breakdown of law and order immediately following the earthquake. The geometric layouts associate the patrons with Enlightenment ideas of rational town planning but can also be read as stamps on the landscape—monuments to despotic governance where, especially in the case of Grammichele, the seemingly rational geometric design is essentially arbitrary.

Chapter Three discusses the shifting alliances that affected the rebuilding of Noto and then focuses on the facade of the Palazzo Nicolaci in Noto. During the eighteenth century, the merchant Nicolaci family acquired both noble status and land for a large palace rivalling those of the more established families. Their palace facade's deployment of elaborate zoomorphic balcony corbel decoration or *mensole* makes it markedly different from other facades in Noto. The facade's strangeness defies the conventional architectural vocabulary. A focus on this facade allows a discussion of the distinctive ornament of eighteenth-century Val di Noto architecture and how palace facades operated within aristocratic competition and assumptions around ornament, luxury, and restraint.

Chapter Four moves to the interior of a palace to discuss the ballroom of the Palazzo Biscari in Catania, the residence of the city's most powerful family. Among the palaces that include ballrooms, this palace has the largest and most lavishly decorated one. This chapter analyses the Palazzo Biscari ballroom in terms of lightness and noble distinction. The ballroom's liquid and reflecting decoration and its materials of gold, glass, and stucco are refined and delicate. I then investigate how ballrooms, dance, and the training of aristocratic bodies maintained distinction through lightness and refinement. Rather than seeing the ballroom as an empty shell, I attempt to repopulate it by discussing the entertainments and dances it enabled.

Chapter Five focuses on the disconcerting facade sculpture of the Palazzo Beneventano in Scicli in order to investigate how this facade challenges expectations that decoration should beautify. On the Palazzo Beneventano,

monstrous faces snarl from below the balconies. Lower down, there are heads of Turks, or 'Moors'. Canonical architectural decoration transforms into imagery of violence and fear. The absence of documentation on this palace creates further challenges but also opens up opportunities for other ways to read the facade. I do not promote a single reading for the decoration, but I relate it to violence and fear of the Other.

Chapter Six moves to the Palazzo Cosentini and Palazzo La Rocca in Ragusa. From below the palace balconies, sculptures of musicians, revellers, and shabby, fanged figures look down. The sculptures evoke abundance, humour, and pleasure, but there is also ugliness and famine. This decoration, with its repertoire of stock figures, suggests an iconological system but continually escapes it. Distinctive to the area around Ragusa and Modica, this sculpture appears to both celebrate and parody the desires of the populace. The chapter is, in a sense, a counter to Chapter Four on ballrooms and aristocratic distinction. Instead of discussing how aristocrats maintained distinction, I consider what they might fear and what they might want to exclude from their palaces and ballrooms.

The ideas for this book are indebted to important new discussions within the history of seventeenth and eighteenth-century architecture. My approach is informed by Helen Hills' work on how investment in certain forms of architecture maintains and furthers the financial and political interests of an alliance or network of patrons. These relationships between architecture, social status, and political power underlie my thinking in all of the chapters in this book.[17] Chandra Mukerji's analysis of territorial transformation in the palace of Versailles, where landscape architecture enables the creation of new physical and symbolic environments, is important for my work on Avola, Grammichele, and Noto, and Martha Pollak's study of connections between town planning, ideal cities, and military architecture is very relevant for the urbanism of Avola and Grammichele.[18]

Mediterranean piracy is an important topic in my chapter on the Palazzo Beneventano in Scicli. Slavery and piracy across the shores of the

17 In her work on Neapolitan convents, Hills describes architecture as 'the product and shaper of broader social forces, in relation to meaning and power'. She adds: 'here I seek to expose architectural patronage and form as not necessarily arising from given specific historical, material and religious conditions, but as necessary for, or useful to, certain groups of people, always politically and socially motivated, intent on ensuring that they were not obscured by rival aristocrats, religious orders or convents in the specific and changing—often uncomfortable and awkward—historical circumstances in which they found themselves. Architecture thus assumed urgent political purpose and consequence.' Hills (2004): 5.

18 Mukerji (2010, 1997, 1984). Pollak (1991).

Mediterranean is an area that is now receiving more attention, particularly in the work of Daniel Hershenson.[19] There is still little new research on rebuilding after natural disasters that opens up ways to discuss architecture. For example, the *Wounded Cities* volume edited by Marco Folin and Monica Preti discusses cities and natural disasters, but its focus on representations of these disasters does not relate to the arguments of my book.[20]

Ornament has become the subject of renewed investigation within architectural history, and the enigmatic, ambiguous decoration of the Val di Noto architecture is an important topic in this book.[21] The strangeness of some Sicilian decoration, its deviation from canonical laws, and its perceived lack of restraint led to condemnation from many of the eighteenth-century writers who were the first to describe Sicilian architecture. Visiting Catania in the late 1770s, Henry Swinburne reports ornamental profusion and bad taste.[22] Richard Payne Knight, another eighteenth-century English visitor to Catania, describes the sea-facing facade of the Palazzo Biscari as 'barbarous'. This facade includes androgynous figures and profuse vegetal ornament, whereas the part of the palace Payne Knight prefers is in a more classicising style.[23]

For these foreign Grand Tourists arriving in the Val di Noto to view classical antiquities, Sicilian facade decoration lacked Winckelmann's 'noble simplicity'.[24] Such assumptions persisted for a long time in art history. The architecture of the era conventionally categorised as 'late baroque' or 'rococo' suffers from connotations of theatricality, decadence, and the grotesque. Ornament carries associations of extravagance and excess.[25]

19 Hershenson (2018).

20 Folin and Preti (2015).

21 Hammeken and Hansen, eds. (2019), Necipoğlu and Payne, eds. (2016), Burroughs (2002), Payne (1999).

22 On the Catania Cathedral, Swinburne writes: 'It has suffered so much by earthquakes, that little of the original structure remains, and the modern parts have hardly anything, except their materials, to recommend them. The other religious edifices of the city are profusely ornamented, but in a bad taste'. Swinburne (1783), vol. 4: 135.

23 'The Prince's Palace is a great irregular building, the ancient part of it in the barbarous taste of the Sicilians, charged with monstrous figures, and unnatural ornaments, but the part which he has built himself is simple, regular and elegant.' Payne Knight (1986): 54. Journal written April–June 1777.

24 Winckelmann in Preziosi, ed. (1998): 31. On his visit to Catania in the 1780s, Dominic Vivant Denon argues: 'It is truly a shame that the great expenses confronted by its rich inhabitants were not directed with better taste: if, instead of great palaces and immense churches of a pompous and complicated architecture, a noble and simple style were chosen, Catania would have been one of the most splendid cities of the Kingdom of Naples.' Vivant Denon. Italian translation in Mozzillo, Vallet, and Mascoli, eds. (1979): 192–193.

25 On associations of rococo with arbitrary and bizarre forms, see Hills (2007a and b, 2015, 2019). On the term 'Baroque' and its art-historical fortune, see Hills, ed. (2011): 11–36 and Millon, ed. (1999):

The Sicilian ornament's enigmatic profusion, the difficulty of matching this imagery to established iconography, and the frequent problem of even putting a name to the strange forms and creatures may also be one of the reasons why architectural historians shied away from it for a long time.[26] However, important new scholarship is now engaging more with architectural ornament. The anthology *Histories of Ornament: From Global to Local*, edited by Alina Payne and Gülrü Necipoğlu, places ornament centre stage, and includes a global focus. However, the chapters are fairly short and do not consider ornament within the politics of the time. The recent volume *Ornament and Monstrosity in Early Modern Art*, edited by Chris Hammeken and Maria Hansen, is also part of a new focus on ornament.[27] Its chapters usefully place ornament within the tradition of *grotteschi,* an aspect of architecture from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries that has received little attention previously.

My approach to ornament is perhaps more speculative and more related to ideas of ambiguity, aporia, and material affect. I analyse the ornament closely in terms of how it questions distinctions of architectural member, sculpture, and ornament as well as distinctions between human, animal, plant, and architectural member. The facades have a flowering, breathing life. Classical orders jostle with hybrid human, animal, and plant forms. The decoration becomes both architectural member and representation of strange life forms. Capitals, modillions, and other canonical facade elements metamorphosise into hybrid creatures that shift between categories. Much of the ornament presents a subversive challenge to ideas of classical decorum and architectural taxonomy.

I have analysed closely a range of interesting contemporary texts. My approach to the hexagonal urbanism of Grammichele is strongly influenced

19–31. On eighteenth-century French ornament, Katie Scott argues: 'Eighteenth-century French decorative arts labour under a double indictment: by their place of destination [the fact that the ornament is found on furniture and interiors, the domestic space] and by the structures of hereditary privilege and habits of extravagance that under the *ancien régime* gave them life.' Scott (2005): 137.

26 Carlo Cresti and Oscar Spadola published the only book-length studies of the Val di Noto *mensole* and *mascheroni*. Cresti's work mainly comprises photographs of the balconies. Much of the text consists of citations from Sicilian literary figures. These create a poetic mood, but there is no analysis. Spadola's study of balconies in Ragusa has greater depth and includes short profiles on many of the palaces, with information on patrons and dates. There is frequent citation of Sicilian architectural historians such as Salvatore Boscarino, Giuseppe Bellafiore, and Giuseppe Salonia. There are also many quotations from the Sicilian dialect poet Domenico Tempio. The quotations from Tempio, adjacent to photographs and drawings of the *mensole*, promote a reading of the balconies as concerned with sensual pleasures. Cresti (2003), Spadola (1982).

27 Hammeken and Hansen, eds. (2019); Necipoğlu and Payne, eds. (2016).

by my reading of the work of Carlo Maria Carafa, the patron of Grammichele. Carlo Maria published at least nine books from his own printing press, and these have received little attention from scholars of Grammichele's architecture. The books mainly deal with the science of meridians and sundials but also with how a Christian prince should rule. Carlo Maria's ideas are autocratic and religiously conservative. This problematises his more common casting as a figure of progressive Enlightenment, as I discuss in the chapter.

The chapter on the Palazzo Biscari ballroom draws on a range of sources including contemporary manuals on dance, warfare, fencing, and aristocratic comportment, as well as descriptions of festivities and the writings of eighteenth-century visitors to Sicily such as Goethe, Patrick Brydon, Baron von Riedesel, and Richard Payne Knight. The chapter on Scicli and the Palazzo Beneventano includes reports by similar eighteenth-century travellers of the threat of piracy and also draws on Antonino Mongitore's *Della Sicilia ricercata nelle cose più memorabili* (1742). Mongitore's strange descriptions of natural monstrosities and portents resonate with the sometimes monstruous and abundant ornament of the Sicilian facades. In the chapter on Ragusa, I relate themes of luxury and poverty in the palace ornament to the work of the Sicilian dialect poet Domenico Tempio, whose poem *La Carestia* on the Catania famine at the end of the eighteenth century describes both the hunger of the populace and the violence they can unleash on the aristocracy.

Finally, there is the question of terminology. Discussions of eighteenth-century architecture often involve the terms Baroque and rococo. Helen Hills' edited volume *Rethinking the Baroque* and Louis Zamora and Monica Kaup's *Baroque New Worlds* are among recent works that discuss the usefulness of the term Baroque.[28] I have decided to use the term only when quoting others. Although discussions such as those in Hills and Zamora and Kaup work to move us away from this, the term 'Baroque' is still often associated with the Council of Trent, the Counter-Reformation, and the architectural commissions of Rome by seventeenth-century popes as well as associations of 'the theatrical'. However, eighteenth-century Italy is chronologically far from the Council of Trent, and the Counter-Reformation has little or no relevance to its architecture. The term 'Baroque' also assigns predetermined generic attributes to seventeenth and eighteenth-century architecture. By avoiding this term, I hope to discuss the architecture of the Val di Noto rebuilding without recourse to the frequent tropes.[29]

28 Hills (2011), Zamora and Kaup (2010).

29 See Hills (2011, 2015, 2019).

In addition, there is the problem of 'Italy' and 'Italian' in discussing a period when Italy did not exist as a nation. In contrast to the discussion above on 'Baroque', where I have tried to avoid generic categories that did not exist at the time, I have chosen to use expressions such as 'the rest of Italy' and 'Italian' instead of circumlocutions such as 'and all of the other Italian-speaking areas' or 'and all of Sicily and the Italian peninsular'. These circumlocutions can become particularly cumbersome if one sets out to always avoid the word 'Italian'. Although Italy did not exist as a single nation in the eighteenth century, there is a sense of unity in that by this time almost all publications and archive documents—from Sicily in the south to the Alpine borders in the north—were written in the same form of standard Italian rather than in dialect or Latin or other languages.

In conclusion, architecture in southern Italy has so often been relegated to a minor, idiosyncratic story that falls outside any important story of European—or even of Italian—art, even though southern Italy comprises a large part of Italy's land mass. Scholars from outside the area generally ignore its architecture or reduce it to a postscript. Surveys of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Italian architecture that include the Val di Noto architecture often present it as a 'late' or regional variant of a Roman mainstream, albeit one that is distinctive and inventive.[30] The tendency to describe Sicilian architecture as a provincial variant of ideas from Rome or elsewhere, where Sicilian architects always modify and react to what is generated outside the island, is part of a broader separation of southern Italy from a putative European mainstream.[31] Although the fact that this

30 Rudolph Wittkower's large survey of Italian baroque devotes 24 out of 329 pages and 11 out of 200 to the south. Wittkower (1999): 82, 197–199, 212, 230–234, 258–267, 300–303, 305–306. John Varriano gives 34 pages out of 293. Varriano (1986): 5–6, 261–294. John Rupert Martin briefly mentions the palace of Caserta only. Martin (1977): 193. The *Larousse Encyclopedia of Renaissance and Baroque Art* devotes just over 3 pages of a total of 411 to southern Italy. Huyghe, ed. (1968). On Sicily, Wittkower notes: 'Sicilian Baroque would deserve closer attention than it can here be given.' Wittkower (1999): 27–28. Matteucci refers to Sicilian architecture's 'exceptional creativity' and its '*genius loci*'. Matteucci (1988): 162–189, Blunt, ed. (1978): 92–103.

31 See Jonathan Morris on *meridionalismo*, history writing describing southern Italy in terms of what the region lacks compared to northern Italy. Lumley and Morris (1997): 1–19. Marco Rosario Nobile notes: 'Southern Europe and the south of Italy in particular, so the argument goes, display their condition of backwardness not only by a structural "delay" in responding to innovations but also by excessive, clumsy and picturesque re-elaboration of the original artistic processes initiated and developed with much greater accuracy and coherence in the major capital cities. Consequently, the "dialects" (as opposed to languages) of these peripheral areas suffer from a lack of theoretical discipline and a constant (though often cryptic) permeability to other cultures (such as those of North Africa) or to vernacular traditions that certify their marginal status.' Nobile (2016): 262. On the marginalisation of southern Italy, Baroque, and ornament, see also Hills (2019).

architecture is ignored does not in itself justify this book, I hope that it will help towards a broader picture of architecture in Italy.

Footnote abbreviations for archives are ASC (Archivio di Stato di Catania), ASM (Archivio di Stato di Ragusa, Sezione Modica), ASN (Archivio di Stato di Siracusa, Sezione Noto), ASNAP (Archivio di Stato di Napoli), ASP (Archivio di Stato di Palermo). All translations are my own unless otherwise stated. All images are my own photographs unless otherwise stated.