

Project: My research addressed the cultural, commercial, and political relationships manifested in the use of objects from al-Andalus as decoration on Pisan churches. I wanted to determine the nature of the relationship between Pisa and al-Andalus in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and then assess the meaning of Muslim objects in a Pisan context. I argue here that the understanding of Islamic objects differed depending upon their means of acquisition, quality, location of display, and audience. I conclude that the Islamic artworks imported into Pisa were important because they came from the Islamic world, and formed part of what we might call a particular “merchant aesthetic” where Islamic objects were an index of the commercial success and cultural sophistication of this influential social group. Finally, I wished to address the theme of the Summer Institute, that is, whether we can classify Muslim *spolia* in Christian contexts as a manifestation of cultural hybridity.

The art historical evidence falls into two categories, the first of which is the numerous ceramics (known as bacini) that are used as decoration on Pisan churches from the tenth to the fifteenth century. The bacini used in Pisa in the eleventh and twelfth centuries originated exclusively from the Islamic world. The early eleventh-century church of San Piero a Grado outside the city of Pisa best exemplifies the aesthetic appeal of bacini decoration and the eclectic variety of ceramics used to ornament the structure. San Piero originally had 222 bacini on its exterior walls, sixty-three of which still survive today. It features bacini from at least five distinct Islamic contexts, and ten percent of the San Piero bacini come from three different cities in al-Andalus: Maiorca, Murcia, and Malaga.

The other category of object consists of luxury artworks from al-Andalus. The Duomo of Pisa possesses two pieces of sculpture from Muslim Spain. The first work, the Pisa Griffin, is a three-foot-tall, metalwork object that was displayed on the exterior eastern apse of the structure. The second work, a capital signed by the artist Fath, is identical to the numerous capitals that adorned structures in Cordoba and Madinat al-Zahra. The capital was displayed on the exterior north transept of the Duomo as a pendant to the Griffin. In their secondary setting, the griffin and capital function as trophies or museum objects, divorced from their original secular function and used as ornaments for a Christian religious structure. The third object is one that I was able to include into this presentation thanks to the help of participants in the Institute. With their assistance I was able to determine that a tombstone displayed in the church of San Sisto was produced in Sharq al-Andalus. It marked the grave of the Amir al-Murtada, governor of the Balearic Islands for the Taifa ruler of Denia

beginning in 1076 and then ultimately the independent ruler of the islands until his death in 1094.

The time period that saw these Muslim objects imported into Pisa was also the time in which the Pisans were at the forefront of Christian offensives against Muslim territories. Early in the eleventh century, the Pisans conducted raids and assaults on various Muslim cities, most notably expelling the ruler of Denia, Mujahid, from Sardinia in 1015. Pisan military offensives culminated in the capture of the Balearic Islands in 1115, which, along with their presence on the islands of Corsica and Sardinia, ensured a clear path through the western Mediterranean to trade centers in North Africa, al-Andalus, and Sicily.

So, in this climate where war, crusade, commercial and cultural exchange were occurring simultaneously, how are we to understand the use of Andalusí objects (the Griffin, capital, tombstone and bacini) as decoration on Pisan churches? First, the reuse of these objects was certainly facilitated by the fact that they were all secular works, with no overt Muslim religious iconography and therefore less intensive meaning. Second, the specific context of the objects helped define their meaning for a particular patron or audience. The pieces associated with the Duomo, the Griffin and the Fath capital, were placed on the most important religious structure in the city, connected to archbishops like Daimberto who supplied not only religious justification but also military forces for the First Crusade and became the first Latin patriarch of Jerusalem. To understand the griffin and capital as spoils of war against Muslims, displayed as they were like trophies on the exterior of the Cathedral and surrounded by triumphal inscriptions, would seem reasonable in the religiously-charged context of the Pisan Duomo. One could also surmise that they would have been readily recognized as products of al-Andalus, as their arrival in Pisa likely coincided with the occupation of the Balearics in 1115.

However, the hundreds of Muslim bacini used on Pisan churches would likely have had a different set of cultural associations based on their specific contexts. Neither San Piero nor San Sisto was associated directly with the ecclesiastical hierarchy of Pisa; San Sisto in particular was founded as a civic church by the citizens of Pisa and had a strong connection to the communal government of the city. Unlike the griffin, capital, or tombstone, bacini were not likely objects of plunder; they were already arriving in Pisa well before the eleventh and twelfth-century military campaigns, came from many disparate production centers, were too numerous and just not valuable enough to be plundered.

So, what meaning could be ascribed to bacini? I would argue that they corresponded to a “merchant aesthetic” that manifested a completely different horizon of expectations from that of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Pisan merchants would have looked at Islamic objects in a specific and culturally determined way, emphasizing their role as commodities, their net worth, and their association with locations to which they themselves had traveled on commercial ventures. A merchant perspective would not see these objects as the spoils of war but as the fruits of trade. Like the ecclesiastical patrons of the Cathedral, they could admire the beauty of these exotic and luxurious objects, but would connect them to the lucrative trade relationships with Muslim territories that fueled Pisa’s prosperity. Thus they could manifest a sense of civic pride in the city’s economic and political accomplishments while differentiating Pisa from its Italian rivals, none of whom used Muslim objects as decoration to the degree that Pisa did in the early Middle Ages.

So, in addressing the topic of this Summer Institute, is bacini decoration a manifestation of cultural hybridity? If the definition of hybridity is the combination of two disparate entities that blend imperceptibly into a completely new whole, then no, these churches and their decoration are not hybrids. They reference two different cultural traditions, but the two traditions remain distinct. *Spolia*, by definition, can never be hybrids, as their meaning centers on the striking disjunction between the original and secondary context. Pisa and al-Andalus in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, then, existed along borderlines in the Mediterranean, interacting frequently in political, social, commercial, and cultural spheres, but never succeeding or even really attempting to eradicate difference.