

The Cloister of Monreale – An Online Exhibition by the Photo Library of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz

The photo library of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz is putting selected images on display from its Photographic campaign of the capitals in the cloister of Monreale

The cathedral of Monreale in Sicily, along with the corresponding Benedictine monastery and the affiliated royal palace, was built by King William II between 1174 and 1189. It was a building programme conceived on a grand scale and the monastery subsequently made this one of the wealthiest institutions of the Norman kingdom. The cathedral would become the coronation and burial church of Sicily's Norman kings, as well as the site of William II's wedding. Apart from the church and some fragments of the monastery buildings, however, only the cloister has remained intact, which counts among the most extensive and skilfully decorated capital programmes of the 12th century.

The photo library of the Kunsthistorisches Institut is now presenting a selection of these capital images in an online exhibition, which accompanied within the framework of the CENOBIUM Project. CENOBIUM is a collaborative international project which is dedicated to the multimedia-based representation of Mediterranean Romanesque cloister capitals.

The visual character of the cloister of Monreale was formed by a particular capital type, which was first found to have a wide diffusion shortly before the turn of the 12th century. Whereas, up to that time capitals had been primarily decorated with ornamental, vegetal, zoomorphic, and anthropomorphic forms, they now provided the representational field for the display of complex narrative or scenographic compositions. In the historiated capital (from Lat. *historiatus* = supplied with a *historia*) now Old and New Testament stories, allegorical scenes, as well as satirical scenes were depicted.

The cloister is connected to the church on the south side, along the entire length of the cathedral nave, forming a square, four-aisled complex with a fountain-house. Each of the 26 double columns organizes the four aisles with arcades of pointed arches, each terminating at the corners with a cluster of four relief columns. This uniform decorative scheme of the cloister is contrasted with the sculptural richness of over 100 capitals. Besides those with ornamental leaf articulation, there are 15 historiated capitals, which represent biblical themes and whose individual scenes are elaborated across several sides: New Testament representations of the Apostles, stories from Christ's, his resurrection, John the Baptist, as well as stories from the Old Testament including Adam and Eve, Samson and the Jacob narrative. Alongside these one also finds a variety of figural capitals containing profane and mythological scenes as well as representations of the dedication of the cathedral itself to the Virgin and Child.

Carved out of white marble, but now encrusted with a thick sandstone-like patina, the capitals owe their motifs to both classicizing and Byzantine models found in ivories and mosaics. Stylistically, the capitals are attributed to different workshops, most likely from southern Italian, northern Italian, and southern French provenance.



Those images selected for the online exhibition are representative of the high artistic quality of the capitals, which is immediately apparent through a high-resolution digital image magnification that generates "studio viewing conditions"; that is to say, they are free from any distracting effects of light.

With the comprehensive photographic documentation of one of the most prominent cloisters of the Mediterranean, the Kunsthistorisches Institut initiated the CENOBIUM project in 2006. It seeks to explore the complex cultural and artistic exchanges in the 12th and 13th centuries in the Mediterranean through such capital sculpture. To this end the capitals will be documented in their architectural and conceptual context with 3-D models and high-resolution digital photos. CENOBIUM combines classical and innovative methods of art history with the latest in data technology that enable critical analyses of the material, which, until now, have not been possible. In collaboration with the Istituto Scienza e Tecnologie dell'Informazione, Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche – ISTI/CNR in Pisa and with the involvement of other International partners, the working project's goal is the creation of a basis for further academic and scientific research through the visual documentation and open access presentation of the capitals at <http://cenobium.isti.cnr.it/>.

The photographs of the exhibition are also searchable through the digital photo library at www.khi.fotothek.org.

**The Cloister of Monreale – An Online Exhibition of the Photo Library of the
Kunsthistorisches Institut– Max-Planck-Institut**

Head of the photo library: Costanza Caraffa

Concept: Ute Dercks

Coordination: Almut Goldhahn

On-line from June 22, 2009 at <http://expo.khi.fi.it>

The next online exhibition opens on October 19, 2009 and will be devoted to the seals and stamps in the collection of the Museo Nazionale di Bargello and the Archivio di Stato in Florence.

For further information:

Astrid Müller

PR Manager/Public Relations

Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut

Via Giuseppe Giusti 44, 50121 Firenze

Tel.: +39 055 24911-1, Fax: +39 055 244394

khi-presse@khi.fi.it

www.khi.fi.it/

P R E S S R E L E A S E , J u n e 2 2 , 2 0 0 9

The Cloister of Monreale

An Online Exhibition by the Photo Library of the

Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz- Max-Planck-Institut



PRESS RELEASE
June 22, 2009

Photographic Material

Monreale, cloister.
© Kunsthistorisches Institut in
Florenz, Max-Planck-Institut



Dedication Capital, east side of
the Monreale cloister, 1174-
1189. © Kunsthistorisches
Institut in Florenz, Max-Planck-
Institut



King William II presents the
model of the church to the
Virgin with the Child, detail from
the Dedication Capital, east side
of the Monreale cloister, 1174-
1189. © Kunsthistorisches
Institut in Florenz, Max-Planck-
Institut



The building of the tower of Babel, detail from the Noah Capital, west side of the Monreale cloister, 1174-1189.
© Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, Max-Planck-Institut



Samson Capital, the north side of Monreale cloister, 1174-1189.
© Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, Max-Planck-Institut



Genesis Capital, east side of the Monreale cloister, 1174-1189.
© Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, Max-Planck-Institut



PRESS RELEASE, June 22, 2009

The Cloister of Monreale - An Online Exhibition by the Photo Library of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz - Max-Planck-Institut

