Inconvenient Globalism: Method Making at the Margins of Art History

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The global turn spun art history on its axis.[1] In every corner of the field, transcultural and transgeographical perspectives have become the rule, rather than the exception. The generation of scholars that came of age in an art history that presupposes globality could be forgiven for thinking that the time for polemic is past: a cursory glance across the disciplinary landscape gives the impression that the dust kicked up by the toppling of Eurocentrism has long settled into place. Early efforts to breach the boundaries that circumscribed traditional art historical narratives proved successful, trading monographic and monofocal literature for a vast archive of global case studies, with ample space left on the shelves. Admittedly, this thirst for expansion, for "unknown" places and protagonists, can mask a familiar colonialist ambition. A globalized history of art, like multiculturalism itself, runs the risk of becoming the same old cultural imperialism in new clothes.[2] The amplification of local histories and

1. Key contributions to a global history of art, with a focus on the early modern, include Claire Farago, *Reframing the Renaissance: Visual Culture in Europe and Latin America 1450–1650* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995); Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Toward a Geography of Art* (University of Chicago Press, 2004); James Elkins, ed., *Is Art History Global?* (New York: Routledge, 2007); James Elkins, Zhivka Valiavicharska, and Alice Kim, eds., *Art and Globalization* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010); Jill H. Casid and Aruna D'Souza, eds., *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn* (Williamstown, MA: Clark Art Institute, 2014); Swati Chattopadhyay, "The Globality of Architectural History," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 74, no. 4 (December 2015): 411–15; Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin, and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, eds., *Circulations in the Global History of Art* (London: Routledge, 2016); and Daniel Savoy, ed., *The Globalization of Renaissance Art: A Critical Review* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

2. Friedrich Teja Bach, "The Modality of Spatial Categories," in Elkins, *Is Art History Global?*, 73.

subaltern identities, however, suggests that sensitivity to this universalizing tendency is on the rise.[3] Art historians now accept that the wide-angle lens of the global should not come at the expense of depth of field, a view that is consistent with a renewed interest in microhistorical analysis.[4] Likewise, retheorizations of the fraught core-periphery paradigm—a bellwether of art history's geographical consciousness—have disrupted the hierarchies that disoriented our disciplinary gaze.[5]

As our investment in this project reaches maturity, the convenience of the global, its casual attraction for scholars seeking an alternative to an art history that privileges the masterwork and the great man, can slip into complacency. This problem is acute for early modernists. It bears repeating that the well-thumbed texts that laid the foundations of the discipline in the nineteenth century co-opted the Renaissance as origin myth, implicating the period in what is increasingly considered the European chauvinism of the canon.[6] That publications like Jacob Burckhardt's *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* (1860) coincided with the birth of Italian nationalism only further hamstrung the evolution of scholarship on centers beyond Florence or Rome. In the quarter century since the first mainstream attempts to reframe the Renaissance, the global has been a life raft, keeping the field afloat in its current crisis of relevance.[7] The disciplinary focus writ large has shifted toward the modern and contemporary periods, where global thinking has been claimed as the intellectual birthright of the post-Enlightenment age. In response, scholars have reaffirmed the transhistorical character of the global: early modernity is routinely taken as evidence

3. See, e.g., Kathleen Christian and Bianca de Divitiis, *Local Antiquities, Local Identities: Art, Literature and Antiquarianism in Europe, c. 1400–1700* (Manchester University Press, 2019); and Carina L. Johnson and Catherine Molineux, "Putting Europe in Its Place: Material Traces, Interdisciplinarity, and the Recuperation of the Early Modern Extra-European Subject," *Radical History Review*, no. 130 (January 2018): 62–99.

4. See John-Paul Ghobrial, ed., "Global History and Microhistory," *Past and Present* 242, supplement no. 14 (November 2019).

5. See, e.g., Stephen J. Campbell, *The Endless Periphery: Toward a Geopolitics of Art in Lorenzo Lotto's Italy* (University of Chicago Press, 2019). For the origins of the core-periphery model, see Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011). For a critique of Wallerstein, see Sanjay Subrahmanyam, introduction to *The Cambridge World History*, vol. 6, pt. 1, *The Construction of a Global World, 1400–1800 CE: Foundations*, ed. Jerry H. Bentley, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 10.

6. Christopher S. Wood, *A History of Art History* (Princeton University Press, 2019), 247.

7. Here I refer to the concurrent publication of Farago's *Reframing the Renaissance* and Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995). For the terminological distinction between "Renaissance" and "early modern" in a global art history, see Ananda Cohen-Aponte, "Decolonizing the Global Renaissance: A View from the Andes," in Savoy, *Globalization of Renaissance Art*, 70.

that globalism (*mondalisation*) existed centuries before modern globaliza-
tion, and pathbreaking research has traced the emergence of globality—
and with it, modernity itself—to the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century prac-
tices of worldmaking.[8]

Transculturation was indisputably authentic to the period, putting early
modernists in a position to participate in current discourse about indigeneity
and identity formation. But as resurgent nationalism weaponizes difference
across the globe, just how stable are the building blocks of our global think-
ing? If the global project began as a problem of geography, it has become
matter of method.[9] The one-two punch of postcolonialism and the global
turn triggered art history to unmake its methods, but it did not leave behind
an instruction manual for their reconstitution. Even postcolonialism now
finds itself on the chopping block as the rising visibility of the Global South
sparks debate on whether conceptions of authority and alterity forged in the
geopolitical maelstrom of the 1970s and 1980s have outlived their value. A
recent call to center decoloniality across disciplinary contexts has similarly
encouraged critical reflections on the stakes—and the ideological impera-
tive—of decolonizing art historical theory and praxis.[10] But just as art history
lagged behind its peers in metabolizing a global mindset, it has largely side-
stepped what I see as an urgent need for self-critique. It is instead historians
and theorists of literature who have done the heavy lifting of method mak-
ing in recent years.[11] Has art history, methodologically speaking, put the cart

8. On globalism and globalization, see Serge Gruzinski, *The Mestizo Mind: The Intellectual Dynamics of Colonialization and Globalization*, trans. Deke Dusinberre (New York: Routledge, 2002), 4; and "The Prehistory of Globalization" (seminar), in Elkins, Valiavicharska, and Kim, *Art and Globalization*, 37–49. On worldmaking, see Ayesha Ramachandran, *The Worldmakers: Global Imagining in Early Modern Europe* (University of Chicago Press, 2015); and Monica Juneja, "'A Very Civil Idea . . .': Art History, Transculturation, and World-Making—with and beyond the Nation," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 81, no. 4 (2018): 461–85, esp. 464.

9. For similar assessments, see Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin, and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, "Introduction: Reintroducing Circulations: Historiography and the Project of Global Art History," in Kaufmann, Dossin, and Joyeux-Prunel, *Circulations in the Global History of Art*, 15; and Chattopadhyay, "Globality of Architectural History," 412.

10. On the art historical response to postcolonial and decolonial histories, see Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, "Art History and the Global: Deconstructing the Latest Canonical Narrative," in "Historicizing the Global: An Interdisciplinary Perspective," ed. Neus Rotger, Diana Roig-Sanz, and Marta Puxan-Oliva, special issue, *Journal of Global History* 14, no. 3 (November 2019): 414; and Catherine Grant and Dorothy Price, eds., "Decolonizing Art History," special issue, *Art History* 43, no. 1 (February 2020): 8–66. For an interdisciplinary perspective, see Catherine E. Walsh and Walter D. Mignolo, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).

11. For early contributions to this subject, see Margaret Cohen, *The Sentimental Education of the Novel* (Princeton University Press, 1999); and Franco Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature," *New Left Review*, n.s., 1 (January/February 2000): 54–68.

before the horse? Aruna D'Souza rightly notes that "method has never emerged fully formed in advance of practice."[12] Yet art historians in the trenches of the global project increasingly feel that their subjects strain against entrenched ways of seeing.[13] The global history of art has reached a tipping point, prompting us to look critically at not just what we know, but how we know it.

Though this article draws on recent contributions to what is now a substantial body of literature, it is neither a comprehensive assessment of the state of the field, nor a historiographical survey of art history's changing attitudes toward the global. Instead, I look to spaces of methodological friction, where existing interpretive models limit our ability to describe the connections and disconnections that defined a global experience of early modernity.[14] I take as my touchstone sixteenth-century Palermo, the capital of the Spanish Habsburg viceroyalty of Sicily. Palermo occupies a marginal position in mainstream scholarship on the early modern period.[15] Even in the current, globally minded climate, the field has been slow to shed perceptions of the city as either a site of stubborn resistance to the Renaissance of the Italian mainland or as the passive object of Hispanicization. Both narratives are borne of a rigid art historical paradigm of influence that prescribes the unidirectional flow of models across space and time.[16] And both narratives are fundamentally at odds with the multiple, and often contradictory, identities that shaped modes of making and seeing in Palermo.

Across the city's visual, material, and literary cultures, the articulation of difference was a persistent act of negotiation. To see Palermo as an active stakeholder in the global early modern is to confront our disciplinary discomfort with places that defy easy categorization—places where processes of dislocation and misidentification complicate the tidier patterns

12. Aruna D'Souza, introduction to Casid and D'Souza, *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn*, xviii.

13. See Elizabeth Horodowich and Alexander Nagel, "Amerasia: European Reflections of an Emergent World, 1492–ca. 1700," in "Making Worlds: Art, Materiality, and Early Modern Globalization," ed. Bronwen Wilson and Angela Vanhaelen, special issue, *Journal of Early Modern History* 23, no. 2–3 (May 2019): 267.

14. On disconnection, see Zoltán Biedermann, *(Dis)connected Empires: Imperial Portugal, Sri Lankan Diplomacy, and the Making of a Habsburg Conquest in Asia* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

15. On southern Italy in the art historical canon, see Michael Cole, "State of the Field: Toward an Art History of Spanish Italy," *I Tatti Studies in Italian Renaissance History* 16, no. 1/2 (Fall 2013): 46. To my knowledge, the only contribution to center Sicily in the discourse of art history's global turn is a study of Isaac Julien's video installation *Western Union: Small Boats* (2007): Ranjana Khanna, "Isaac Julien, or the Southern Question in Art History," in Casid and D'Souza, *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn*, 176–96.

16. On influence, see David Young Kim, *The Traveling Artist in the Italian Renaissance: Geography, Mobility, and Style* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 11–38.

of importation and assimilation that we have come to expect of an expanded early modernity. How might such examples of inconvenient globalism galvanize method making?

TELLABILITY

Sicily would seem tailor-made for the global project. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, port cities like Palermo played host to a concentration of foreign mercantile communities, which commanded a brisk import-export business of commodities like salt and silk that were essential to the emergent global economy. The island's building sites teemed with Italians and Spaniards dispatched to the island by distant imperial authorities, who rubbed shoulders with local architects and engineers, generating design strategies that traveled as far as South Asia.[17] The viceroys imagined themselves at the "frontier of the Levant," collapsing the nearby coast of North Africa with the easternmost boundary of the eastern Mediterranean basin.[18] These geographical acrobatics were only reinforced as populations in the path of Ottoman territorial expansion immigrated to Sicily from Greece and Albania.[19] Simultaneously, Palermo became entangled with geographies in the Americas and the broader Iberian world. Devotional practices moved back and forth across these colonial borders: the dedication of a chapel to the Virgin of Guadalupe in a Palermitan church was followed by the exportation of the city's native saint, Santa Rosalia, to Valencia and, ultimately, to Mexico.[20] And we should not forget that the city was an export market for enslaved Africans trafficked by Iberian traders along a trans-Saharan route that linked Borno to Tripoli.[21]

17. See Elizabeth Kassler-Taub, "Building with Water: The Rise of the Island-City in the Early Modern Mediterranean," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 78, no. 2 (June 2019): 145–66.

18. "Frontera di levante" (Archivio di Stato di Palermo, Tribunale del Real Patrimonio, Lettere Viceregie, vol. 325, fol. 233v).

19. Antonio Mongitore, *Memoria de' Greci venuti dall'Albania*, Biblioteca Comunale di Palermo (hereafter BCP), MS Qq E 32, fols. 81r–82r.

20. David Chillón Raposo, "La sensibilidad estética siciliana en la ciudad de Sevilla a finales del siglo xvii: El origen de la devoción a Santa Rosalía," *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma*, 7th ser., *Historia del Arte*, no. 5 (2017): 247–72, https://doi.org/10.5944/etfvii.5.2017.18743. On the chapel to the Virgin Guadalupe in S. Maria degli Angeli (La Gancia), see D. Gaspare Palermo, *Guida istruttiva per potersi conoscere [. . .] tutte le magnificenze, e gli oggetti degni di osservazione della Città di Palermo*, vol. 2 (Palermo, 1816), 307–10.

21. See Lori de Lucia, "The Space between Borno and Palermo: Slavery and Its Boundaries in the Late Medieval Saharan-Mediterranean Region," in *Rethinking Medieval Margins and Marginality*, ed. Ann E. Zimo, Tiffany D. Vann Sprecher, Kathryn Reyerson, and Debra Blumenthal (New York: Routledge, 2020), 11–26.

Historians of art and architecture are hardwired to see in this portrait of Sicily an interconnected network of things that set sail around the early modern globe, whether tucked into a proverbial pocket or stowed in the hull of a ship: drawings and blocks of stone, iconographies and units of measure, books and antiquities. Even monumental buildings and urban infrastructure—things that, by definition, are firmly fixed in place—were made mobile as the demands of war and colonial governance uprooted architectural patrons from the home front, paving the way for copycat projects abroad. We have a robust language to describe this kind of network: proposals for a connected history of early modernity developed right alongside the movement to globalize the Renaissance.[22] However, it is in only in the last five years that art history began to take for granted the terminologies of portability, mobility, and connectivity.[23] Rather than pinning points of "exchange" or "encounter" on the map, we now speak in terms of "circulations."[24] While the reconception of the global as a circulatory system charts a path for rethinking the material conditions of artistic and architectural production, its primary concern is the mechanics of the network itself. It has, in this sense, distracted our attention from the experience of globality on the ground—from the objects or spaces that are thrust into focus when circulation comes to a standstill. And, in that stillness, a question emerges: Does the discipline, for all its progress, have a vocabulary adequate to the phenomena of visual and architectural transculturation in early modernity?

In Palermo's case, it was the Loggia neighborhood, abutting the old harbor, that was the most immediate witness to the city's participation in the circulations of early modernity. As the hub of Palermo's mercantile economy, the Loggia had long been home to the city's foreign-born population, which between the eleventh and sixteenth centuries included Amalfitan, Venetian, Tuscan, Sardinian, Lombard, Greek, Neapolitan, Messinese, Calabrian,

22. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia," in "The Eurasian Context of the Early Modern History of Mainland South East Asia, 1400–1800," ed. Victor Lieberman, special issue, *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 3 (July 1997): 735–62, and "Holding the World in Balance: The Connected Histories of the Iberian Overseas Empires, 1500–1640," *American Historical Review* 112, no. 5 (December 2007): 1359–85.

23. See, e.g., Gülru Necipoğlu and Alina Payne, eds., *Histories of Ornament: From Local to Global* (Princeton University Press, 2016); Daniela Bleichmar and Meredith Martin, eds., *Objects in Motion in the Early Modern World* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016); and Hannah Baader, Avinoam Shalem, and Gerhard Wolf, "'Art, Space, Mobility in Early Ages of Globalization': A Project, Multiple Dialogue, and Research Program," *Art in Translation* 9, supplement no. 1 (2017): 7–33, https://doi.org/10.1080/17561310.2015.1058024.

24. Kaufmann, Dossin, and Joyeux-Prunel, "Reintroducing Circulations," 1. For a critique of this view, see Emanuele Lugli, "Linking the Mediterranean: The Construction of Trading Networks in 14th and 15th-Century Italy," in Savoy, *Globalization of Renaissance Art*, 160.

Genoese, and Catalan communities. Though there is little surviving evidence of this substantial foreign presence in the contemporary cityscape, the architectural patronage of Palermo's merchants is well documented.[25] Boasting generous imperial privileges, foreign communities frequently established both a "national church" and a loggia, which, like its close typological cousin the *funduq*, offered lodging, provided for the storage of goods, and served as the primary venue for commercial dealings.[26] Such institutions operated alongside the workshops of skilled artisans, including local *fabricatores* (proficient in stone) and foreign *marmorari* (proficient in marble), for whom the neighborhood's proximity to the waterfront facilitated the transportation of materials from ship to shore.[27]

Between 1481 and 1487, a fountain known in dialect as the *planu di lu Garraffu* was installed by municipal authorities along a street connecting the Loggia's primary commercial nodes.[28] The fountain was surmounted by a sculpture (the *Palermo lu Grandi*) of the Genio di Palermo, a crowned, bearded figure bearing a serpent in its arms, which served as the primary emblem of the municipality. As a *genius loci*, a divine protector of place across the geographies of the Roman diaspora, the figure of the Genio was understood in early modernity as a personification of the *civitas*, and thus Palermo itself. The Genio was closely associated with the city's Latin motto, "Palermo, Conca D'Oro, devours its own and nourishes foreigners" (*Panormus vas aureus suos devorat alienos nutrit*), which was inscribed on a

25. Recent publications on this subject include Antonietta Rovida, "Città multietnica e colonie mercantili a Palermo fra dominazione islamica e dominazione normanna," in *Città portuali del Mediterraneo: Luoghi dello scambio commerciale e colonie di mercanti stranieri tra Medioevo ed età moderna*, ed. Teresa Colletta (Milan: Angeli, 2012), 105–18; Gian Luca Borghese, "The City of Foreigners: Palermo and the Mediterranean from the 11th to the 15th Century," in *A Companion to Medieval Palermo: The History of a Mediterranean City from 600 to 1500*, ed. Annliese Nef (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 325–48; and Vincenzo d'Alessandro and Giovanna d'Alessandro, *"Nazioni" forestiere nell'Italia del Cinquecento: Il caso di Palermo* (Naples: Liguori Editore, 2014).

26. On the *funduq* typology, see Olivia Remie Constable, *Housing the Stranger in the Mediterranean World: Lodging, Trade, and Travel in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 2003). On the phenomenon of the national church, see Susanne Kubersky-Piredda and Tobias Daniels, eds., "Constructing Nationhood in Early Modern Rome," special issue, *RIHA Journal: Journal of the International Association of Research Institutes in the History of Art* (March 2020).

27. On the Sicilian culture of stone, see Emanuela Garofalo, "Architecture, Materials and Languages: From Marble to Stone and Vice Versa (Sicily 15th–16th Centuries)," *Artigrama*, no. 33 (2018): 187–208.

28. Scholarship offers varied interpretations of the word *Garraffu*. See, e.g., Iolanda Lanzafane, "Linguistic Contaminations in Sicily: From the Roman Rule to the Present," in *Sicily and the Mediterranean: Migration, Exchange, Reinvention*, ed. Claudia Karagoz and Giovanna Summerfield (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 116; and Michele Amari, *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia*, vol. 2 (Florence, 1858), 300 n. 3.

smaller sculptural iteration of the subject in the seat of the Palermitan senate. Carved in imported Carrara marble in 1483, the so-called Genio del Garraffo is attributed to the Lombard sculptor Pietro de Bonitate, a close collaborator in Palermo of both the Dalmatian sculptor Francesco Laurana and Domenico Gagini, the Lugano-born patriarch of an influential local sculptural workshop. The structure of the fountain was the product of Antonio da Como, a Lombard stonecutter, who worked alongside a number of local *marmorari*, as well as local engineers who oversaw its assimilation into the expansive hydrological system that lay beneath the cobblestones.[29] The fountain was fed by an extra-urban spring, the Averinga (Ayn Rutah), which supplied the neighborhood through a series of subterranean water canals and pipes that survived to early modernity from the late Kalbid period.[30]

Over the following decades, the Loggia underwent a series of interventions that altered the relationship between the Genio and its urban environs. In the 1530s, a cluster of workshops and private homes around the fountain was razed, which in turn paved the way for the establishment of a new loggia of the Catalan "nation" at the fountain's flank. The building, which was later adapted as the church of Santa Eulalia dei Catalani, was a billboard for Catalan power. Early modern chronicles recall that the interior was outfitted with four "noble columns" wrought of marble from Barcelona.[31] The appropriation of the Catalan seat as a focal point

29. On the history of the Via Argenteria, see Marco Rosario Nobile and Fulvia Scaduto, "Architettura e magnificenza nella Palermo del primo Cinquecento: Il prospetto denominato di Santa Eulalia dei Catalani," *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma*, 7th ser., *Historia del Arte*, no. 18–19 (2005/6): 16, https://doi.org/10.5944/etfvii.18-19.2005.1489. On the history of the fountain and the Genio del Garraffo, see Pietro Gulotta, "La Fontana del Garraffo: Un progetto estetico e iconologico di Paolo Amato da restituire alla città," in *Il genio di Ciminna nella Felicissima Panormus*, ed. Vito Mauro (Ciminna: Circolo Culturale "Paolo Amato," 2017), 97–114, esp. 97–104. For the attribution, see Pietro Gulotta, "Antonio da Como scultore del XV secolo," *PER Salvare Palermo* 6 (May–August 2003): 38–39, and "È di origine lombarda lo scultore del Vecchio di piazzetta Garraffo," *PER Salvare Palermo* 5 (January–April 2003): 28–29. For an overview of the commission and an analysis of the sculpture, see also Antonella Chiazza, *Il Genio di Palermo: Contesti urbani e immagini scultoree* (Palermo: Editrice Pitti edizioni, 2010), 13–35.

30. Elena Pezzini, "Palermo's *Forma Urbis* in the 12th Century," in Nef, *Companion to Medieval Palermo*, 220. On Palermo's water system, see Sebastiano Tusa, "Il qanat: Il sistema di canalizzazione delle acque nella Sicilia arabo normanna," in *Il Mediterraneo al tempo di al-Idrīsī: Relazioni tra Nord e Sud, Oriente e Occidente* (Ragusa: Edizioni di storia e studi sociali, 2017), 44–88. On the Averinga as the fountain's source, see Francesco Maria Emanuele e Gaetani, marchese di Villabianca, *La fontanagrafia oretea (le acque di Palermo)*, ed. Salvo di Matteo (Palermo: Edizione Giada, 1986), 91. On the Averinga's location, see Pietro Todaro, "Sistemi d'acqua tradizionali siciliani: *Qanat*, *ingruttati* e *pozzi allaccianti* nella Piana di Palermo," *Geologia dell'Ambiente* 22, no. 4 (October–December 2014): 21.

31. G. B. Castellucci, *Giornale sacro palermitano*, fol. 31, quoted in Antonino Mongitore, *Le Confraternite, le chiese di nazioni, di artisti e di professioni, le Unioni, le Congregazioni e le chiese*

of Charles V's triumphal entry into the city in 1535, during which the surrounding streets were festooned with architectural ephemera, made the community's natural associations with the Spanish crown explicit.[32] The ornamental program of the façade, completed soon after, quite literally set those associations in stone. A register of *all'antica* busts surmounting the tripartite portico allude to the Roman *imperium*, while in the central pediment twinned Herculean columns (early modern shorthand for the Spanish colonial project) surround a Habsburg crest and the insignia of the city of Barcelona (fig. 1).[33] Between 1545 and 1560, a more focused campaign of *renovatio* systematized and regularized the neighborhood, absorbing the fountain into the eponymous piazzetta Garraffo.[34] This first iteration of the square, with the Genio at its center, was short-lived. Following a minimal restoration of the fountain in 1585, it was replaced in 1698 with a larger sculptural fountain bearing a female allegory of abundance that was moved in its entirety to the piazza Marina in 1865, where it became known as the Fontana del Garraffo. As part of the seventeenth-century disassembly of the original fountain, the figure of the Genio was inserted into a tripartite sculptural aedicule on a wall perpendicular to Santa Eulalia dei Catalani, where it remains (fig. 2).[35]

Dueling lapidary inscriptions to the Spanish kings Philip IV and Charles II—mounted above the central niche and in a richly ornamented frame on the facing wall—now anchor the aedicule.[36] The former, dated 1663, credits the *Genio felice* for redoubling the flow of water through the fountain, and thus renewing the "benefits" of the city "for itself and for others," a reference to both Palermo's citizenry and its foreign communities.[37] The local humanist Antonino Mongitore, who transcribes the text in his late seventeenth-century manuscript *Memorie lapidarie*, an inventory of Palermo's inscriptions, notes that the 1663 panel shared space with a sixteenth-century dedication, now lost, to Philip II. Mongitore attributes this earlier dedication to the prolific poet Antonio Veneziano, who

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particolari, BCP, MS Qq E 9, fol. 264v. For the published text, see Valentina Vadalà, ed., *Palermo sacro e laborioso* (Palermo: Sellerio Editore, 1987), 175–80. On the evolution of the structure, see Nobile and Scaduto, "Architettura e magnificenza," esp. 18–21.

32. Maurizio Vesco, "Il quartiere della Loggia da Ferrante Gonzaga a Domenico Caracciolo: Tre secoli di progetto urbano nel cuore di Palermo," in *La Vucciria tra rovine e restauri*, ed. Renata Prescia (Edizioni Salvare Palermo, 2015), 19.

33. Nobile and Scaduto, "Architettura e magnificenza," 15, 24.

34. Vesco, "Il quartiere della Loggia," 18.

35. See Gulotta, "La Fontana del Garraffo," esp. 112–13.

36. See Pietro Gulotta, "A proposito di epigrafia: Le lapidi di piazzetta Garraffo alla Vucciria di Palermo," *Archivio storico siciliano*, 4th ser., 30 (2006): 409–21.

37. Gulotta, "La Fontana del Garraffo," 103.

Figure 1. Façade of the Catalan loggia, 1535–37 (later adapted as the church of Santa Eulalia dei Catalani), Via Argenteria, Piazzetta Garraffo, Palermo, Sicily. Image by author.

Figure 2. Pietro de Bonitate, Genio di Palermo (*Palermo lu Grandi*), 1483 (reinstallation 1698), Piazzetta Garraffo, Palermo, Sicily. Image by author.

left similar inscriptions across the city's early modern monuments.[38] It is through works like Mongitore's that we can begin to reconstruct the broader matrix of installations with which the Genio del Garraffo and its own textual apparatus would have been in dialogue, both before and after its eventual displacement to the aedicule. Just a stone's throw away from the piazzetta Garraffo, for instance, was the Fontana del Garraffello, a more modest fountain that likewise anchored its own eponymous square. Still extant,

38. Antonino Mongitore, *Memorie lapidarie, Ovvero racolta delle iscrizioni che si leggono nelle porte, baluardi, fonti ed altri publici edifici della felice ed fedelissima città di Palermo*, BCP, MS Qq B 9, fols. 161–62 (original pagination). See also Gulotta, "A proposito di epigrafia."

the fountain bears a dedication of 1591 to Philip II, also authored by Vene-
ziano, which extolls the virtues of the fountain in bringing water to "the cit-
izens, the inhabitants, and the foreigners" of Palermo.[39] Both inscriptions,
like Palermo's motto, speak to the outsized place of the foreign presence
in the city's early modern imaginary.

From the perspective of the entwined histories of migration and mer-
cantilism alone, the Loggia reads as a ready case study in sixteenth- and
seventeenth-century transculturalism. The Genio, which was at the heart
of that rapidly changing urban fabric, nonetheless poses an art historical
problem. In its material, iconographical, and textual legacies, the Genio
was a product of—and a proxy for—the ties that bound Palermo to Rome,
to Tuscany, to Lombardy, and to Dalmatia. So too did the protonationalist
program of the façade of the Catalan loggia recalibrate the Genio's con-
nection to place, and to the local mythography that gave early modern cit-
ies like Palermo a sense of self. The sculpture was, in this sense, marked
by instability. Faced with the challenge of describing an object such as the
Genio of the piazzetta Garraffo, we might reach for the well-worn vocabu-
lary of hybridity, which art history has long relied upon as an interpretative
catchall.[40] It could be argued that the humanities come by the term hon-
estly. The concept surfaces in the very first lines of Horace's *Ars poetica*,
while Pliny the Elder's description of migrant populations in Rome has
been proposed as an alternate point of origin.[41] But hybridity, as appropri-
ated by modern discourse, flattens difference; it hinges (paradoxically) on
a myth of biological, ethnic, and racial purity.[42] As such, it plays upon a fear
of contamination—of "mixing"—theorized by Jacques Derrida and oth-
ers.[43] In the piazzetta Garraffo, the construct of the hybrid, with its expec-
tation of "discrete" and easily identifiable parts, hardly seems up to the
task.[44] Moreover, the Genio was not an isolated case: time and again in early

39. The 1591 inscription also appears in *Inscriptiones, que sparsim passimque ab eodem Antonio
Vinitiano conscriptae per leguntur*, part of Antonio Veneziano, *Opere*, BCP, MS Qq D 168, fol. 24r.

40. Hybridity remains popular in scholarship. See, e.g., Peter Burke, *Hybrid Renaissance:
Culture, Language, Architecture* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2016).

41. See Jennifer Ferriss-Hill, *Horace's "Ars poetica": Family, Friendship, and the Art of Living*
(Princeton University Press, 2019), 39–41; and Néstor García Canclini, "New Introduction:
Hybrid Cultures in Globalized Times," in *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving
Modernity*, trans. Christopher L. Chiappari and Silvia L. López (Minneapolis: University of
Minnesota Press, 2005), xxiii.

42. See Carolyn Dean and Dana Leibsohn, "Hybridity and Its Discontents: Considering
Visual Culture in Colonial Spanish America," *Colonial Latin American Review* 12, no. 1 (2003):
5–35.

43. Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre," trans. Avital Ronell, *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1
(Autumn 1980): 55–81.

44. Canclini, "New Introduction: Hybrid Cultures in Globalized Times," xxviii.

modern Palermo, the local and the global, the familiar and the foreign, intersected and interpenetrated, blurring the boundaries that give relational logic to art historical analysis.

James Elkins observed that the word "hybridity" is simply a "cipher" for the "anxiety" of artistic *métissage*.[45] If only we could find the right alternative, the thinking goes, we would be able to crack the code. Hybridity might be the third rail of global art history, but I am not convinced that the disciplinary "anxiety" surrounding marginalized geographies like Palermo is solely a symptom of language and its limitations. Rather, it speaks to an unspoken desire for fixity, for cases where difference is clearly legible.[46] Homi Bhabha's theory of mimicry—a transgressive discursive mode designed to account for the "indeterminacy" and "ambivalence" of the colonial condition—was a reaction to this dependence on a fixed "ideological construction of otherness."[47] Renaming the hybrid, then, is the right answer to the wrong question. Instead, we should be asking whether our ontology of difference accounts for the full range of objects, spaces, and identities that the global project brings into focus. At issue, I argue, is our disciplinary tolerance for histories that lack clear subjectivity. In a discussion of minority histories, Dipesh Chakrabarty notes, "History is a subject primarily concerned with the crafting of narratives. Any account of the past can be absorbed into, and thus made to enrich, the mainstream of historical discourse so long two questions are answered in the affirmative: Can the story be told/crafted? And does it allow for a rationally defensible point of view or position from which to tell the story?"[48] If history is first and foremost a challenge of tellability, Palermo presents an inconvenient narrative. The early modern city straddled geographical fault lines, cultural identities, and subject positions: it operated between Spain and Italy, the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, the premodern Global North and the Global South. From what perspective should we tell its story? And what (or whose) histories will that narrative inevitably leave untold?

Art history is ill equipped to deal meaningfully with the kind of multiplicity that marked Palermo's experience of early modernity. Even as our visual economy of the Renaissance goes global, we continue to deal in a currency of comparison. This may simply be occupational hazard. Since Heinrich Wölfflin first popularized the double projection of lantern slides

45. "Hybridity" (seminar), in Elkins, Valiavicharska, and Kim, *Art and Globalization*, 60.

46. On fixity see Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 66.

47. Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," in "Discipleship: A Special Issue on Pyschoanalyis," ed. Joan Copjec, special issue, *October* 28 (Spring 1984): 126.

48. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton University Press, 2000), 98.

in a darkened lecture hall in nineteenth-century Munich, art historians have been trained to see in opposition.[49] This pedagogical method may have given the discipline its soundtrack—the telltale whir and click of the modern slide projector—but it also produced a reflex to take our subjects two by two.[50] It should not be surprising that when art history first dipped its toes in the water of the global project it made recourse to comparativism. Cross-cultural analysis, itself a hunt for sameness and difference, was for many years the dominant modus operandi.[51] Art historians have only just begun to address the comparative method's outsized influence on the discipline.[52] In "the new art history" of the 1980s, Wölfflin's *Principles of Art History* (1915) was thought to have given rise to an "often colonial-imperialist and sometimes racist" gaze.[53] Most recently, the text, in its transnational dissemination and reception, has been proposed as a contribution to "world literature."[54] Outside of these debates, however, comparison is often leveraged as a strategy for rewriting marginal geographies into a mainstream art history of early modernity. Enumerating the ways in which an unknown geography is analogous to one that is known—privileging its sameness over its difference—admittedly gives art historians a clear sense of orientation. Yet literary theorists would likely say that this approach is shortsighted. Natalie Melas, who set the terms of postcolonial comparativism, notes that the practice of comparison is wrapped up in "colonialism's culture."[55] A new generation of scholars, too, recognizes that comparison is anchored in the very "nation-based geography" from which the humanities have struggled to divest.[56] If comparison avoids the messiness of mixing,

49. See Robert S. Nelson, "The Slide Lecture, or the Work of Art 'History' in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Critical Inquiry* 26, no. 3 (Spring 2000): 414–34.

50. Whitney Davis, "Bivisibility: Why Art History is Comparative," in *Comparativism in Art History*, ed. Jaś Elsner (London: Routledge, 2017), 42.

51. See, e.g., Deborah Howard, *Venice and the East: The Impact of the Islamic World on Venetian Architecture, 1100–1500* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000).

52. On comparison in global art history, see Joyeux-Prunel, "Art History and the Global," 414. On comparison in connected histories, see Prasannan Parthasarathi, "Comparison in Global History," in *Writing the History of the Global: Challenges for the 21st Century* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 69–82; and Biedermann, *(Dis)connected Empires*, 14.

53. Davis, "Bivisibility," 46.

54. Evonne Levy and Tristan Weddigen, *The Global Reception of Heinrich Wölfflin's "Principles of Art History"* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020).

55. Natalie Melas, *All the Difference in the World: Postcoloniality and the Ends of Comparison* (Stanford University Press, 2007), 32–43, esp. 36. See also Francis Goyet, "Comparison," in *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, ed. Barbara Cassin, Emily Apter, Jacques Lezra, and Michael Wood (Princeton University Press, 2014), 159–64.

56. Nirvana Tanoukhi, "The Scale of World Literature," *New Literary History* 39, no. 3 (Summer 2008): 599.

incommensurability, a hallmark of literary postcolonial thought, points to the impossibility of flattening difference.[57]

It would be tempting—convenient, even—to cast Palermo as incommensurable. But there is a danger to emphasizing its difference in this way. Modern scholarship has a bad habit of treating Sicilian history as untellable, even unknowable. A global history that tokenizes difference becomes nothing more than a series of exceptions, each more unlike than the last. Instead, Palermo is valuable precisely because it is unexceptional. There were, I would wager, many "Palermos" in early modernity: many places where historical conditions of political, cultural, and geographical indeterminacy sowed the seeds of our historiographical ambivalence. Our task is to engineer a methodological framework that sees indeterminacy as productive, rather than as silencing.

THE GLOBAL REARVIEW

The phenomena typically associated with a global history of art—even those that contemporary scholarship has left on the cutting room floor—describe a present moment and its immediate afterlife, whenever that moment might be. This sense of immediacy cuts across the full life span of a global case study: mobility, portability, and circulation chart patterns of movement that span distance, not time; contact, encounter, and exchange capture turning points and their aftereffects; and art historians with an interest in reception might consider how such events catalyzed cultural change on the ground, establishing new norms of taste and new systems of value. Our model of connectivity marches forward in time. Is it capable of looking backward?[58]

Even as early modern Sicily was tugged back and forth across the map, it was caught up in a much more immediate negotiation with its own history. Prior to the Risorgimento, the island was seized by a litany of foreign powers, which exploited Palermo's architectural landscape in the service of self-fashioning. The formalization of Habsburg hegemony may have set off a domino effect of new interventions, but the city was already crowded with sites where the global had been made local. Palermo's humanists never swept that messy legacy under the rug. Instead, their chronicles and travelogues reveal an obsessive drive to document the city's past and contextualize its present. Though elsewhere on the island Greco-Roman fragments were

57. See Melas, *All the Difference in the World*, xii; and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Par-delà l'incommensurabilité: Pour une histoire connectée des empires aux temps modernes," in "Histoire globale, histoires connectées: Un changement d'échelle historiographique?," supplement, *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 54, no. 4 bis (2007): 34–53.

58. See the reference to "antilinear" and "parallel" histories in Baader, Shalem, and Wolf, "'Art, Space, Mobility,'" 9. On the concept of time in the Renaissance, see Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2010).
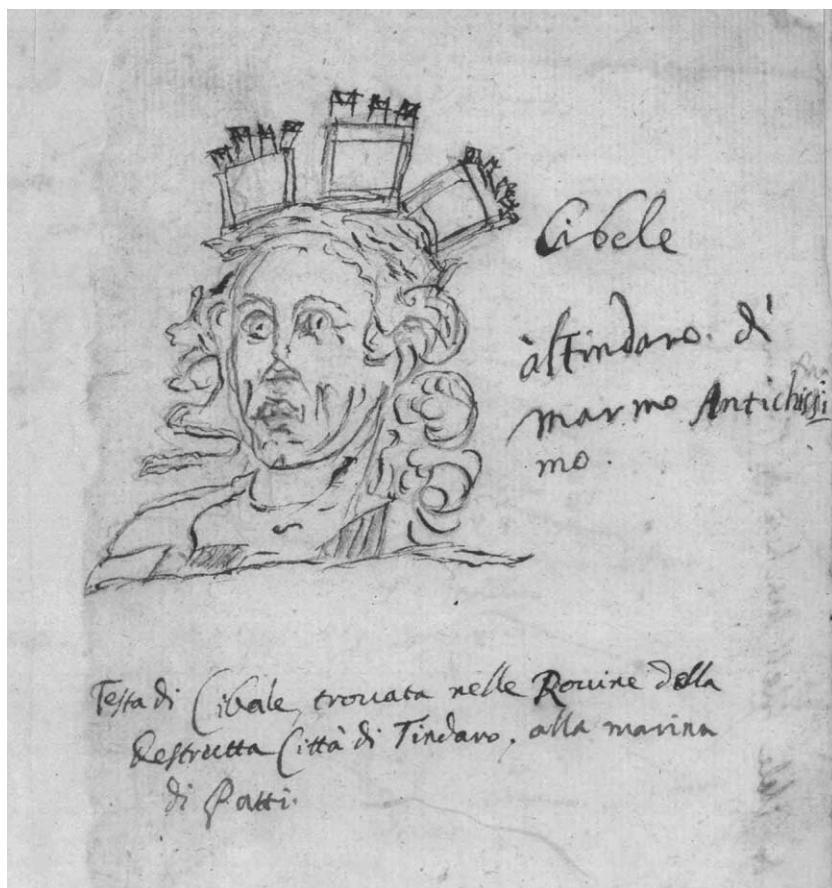
Figure 3. Sketch of a sculptural fragment representing the head of Cybele found at Tindari. From D. Carlo Ventimiglia and Francesco Negro, *Osservazioni geometriche sopra diverse altezze di città e luoghi di Sicilia* (ca. 1640), Biblioteca Comunale di Palermo, MS Qq D 82, fol. 100. Reproduced with permission of Servizio Sistema Bibliotecario Spazi Etnoantropologici e Archivio Cittadino (Comune di Palermo).

unearthed from the ruins of lost settlements—like an evocative head of the goddess Cybele that survives in the pages of a manuscript from the mid-seventeenth century—Palermo itself lacked material traces of its classical heritage (fig. 3).[59] It was the architecture of the Normans, with its conscious counterfeit of Islamicizing ornamental vocabularies, that was co-opted as

59. On buried antiquities, see Leonard Barkan, *Unearthing The Past: Archaeology and Aesthetics in the Making of Renaissance Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 1–63.

an authentic antiquity.[60] This is nothing new: a malleable understanding of history was part of the early modern zeitgeist, particularly in the Iberian world. Spanish chronicles readily dealt in myth and forgery, while the "shock" of the New World is traditionally thought to have complicated the European conception of the ancient past.[61]

Palermo's history nevertheless remains a stumbling block in modern and contemporary literature alike. The argument that the city's transculturalism robbed it of its relevance has in fact been a mainstay of Renaissance architectural history since at least Tafuri's *L'architettura dell'umanesimo* (1976), which characterizes Sicilian culture as "hesitant," inclined to "hasty and superficial syntheses."[62] The problem lies in the very act of mixing, whether precipitated by foreign migration or stylistic synthesis. This attitude resurfaces in a history of Sicily published by the British historian John Julius Norwich in 2015. He writes of the island: "It has belonged to them all—and yet has properly been part of none; for the number and variety of its conquerors, while preventing the development of any strong national individuality of its own, have endowed it with a kaleidoscopic heritage of experiences which can never allow it to become completely assimilated." For Norwich, nationalism—and the cultural homogeneity it mandates—is a precondition of selfhood. Sicily's history of foreign conquest, he says, has imbued it with a pervasive sense of sadness: "It is the sorrow of long, unhappy experience, of opportunity lost and promise unfulfilled—the sorrow, perhaps of a beautiful woman who has been betrayed too often and is no longer fit for love or marriage."[63] Setting aside its thinly veiled misogyny, Norwich's colonialist rhetoric is reminiscent of late nineteenth-century polemics on the Italian South, from Leopoldo Franchetti and Sidney Sonnino's sensationalized 1877 account of Sicilian "brigands" and "assassins," to Alfredo Niceforo's *L'Italia barbara contemporanea* of 1898. Niceforo, too, lays the blame for Sicily's supposed primitivity and inferiority at the feet of its global heritage. The Sicilian character, he argues, betrays the "restlessness and pride" of the

60. Marco Rosario Nobile, "'This Is Babel': Sicily, the Mediterranean Islands, and Southern Italy (1450–1550)," trans. Barbara De Gaetani, in Necipoğlu and Payne, *Histories of Ornament*, 270.

61. On the former subject, see Antonio Urquízar-Herrera, *Admiration and Awe: Morisco Buildings and Identity Negotiations in Early Modern Spanish Historiography* (Oxford University Press, 2017); and Katrina B. Olds, *Forging the Past: Invented Histories in Counter-Reformation Spain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015). On the latter subject, see Anthony Grafton, *New Worlds, Ancient Texts: The Power of Tradition and the Shock of Discovery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992). For a critique of Grafton, see Jill Burke, "Nakedness and Other Peoples: Rethinking the Italian Renaissance Nude," *Art History* 36, no. 4 (September 2013): 724.

62. Manfredo Tafuri, *L'architettura dell'umanesimo* (Bari: Laterza, 1969), 106. For the quoted English translation, see Nobile, "'This Is Babel,'" 262.

63. John Julius Norwich, *Sicily: An Island at the Crossroads of History* (New York: Random House, 2015), xxiii.

"Saracens," the "vanity" of the Greeks, the "arrogance" of the Spanish, and "certain savage impulses" of the Arabs.[64] Period photography brought this racializing gaze into even sharper focus: in his *Picturesque Sicily* (1897), for example, William Agnew Paton includes portraits of a turbaned, shirtless man he calls an "Arab Type," and two barefoot young girls he identifies as "Norman and Saracen Types" (figs. 4, 5).

The preoccupation with the island's patchwork past underscores the methodological friction that surrounds conditions of multiplicity, whether past or present. A recent effort to redevelop the literary construct of the palimpsest as a methodological tool looked across geographies to show how the processes of erasure and masking generated historical meaning in building sites with deep stratigraphies.[65] But the question of how to understand this phenomenon in places that are themselves characterized by geographical diversity remains largely unanswered. Palermo's diversity meant that the construction of artistic and architectural difference occurred fluidly, across temporal boundaries. Reframing early modern Palermo as a global city is therefore an exercise in transhistorical thinking: it draws our attention to how the city's global past and global present rub up against one another. Scholars of the period are no stranger to this basic interpretive mode. In early modernity, history itself was a project of translation.[66] We need only look to Leonardo Bruni's *De interpretatione recta* (1424) for evidence that the vernacularization of classical texts was the backbone of humanist practice.[67] What set Palermo apart from Bruni's Florence, however, was the persistence of multiple antiquities, which fostered in the city a precocious globality.

Might translation be a productive method for coming to terms with the foreignness of Palermo's past? In *The Task of the Translator* (1923), Walter Benjamin locates meaning beneath the surface of language, where it languishes "in a constant state of flux." Translation, Benjamin admits, is "only a provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages," though it "points the way" there.[68] For the early modern thinkers who

64. Leopoldo Franchetti and Sidney Sonnino, *La Sicilia nel 1876: Condizioni politiche e amministrative* (Florence, 1877); Alfredo Niceforo, *L'Italia barbara contemporanea: Studie ed appunti* (Milan, 1898), 180.

65. Nadja Aksamija, Clark Maines, and Phillip Wagoner, eds., *Palimpsests: Buildings, Sites, Time* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017).

66. Stephen J. Campbell and Stephen J. Milner, *Artistic Exchange and Cultural Translation in the Italian Renaissance City* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1.

67. See Leonardo Bruni, "On the Correct Way to Translate," in *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, ed. Gordon Griffiths, James Hankins, and David Thompson (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1987), 217–29.

68. Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator: An Introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens* (1923)," trans. Harry Zohn, in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 78–79.
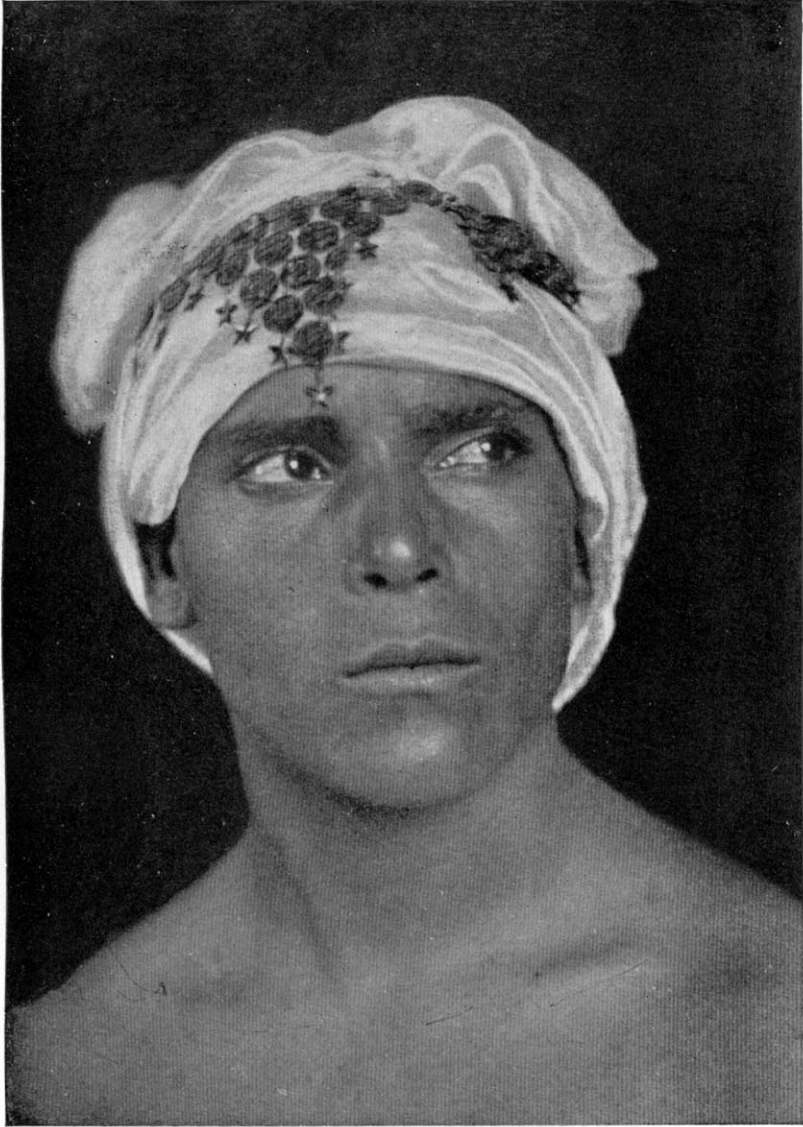
SICILIAN (ARAB TYPE)

Figure 4. "Sicilian (Arab Type)." From William Agnew Paton, *Picturesque Sicily* (1897; New York, 1898). Courtesy of Ingalls Library & Museum Archives, The Cleveland Museum of Art.

NORMAN AND SARACEN TYPES

Figure 5. "Norman and Saracen Types." From William Agnew Paton, *Picturesque Sicily* (1897; New York, 1898). Courtesy of Ingalls Library & Museum Archives, The Cleveland Museum of Art.

committed Palermo's history to paper, translation was woven into the city's mythography. It was a way of reckoning with the city's changing cultural identity over time. Even the etymology of the word *Palermo* became the subject of heated debate, in which the contradictory claims of ancient authors were discharged as humanistic ammunition.[69] Translation, too, was at the heart of period narratives of Palermo's foundation. In his *De rebus Siculis decades duae* (1558), the first published history of the island, Tommaso Fazello describes his pilgrimage in 1534 to a crumbling stone tower at the edge of the Loggia neighborhood.[70] Believed to have dated to at least the tenth century, the Torre Baich (variously "Baych") was adjacent to the Porta Patitelli, previously known as the Bāb al-Baḥr (Sea Gate), which was destroyed in 1564.[71]

Fazello claims to have arrived during a restoration of the tower's western wall with the intention of recording an inscription wrapped around the façade, only to find that a number of inscribed stone blocks had been removed and left in a state of disorder and disrepair. The letters in his printed version, he says, are thus "broken" (*spezzate*), amounting only to a "fragment" (*frammento*) of the original.[72] The transcription, which bears a resemblance to foliated Kufic script, is indeed characterized by irregularities: in addition to the disconnections between letters, some passages of the text are rendered legibly while others are fully illegible, and various elements appear upside down (fig. 6).[73] On the basis of Pietro Ranzano's *De auctore, primordiis et progressu urbis Panormi* (1471), Fazello identifies the inscription as "Chaldean."[74]

69. See, e.g., Vincenzo di Giovanni, *Palermo restaurato*, ed. Mario Giorgianni and Antonio Santa Maura (Palermo: Sellerio Editore, 1989), 76.

70. Tommaso Fazello, *Storia di Sicilia*, vol. 1 (Catania: Dafni, 1985), 440–43.

71. On the relationship between the monuments, see D. Agostino Inveges, *Annali della felice città di Palermo* (Palermo, 1649), 144; Amari, *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia*, 302–4; Gioacchino di Marzo, ed., *Opere storiche inedite sulla città di Palermo ed altre città di Sicilia*, vol. 5 (Palermo, 1874), 303; and Alessandra Bagnera, "From a Small Town to a Capital: The Urban Evolution of Islamic Palermo (9th–mid-11th Century)," in Nef, *Companion to Medieval Palermo*, 76 n. 67.

72. Fazello, *Storia di Sicilia*, 442.

73. As Fazello's transcription appears to be the sole visual evidence of the inscription prior to the tower's destruction, it cannot be stated definitively whether it represents an imperfect record of an authentic Kufic inscription, an intentional pseudoscript, or a combination thereof. There is a robust literature on the medieval and Renaissance tradition of pseudoscript. See, e.g., Alexander Nagel, "Twenty-Five Notes on Pseudoscript in Italian Art," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 59–60 (Spring–Autumn 2011): 228–48. On pseudoscript in Palermo, see Kristen E. G. Streahle, " 'TABI MUROLLI MUIDEM REP': Pseudo-Kūfic, Retrograde Latin, and the Crusades Remembered on the Palazzo Chiaromonte-Steri Ceiling," in "The Sicilian Questions (Continued)," ed. Giuseppe Mandalà, special issue, *Journal of Transcultural Medieval Studies* 4, no. 1–2 (2017): 217–68.

74. Fazello, *Storia di Sicilia*, 441. On Ranzano's account see Nadia Zeldes, "The Last Multi-Cultural Encounter in Medieval Sicily: A Dominican Scholar, an Arabic Inscription, and a Jewish Legend," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 21, no. 2 (2006): 159–91.
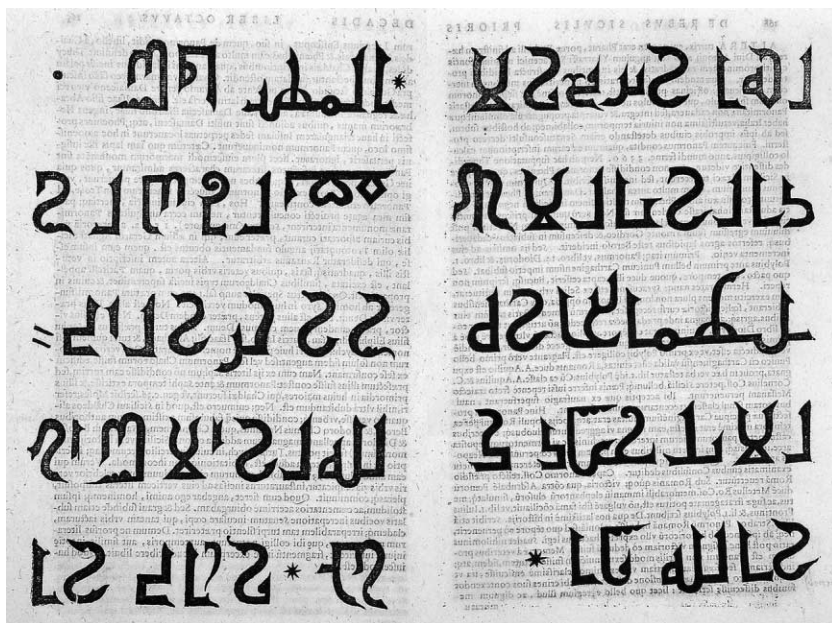
Figure 6. Inscription on the Torre Baich. From Tommaso Fazello, *De rebus Siculis decades duae* [. . .] (Palermo, 1558), Biblioteca centrale della Regione siciliana "Alberto Bombace," Rari sic. 181, pp. 166 (*left*) and 167 (*right*). Reproduced with permission of Dipartimento di Beni Culturali e dell'Identità Siciliana (Regione Siciliana).

Both histories proselytize the story of the Baich inscription, recounting a relentless—and often dubious—quest to decipher its meaning.[75] For Ranzano and Fazello, the tower was a *lieu de mémoire*: it affirmed that the city was first built by the Chaldeans and could therefore claim a biblical heritage. Fazello rehearses a purported translation of the inscription that identifies the "Captain" of the tower as "Sefo (*Safu*) son of Eliphaz, son of Esau, brother of Jacob son of Isaac, son of Abraham."[76] It didn't take long for the myth of Palermo's biblical origins to be dispelled. In his *Annali della felice città di Palermo* (1649), Agostino Inveges counters that comparison to "Arab coins" (*Monete Arabiche*) and other sources reveals that the inscription was instead

75. For attempts to reconstruct and translate the inscription, see Gabriele Lancillotto Castello, *Le antiche iscrizioni di Palermo* (Palermo, 1762), xii–iii, 57 (fig. 113); Salvatore Morso, *Descrizione di Palermo antico* (Palermo, 1827), 46–72; and Amari, *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia*, 303 n. 1.

76. Fazello, *Storia di Sicilia*, 441. On the legend of Sefo, see Zeldes, "Last Multi-Cultural Encounter," 169–71.

"clearly" written in "Arabic letters."[77] This narrative of translation and mistranslation nonetheless reached readers well beyond the island's shores. Soon after its publication, Fazello's volume was translated from the Latin by a Florentine humanist in Venice.[78]

The early modern retelling of Palermo's foundation is eerily familiar: all that remains of a ruined biblical tower is a confounding—even untranslatable—text. The Torre Baich, it seems, is a kind of Babel. Marco Rosario Nobile has likened the stylistic landscape of early modern Palermo as a whole to Babel, using the metaphor to capture the varied "dialects" that made up the city's "multilingualism."[79] Though Babel is a cautionary tale about human hubris, we might also read it as an architectural parable—one that tells of the inevitable loss of spaces of belonging in the face of a nascent globality. As described in Genesis, the construction of a tower that pierced the sky of the Shinar Valley set in motion a dramatic diaspora: "The Lord *scattered* them abroad from thence upon the face of the earth."[80] The punishment of mutual incomprehensibility thus went hand in glove with the expansion of the world on a global scale. A rabbinical commentary on the Babylonian Talmud dating from late antiquity underscores this architectural subtext: one third of the tower, it asserts, was burned; the second sunk beneath the surface of the earth; and the last is "still standing," enveloped in an air that "makes one lose one's memory."[81] Daniel Heller-Roazen, drawing on Dante Alighieri's fourteenth-century *De vulgari eloquentia*, reframes that loss of memory as the "forgetting" of language.[82] Surrounded by Babel's ruins, we not only find ourselves tongue-tied, but quite literally speechless.

The same specter of the loss of language hangs over the image of Sicily in twentieth-century popular culture. In Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's iconic novel *Il Gattopardo* (1958), set during the Risorgimento, the protagonist Don Fabrizio laments, "The violence of landscape, this cruelty of climate, this continual tension in everything, and even these monuments, even, of the past, magnificent yet incomprehensible because not built by us and yet standing around us like lovely mute ghosts; all those rulers who landed by main force from every direction, who were at once obeyed, soon detested, and always misunderstood, their only expressions were works of art we couldn't

77. Inveges, *Annali della felice città di Palermo*, 148.

78. Tommaso Fazello, *Storia di Sicilia*, trans. Antonio de Rosalia and Gianfranco Nuzzo, vol. 1 (Palermo: Regione Siciliana, Assessorato dei Beni Culturali e Ambientali e della Pubblica Istruzione, 1990), 17.

79. Nobile, "'This Is Babel,'" 262–63, 272.

80. Gen. 11:8, quoted in Daniel Heller-Roazen, *Echolalias: On the Forgetting of Language* (New York: Zone Books, 2005), 220.

81. *Sanhedrin* 109a; English from Isodore Epstein, ed., *The Babylonian Talmud*, 7 pts. (London: Soncino, 1961), quoted in Heller-Roazen, *Echolalias*, 225–27.

82. Heller-Roazen, *Echolalias*, 225–27.

understand and taxes which we understood only too well and which they have spent elsewhere."[83] Here, Sicily's "lovely mute ghosts" are not those of empires past, but of the buildings that they left behind, each an incomprehensible ruin of ill-fated ambition. One would not be hard-pressed to read in this passage the belief that Palermo's "multilingualism" sowed the seeds of its architectural obsolescence. And yet, if Palermo was a place that told the story of its foreign past in many tongues, it was also a place caught up in a perpetual act of translation. By its very nature, translation is cacophonous—marked as much by the grating sounds of misunderstanding as by the intimate hush of understanding. In other words, the city's ghosts are anything but mute.

FROM METAPHOR TO METHOD

Over the last ten years, translation has gained traction among historians of art and architecture working on modalities of building and image making shaped by cultural transfer.[84] Esra Akcan's *Architecture in Translation* (2012) and Alexandra Russo's *The Untranslatable Image* (2014) eschew the "indistinct," "ambiguous," and "imprecise" models of hybridity and syncretism in favor of translation.[85] Akcan suggests that translation removes the blinders that constrain arguments for "pure 'local' architecture" or "pure 'global' building" to reveal how "diverse types of continuous translations have shaped and are still shaping history, perpetually mutating definitions of the local and the foreign."[86] Russo similarly builds upon Barbara Cassin's category of the untranslatable "to stress the transformations, even the dynamics, of creation in New Spain in order to illuminate the ongoing process of *making* images rather than the final result of the 'visual translation.'"[87] The art historical interest in translatability and its limits bookends the publication

83. Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, *The Leopard*, trans. Archibald Colquhoun (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991), 208.

84. See, e.g., Jeffrey Saletnik and Karen Koehler, eds., "Translation and Architecture," special issue, *Art in Translation* 10, no. 1 (2018), https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rfat20/10/1; and "Translation" (seminar), in Elkins, Valiavicharska, and Kim, *Art and Globalization*, 23–35.

85. Esra Akcan, *Architecture in Translation: Germany, Turkey, and the Modern House* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 5; Alexandra Russo, *The Untranslatable Image: A Mestizo History of the Arts in New Spain* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 4. See also Esra Akcan, "Channels and Items of Translation," in Casid and D'Souza, *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn*, 145–59, and "Writing a Global History through Translation: An Afterword on Pedagogical Perspectives," in Saletnik and Koehler, "Translation and Architecture," 136–42, https://doi.org/10.1080/17561310.2018.1424309.

86. Akcan, *Architecture in Translation*, 2.

87. Russo, *Untranslatable Image*, 6–7; see also 246–53.

of Emily Apter's veritable manifesto on untranslatability, *Against World Literature* (2013), which imagines a literary comparativism that "recognizes the importance of non-translation, mis-translation, incomparability and untranslatability."[88]

Translation, and the category of the untranslatable, are not without critics in art history. Elkins characterizes arguments for the impossibility of translation as "hedges to claims about the meaning of art that otherwise may appear too direct or universalizing." Translation, he contends, "may function more as an acknowledgement of contingency and uncertainty than as an explanatory model."[89] This is a valid critique, and one that recalls the growing pains of the hybrid in critical theory. Néstor García Canclini previously cautioned that studies of hybridization rarely surpass mere description; instead, he exhorted scholars to give the concept "*hermeneutical* capacity" in order to make it "useful for interpreting relations of meaning that are reconstructed through mixing."[90] Investing translation with agency as a methodological model similarly forces us to set aside the enduring assumption that ill-defined mixtures can, and must, be fully reconciled. We often expect our methods to be puncture proof, but that expectation is to our disciplinary detriment. As the rise and fall of hybridity in the wake of art history's global turn should remind us, not all places and problems require us to tread the same terrain. In this sense, translation is not a universal alternative to existing models of visual or architectural transculturation, but provides a stable scaffold as we find our footing in spaces shaped by conditions of transhistorical globalism, where the boundary between the local and foreign was ever shifting.

Returning to the piazzetta Garraffo, the hermeneutics of translation sharpens our gaze. Reading the Genio as a vehicle of translation, rather than as an object of hybridization, allows for the articulation of the multiple registers of difference that operated in the space over time. The figure can simultaneously act as an intentional marker of local memory, expressed in a familiar visual vernacular, and as a flexible signifier, implicated in an opportunistic statement of foreign ambition. Highlighting these translations—these echoes and reverberations—refocuses our attention on the Genio's place within the spatial and visual dynamics of the square, and the Loggia neighborhood as a whole. It encourages us to think, and to see, dialogically.[91]

88. Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (London: Verso, 2013), 3–4.

89. James Elkins, afterword to Elkins, Valiavicharska, and Kim, *Art and Globalization*, 253–54. For a critique of translation, see also Steven Nelson, "Conversation without Borders," in Casid and D'Souza, *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn*, 83.

90. Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures*, xxix.

91. See Michal Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michel Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004).

And it encourages us to rethink the status of objects realized through the collaboration of local and foreign sculptors and craftsmen. Most often, evidence of these transgeographical or transcultural exchanges prompts a rote matching game, which seeks to trace the source of a given visual element to its point of origin abroad—to reconcile the impurity of the mixture. Constructing that tidy genealogy, though, belies the sheer scope of translations that were set into motion by the jostling between vernacular and imported forms in early modernity. In sum, there is value to foregrounding, rather than sublimating, those contradictions.

Two encounters with multilingualism—some four hundred years apart— suggest that in Palermo translation was, and continues to be, a lived experience. In April 1578, Antonio Veneziano, the local poet who authored inscriptions on the lost fountain of the piazzetta Garraffo and the Fontana del Garraffello, was taken captive by corsairs off Capri while traveling on a galley to Madrid. He was imprisoned for over a year in Algiers, where, in a poetic encapsulation of the early modern global, he met Miguel de Cervantes, also a prisoner, who shared newly penned verses with his Sicilian counterpart.[92] Following his return to Palermo, Veneziano completed a volume of poetry in Sicilian dialect, thought to have been partially written during his imprisonment. In the 1581 dedication to the volume, Veneziano muses on translation, remarking wryly that if "Homer, who was Greek and wrote in Greek, Horace who was from where they spoke Latin and wrote in Latin, Petrarch who was Tuscan and wrote in Tuscan, it would be troubling if I, being Sicilian, did not see fit to compose in Sicilian." Reminding his reader of Plautus and Virgil—who, he notes, liberally copied their Sicilian predecessors—he asks: "must I, myself Sicilian, parrot the languages of others?" For Veneziano, language is bound up in the challenge of selfhood. "Poetry," he writes a few lines later, "does not lie in language, it is in the veins, in the spirit, and in the mind."[93] Writing on translation, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak observes, "Language is not everything. It is only a vital clue to where the self loses its boundaries."[94] Veneziano, it seems, would agree.

In early April 2017, a pair of trilingual street signs that mark the corner of the piazza Santi Quaranta Martiri in Palermo's Ballarò neighborhood were

92. Antonio Veneziano, *Libro delle rime Siciliane,* ed. Gaetana Maria Rinaldi (Palermo: Centro di studi filologici e linguistici Siciliani, 2012)*,* ix n. 5.

93. "Starria friscu Homeru chi fu grecu e scrissi grecu, Horaziu chi fu d'undi si parlava latinu e scrissi latinu, lu Petrarca chi fu tuscanu e scrissi tuscanu, s'a mia, chi su sicilianu, non mi convenissi componiri sicilianu. E si Plautu happi a summa grazia potiri imitari chillu primu comicu sicilianu Epicarmu e Virgiliu si tinni assai contentu di ritrairi l'idillii di Teocritu, puru sicilianu, iu chi su sicilianu m'haiu a fari pappagallu di li lingui d'autru? . . . La poesia non sta ne lu idioma, sta ne la vena, ne la spiritu e ne li pinseri" (ibid., 4).

94. Gayarti Chakravorty Spivak, "The Politics of Translation" (1992), in Venuti, *Translation Studies Reader,* 370.

Figure 7. Vandalized street signs in Piazza Santi Quaranta Martiri on April 3, 2017, Palermo, Sicily. Image reproduced with permission of Gea di Bella.

vandalized. Thick streaks of green paint were used to blot out the Arabic and Hebrew names which preserved the toponyms used by the neighborhood's previous inhabitants. Only the modern Italian was left unscathed (fig. 7). Many streets in the city's historic center bear similar signage, evidence of a local desire to make the city's past legible—to tell its history in translation. Palermo's mayor condemned the "racist gesture," which he called all the more serious for its occurrence in "a place that more than anything symbolizes the welcoming and intercultural calling of our city."[95] And indeed, the square, which was the site of the city of the city's first Pisan church, is now home to an advocacy group for Palermo's immigrants and refugees.

95. Leoluca Orlando, "A seguito della cancellazione dei nomi delle vie scritte in arabo e in ebraico," Facebook, April 3, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/leolucaorlandosindaco/photos /a.422899234392312/1673238936024996/. See also Silvia Buffa, "Ballarò, vernice su nomi in arabo ed ebraico delle vie," *MeridioNews,* April 3, 2017, Palermo edition, https://palermo .meridionews.it/articolo/53592/ballaro-vernice-su-nomi-in-arabo-ed-ebraico-delle-vie-il -responsabile-del-gesto-e-contro-la-storia-della-citta.

The nativism that fueled the 2017 episode is an extreme expression of what we might identify as the discomfort of cultural indeterminacy. At its core, however, it is the very same discomfort that wrote Sicily out of a mainstream history of early modernity. Cities like Palermo, in all their indeterminacy, ask art historians to grapple with spaces where the boundaries of selfhood are constantly redrawn. Those spaces are at once familiar and alienating. But they are not beyond the grasp of method making.