

The Cult of St Nicholas of Myra in Norman Bari, c. 1071–c. 1111

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This article explores the cult of St Nicholas in later eleventh-century Bari, focusing on its importance to the new Norman rulers in the region as well as to their subjects. While acknowledging the influence of earlier expressions of the cult in Normandy and in Byzantine southern Italy, it argues that for numerous reasons Nicholas was, for Bari, an especially important – and appropriate – intercessor. During these years, which witnessed the translation of the saint from Myra, economic developments, church politics and the demands of the First Crusade merged to render Nicholas an ideal patron for the city.

From the very beginning of the Norman conquest of Sicily and southern Italy, the city of Bari played an important role: it was not only the seat of an archbishopric, it had also served as the administrative centre of Byzantine Apulia and, from about 969, the seat of the Catepan, an official whose authority probably extended over all the imperial provinces in Italy.¹ Indeed, according to the late eleventh-century Norman chronicler William of Apulia, during a pilgrimage to the summit of Monte Gargano in honour of Michael the Archangel, the Normans were invited back to Apulia by Melus, a Lombard from the city. Melus told the Normans that he had been forced out of Bari by the Byzantines but assured them that with their help he could regain the town. Not ones to decline a challenge, the Normans promised Melus that they would return. They kept their word and so did Melus, who led them in an invasion of Apulia. It is an accomplishment that encouraged William to christen Melus ‘the first leader of the Norman race in Italy’.² The last Byzantine

¹ Graham A. Loud, *The age of Robert Guiscard: southern Italy and the Norman conquest*, Harlow 2000, 31.

² ‘Hunc habuere ducem sibi gens Normannica primum partibus Italiae’: William of Apulia, *The deeds of Robert Guiscard*, trans. Graham A. Loud, University of Leeds, <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/history/weblearning/MedievalHistoryTextCentre/medievalTexts.htm>,

stronghold on the mainland had fallen to the Normans by 1071. Victory at Bari encouraged the Normans and gave them great hope that they would soon ‘engage in battle at sea with more hope of success’.³

As the Normans conquered land and consolidated power in southern Italy, they and their subjects looked for support to St Nicholas of Myra, whose relics would eventually find a home in Bari. Although Nicholas’s relics did not arrive there until 1087, Robert Guiscard and his brother, Roger I, were aware of the saint and his patronage earlier. Indeed, before their arrival in southern Italy, Nicholas was already popular in Normandy. In addition, an earlier Orthodox Christian cult had been fostered by their Byzantine predecessors, leaving an indelible footprint in the region. These pre-existing traditions converged with political, religious and economic developments in the later eleventh century and, in so doing, transformed Nicholas into an especially relevant saint for Norman rulers, church leaders and the subjects who lived in the region.

Early influences in northern France

In hindsight, it is not surprising that Nicholas became a favourite saint of the early Normans in Italy. In his well-known study, Charles Jones notes that nationalism was never part of Nicholas’s identity.⁴ Unlike St Denis, for example, Nicholas never became fully identified with a particular kingdom, despite that his popularity was widespread during the Middle Ages. In France itself, Nicholas was considered a patron of (among others) merchants, scholars, children and lovers. The lack of association

4. Loud’s translation is based on Guillaume de Pouille, *La Geste de Robert Guiscard*, ed. Marguerite Mathieu, Palermo 1963.

³ ‘Gens Normannorum navalis nescia belli hactenus, ut victrix rediit, spem principis auget. Sentit enim Danaos non tantum civibus Urbis praesidii ratibus vexisse, quod obsidionem impediit; multum simul et novitate triumphii aequorei gaudet, securius unde subire iam cum Normannis navalia proelia sperat’: *La Geste de Robert Guiscard*, 170 (‘The Norman race had up to this point known nothing of naval warfare. But by thus returning victorious they very much enhanced their leader’s confidence, for he knew that the Greeks had been unable to carry enough help to the citizens of the town to hinder the siege. At the same time he greatly rejoiced at the novelty of this naval victory, hoping in consequence that he and the Normans might in future engage in battle at sea with more hope of success’: William of Apulia, *Deeds of Robert Guiscard*, 32). See also *The history of the Normans by Amatus of Montecassino*, ed. Graham A. Loud, Rochester 2004, 143–6; the *Anonymi barensis chronicon*, ed. L. A. Muratori, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores* v, 1724; and Charles Stanton, ‘The use of naval power in the Norman conquest of southern Italy and Sicily’, *Haskins Society Journal* xix (2007), 120–36 at pp. 125–6.

⁴ ‘Nationalism ... was never a part of N[icholas’s] personality; perhaps that is one reason why his cult was more intense among Normans, who were wandering knights, than anywhere else’: Charles Williams Jones, *Saint Nicholas of Myra, Bari and Manhattan: biography of a legend*, Chicago 1978, 220.

with a particular people – combined with the fact that he was one of the most popular non-biblical saints in Christendom – may have made him attractive to the Normans, who by the eleventh century had become well-known for their adventurous exploits in foreign lands.⁵

There were a number of ways in which the Normans may have learned about Nicholas while still in their homeland. In the West, the cult probably began to grow in the ninth century and reached Rouen around 960 or so.⁶ In other words, it had existed in Normandy for over a century before the translation of his relics to Bari.⁷ One possible line of transmission began in Eichstätt (Franconia), moved to Regensburg (Bavaria), to Hildesheim (Saxony), to Liège (Upper Lotharingia) and finally to Rouen.⁸ The first recorded person to carry the name Nicholas north of the Alps was the son of Duke Richard II of Normandy, born sometime between 1026 and 1028, who later became the abbot of St Ouen. By 1040 the name had grown in popularity and a number of Nicholases were on record.⁹ Although there were few sources concerning the cult of Nicholas in the duchy of Normandy in the tenth century, references multiplied in the eleventh, including a chapel dedicated to the saint in the cathedral of Coutances, which was consecrated in 1056, as well as a chapel in Normandy, near the Seine, dedicated to Nicholas of the Sailors.¹⁰ Yet another important Norman example is the Abbey of Jumièges.¹¹ This is an intriguing connection given the architectural similarities between the Norman abbey and the basilica at Bari; the church was probably built by

⁵ ‘N[icholas] has been the most popular nonbiblical saint in Christendom, though Saint Martin might challenge that claim’: *ibid.* 3.

⁶ *Wace, the hagiographical works: The Conception Notre Dame and the Lives of St Margaret and St Nicholas*, trans. with introduction and notes by Jean Blacker, Glyn S. Burgess and Amy V. Ogden, Leiden 2013, 252. See also Charles Williams Jones, ‘The Norman cults of Sts Catherine and Nicholas, saec. XI’, *Collection Latomus* cxlv (1976), 216–30 at p. 222 n. 44.

⁷ It should be noted that although the cult of St Nicholas had been observed pre-1087, it received a boost once his relics were moved to Bari. This is particularly true of northern, central and eastern France: Karl Young, *The drama of the medieval Church*, Oxford 1962, 308–9.

⁸ Jones, ‘The Norman cults of Sts Catherine and Nicholas’, 223. See also Ildar H. Garipzanov, ‘The cult of St Nicholas in the early Christian North (c. 1000–1150)’, *Scandinavian Journal of History* xxxv (2010), 229–46 at pp. 230–2.

⁹ Karl Meisen, *Nikolauskult und Nikolausbrauch im Abendlande* (1931), Düsseldorf 1981, 344ff.

¹⁰ Jean Fournée, *Saint Nicolas en Normandie*, Nogent-sur-Marne 1988, 48, 24ff., respectively. According to legend, the chapel was built by grateful sailors from Rouen who had been faced with shipwreck during a voyage to England. Nicholas protected them and descended from the sky to offer reassurance (p. 52).

¹¹ Marjorie Chibnall, ‘The translation of the relics of Saint Nicholas and Norman historical tradition’, in *Le relazioni religiose e chiesastico-giurisdizionali: atti del Congresso di Bari, 29–31 ottobre 1976*, Rome 1979, 31–41 at p. 35.

Lombard craftsmen attempting to model a Norman style.¹² It should be noted that the influence seems to have worked both ways, with Norman devotion influencing Italy and *vice-versa*. Nicholas's cult, once centred at Bari, became almost as celebrated in Normandy as it was in the saint's new home.¹³

The cult of Nicholas received a boost in popularity as a result of the devotion of Fulk Nerra, count of Anjou (970–1040). Fulk believed that Nicholas had saved him during a storm that claimed his ship, leaving him stranded off the coast of Myra.¹⁴ A later collection of miracle stories suggests that Fulk learned about Nicholas's powers while traveling in the East.¹⁵ In his biography of the count, Bernard Bachrach notes that in addition to his gratitude for being spared the perils of the deep, Fulk also wanted to associate himself with other attributes of the saint. For example, Nicholas was a patron of the military and associating with him could raise the prestige of the count's military service. In addition, the saint was a patron of secular piety, another *persona* that Fulk tried to cultivate by restoring and building churches. Nicholas's reputation as a patron of merchants could also be useful to a man who was trying to develop trade and commerce throughout his dominions.¹⁶ Fulk's construction and rich endowment of a monastery dedicated to the saint in Anjou may have been a manifestation of these desires. And yet, at the same time, it was another way in which Nicholas's fame spread in eleventh-century northern France.

One of the most intriguing pieces of evidence regarding the cult of Nicholas in eleventh-century Normandy concerns William the Conqueror, new overlord of an island kingdom, who in 1067 was also spared an untimely death by Nicholas's intercession. Orderic Vitalis reports that while in Normandy during that winter, William received word of a possible rebellion in England by Anglo-Saxons with support from the Danes 'and other barbarous peoples'.¹⁷ The news clearly

¹² Graham A. Loud, *The Latin Church in Norman Italy*, Cambridge 2007, 132.

¹³ David Charles Douglas, *The Norman achievement, 1050–1100*, Berkeley 1969, 118.

¹⁴ Bernard S. Bachrach, *Fulk Nerra, the neo-Roman consul, 987–1040: a political biography of the Angevin count*, Berkeley 1993, 165. For the Latin text see Yvonne Maïlfert, 'Fondation du monastère bénédictin de Saint-Nicolas d'Angers', *Bibliothèque d'École de Chartes* xcii (1931), 43–61 at p. 55.

¹⁵ Jonathan Shepard, 'Adventus, arrivistes and rites of rulership in Byzantium and France in the tenth and eleventh century', in *Court ceremonies and rituals of power in Byzantium and the medieval Mediterranean: comparative perspectives*, London 2013, 337–71 at p. 358.

¹⁶ Bachrach, *Fulk Nerra*, 165.
¹⁷ 'Et ex malivolentia Anglorum cum nisu Danorum aliarumque barbararum gentium magnam cladem Normannis orituram intimabant': *The Ecclesiastical history of Orderic Vitalis*, ed. Marjorie Chibnall, Oxford 1969–80, ii. 208–9. Versions 'D' and 'E' of the *Anglo-Saxon chronicle* also maintain that William returned to England on St Nicholas's Day 1067: David C. Douglas, *William the Conqueror*, Berkeley 1964, 213.

concerned the king and he made the decision to cross the English Channel on the night of 6 December, Nicholas's feast day. The next morning, William reached Winchelsea safely. Orderic makes it clear that the saint had a hand in the uneventful passage. The winds had made the seas choppy but, as churches in Normandy offered up prayers for the king during the celebrations in honour of Nicholas, the waters were calmed, allowing William a safe journey:

Then during the night of the sixth of December he reached the mouth of the Dieppe River beyond the town of Arques, and, setting sail with a southerly wind in the first watch of a bitter night, made a good crossing and reached the harbour of Winchelsea on the opposite shore next morning. The wintry season made the sea rough; but the church of God was celebrating the feast of St. Nicholas, bishop of Myra, and all over Normandy prayers were offered for the good of the duke. And so divine providence, which at all times and in all places guides to prosperity all whom it wills, brought the godly king rejoicing through the winter storms to the safety of the harbour.¹⁸

Nicholas's favour is emphasised in Orderic's account as he stresses the highly unfavourable conditions under which William travelled. The king departed during first watch, meaning that the bulk of his journey was made in darkness, a challenge to which many modern people living in a world illuminated by artificial light have difficulty relating. Instead of waiting for favourable conditions, William chanced the southerly winds. The physical toll on the rowers, struggling to maintain a course to the north and west, must have been enormous. If this was not enough, it was December and the king had to contend with a dangerous winter sea. Like the Normans of southern Italy and Sicily, William faced the challenge of maintaining authority over lands that were separated by a body of water, adding even further unpredictability to a reign already complicated by the need to integrate newly-conquered peoples prone to rebellion.¹⁹

That Nicholas at times demonstrated a special affection for the Norman people is made even more obvious by the juxtaposition of two accounts related by Orderic in the same source. He tells the story of Stephen, a monk from Anjou and a would-be thief who stole one of the saint's arms

¹⁸ 'Deinde sexta nocte decembris ad hostium annis Deppæ ultra oppidum Archas accessit, primaque vigilia gelidæ noctis Austro vela dedit, et mane portum oppositi litoris quem Vincenesium vocitant prosperrimo cursu arripuit. Iam aura hiemalis mare sevissimum efficiebat sed sancti Nicholai Mirreorum præsulis solennitatem Ecclesia Dei celebrabat, et in Normannia pro devoto principe fideliter orabat. Omnipotentia ergo divina quæ omnes ubique et semper quos vult prospere gubernat benivolum regem inter hiemales tempestates ad portum salutis cum gaudio dirigebat': *Ecclesiastical history of Orderic Vitalis*, ii. 208–11.

¹⁹ Roger II, son of Roger I, would experience a similar challenge in the twelfth century.

and attempted to carry it off to his homeland.²⁰ His plans were foiled at Venosa, where he became ill while waiting out the winter. Erembert, a Norman by birth, recognised the reliquary and quite properly reclaimed it. Orderic immediately follows this story of the unsuccessful abduction from Apulia of one of Nicholas's relics with another that recounts the successful translation of a tooth to Normandy.²¹ Unlike Stephen's underhanded attempt, the efforts of William Pantoul (Pantulf), a Norman knight, to obtain a relic of the saint, were legitimate. In 1092 he left Apulia with a tooth belonging to Nicholas and reverently handed it over to a church in Noron, in Normandy, after which miracles attributed to Nicholas were soon recorded. William was also able to take with him two pieces of Nicholas's sarcophagus.²² Although it is true that the disposition of the two men can account for the fate of the relics that they acquired, it is also notable that Normans fare well in these two stories whereas Stephen, a Frenchman, does not.²³ This could, of course, simply be Orderic's bias, but these stories also suggest a perceived relationship between the saint and people of Norman stock.

Engaging existing traditions, and creating others, in a new land

The early Normans in southern Italy and Sicily, therefore, could have carried a cultivated tradition of devotion to Nicholas into their new homeland. Yet whatever they might have brought with them would soon have been in dialogue with previously established traditions. Although this article will not focus on the earlier Byzantine period, it should be noted that there is strong evidence of dedication to Nicholas in Bari before the Norman conquest of the city. Emperor Constantine IX Monomachos (r. 1042–55) built a church within Bari's walls that was served by Basilian monks and placed Bari under Nicholas's patronage well before the translation.²⁴ Additional evidence survives. For example, a charter, now in the abbey of Cava, documents that the church of San Nicola in Turre Musarra existed as early as 1039.²⁵ Another record—this one from

²⁰ *Ecclesiastical history of Orderic Vitalis*, iv. 70–3.

²¹ *Ibid.* iv. 72–3.

²² Chibnall, 'Translation of the relics of Saint Nicholas', 36.

²³ Orderic accuses Stephen of attempting 'to escape to France to enrich his own country' ('et in Gallias aufugere, patriamque suam, coenobiumque suum tanto thesauro ditate satagit') with the relic: *Ecclesiastical history of Orderic Vitalis*, iv. 72–3.

²⁴ See, for example, F. Ferruccio Guerrieri, 'Dell'antico culto di S. Nicola in Bari', *Rassegna pugliese* xix (1902), 257–62; Meisen, *Nikolauskult*, 63–7; and Jones, *Saint Nicholas of Myra*, 166.

²⁵ *Codex diplomaticus cavensis*, ed. Michaelae Morcaldi, Mauro Schiani and Sylvano de Stephano, Milan 1884, vi. 115–17, no. 950 (1039). See also Antonio Gambacorta, 'Culto e pellegrinaggi a San Nicola di Bari fino alla prima crociata', in Giuseppe

October 1048 – records an agreement between two men in which is mentioned a churchyard of St Nicholas ('in cure sancti Nicolai confessoris Christi').²⁶ And in yet another a priest records his installation on the orders of the archbishop to officiate at the church of St Nicholas de Monte in 1073.²⁷ There were five churches dedicated to Nicholas in Bari and its vicinity before 1087, each intended to cultivate a particular kind of devotion to the saint.²⁸

Another intriguing example of Byzantine evidence is provided by the Bari Exultet, a roll containing the hymn sung on Holy Saturday during the blessing of the paschal candle. Produced in about 1000, this document includes a prayer for anyone who encounters violent storms or difficult winds, asking God to provide refuge.²⁹ The meaning of these words may be amplified by some of the accompanying images. Nicholas is one of the numerous saints who appear in the exultet. His image is to the right of Christ, who is in the centre of a rota containing the names of twelve personified winds. Given Nicholas's reputation as a protector of sailors, the text may be read to have both spiritual and literal meanings. Among the exultets from southern Italy, that from Bari is the only one to feature a wind rose.³⁰ The character of exultets reflected local tastes and concerns and it is likely that the presence of the wind rose and the neighbouring image of Nicholas reveal the interests and concerns of the church's archbishop and perhaps even its deacon.³¹

Ermini (ed.), *Pellegrinaggi e culto dei santi in Europa fino alla I. Crociata*, Todi 1963, 485–502 at pp. 490–2.

²⁶ *Codice diplomatico barese, I: Le pergamene del Duomo di Bari (952–1264)*, ed. Giambattista Nitto de Rossi and Francesco Nitti di Vito, Bari 1897, 38–9, no. 22.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 51–2, no. 28.

²⁸ 'appare chiaro che a Bari e nelle sue vicinanze immediate esistettero ben cinque chiese dedicate a san Nicola di Mira molto prima del 1087, cioè assai prima della traslazione delle sue ossa da Mira a Bari, e alcune indubbiamente di uno o due secoli prima. Esse sono dedicate al Santo con questi titoli: 1) "da monte"; 2) "de pusterula Curtis"; 3) "in turre Musarra"; 4) "de lu porto"; 5) "supra portam veterem": Gambacorta, 'Culto e pellegrinaggi', 496–7.

²⁹ 'In huius autem cerei luminis corpore te, Omnipotens, postulamus ut supernae benedictionis munus accommodes, ut si quis hinc sumpserit adversus flabra ventorum, adversus spiritus procellarum, sit ei, Domine, singulare perfugium, sit murus ab hoste fidelibus': Louis Duchesne, *Christian worship: its origin and evolution: a study of the Latin liturgy up to the time of Charlemagne*, trans. M. L. D. McClure, 5th edn, London 1919, 539.

³⁰ Thomas Forrest Kelly, *The exultet in southern Italy*, Oxford 1996, 124.

³¹ 'The varying character of the Exultet rolls reflects a mixture of tradition and innovation. The scribes – perhaps they were deacons – who made these rolls were aware of what an Exultet roll was like, but their creations are seldom versions of an older roll. The deacons, or whoever produced the rolls, deliberately sought distinction and *varietas*, perhaps to match local conditions, but probably above all to accord with the artistic and liturgical sensibilities of deacon and (especially) bishop. The individual for whom a roll is made may have a substantial influence on its formulation': *ibid.* 211.

For the purposes of this article, the Bari Exultet is distinguished further. At numerous points in the roll, and on its reverse, peoples' names have been inserted over time so that they could be included in commemorative formularies.³² These include the names of popes, archbishops and secular rulers. Included in the addenda are the Empress Theodora (r. 1055–6), Constantine x Doukas (r. 1059–67), his wife Eudocia (r. 1067 and 1071), and sons Michael vii (r. 1071–8) and Constantios Doukas. In addition, Robert Guiscard and his second wife Sichelgaita are included twice, with the first reference probably dating to the Easter celebrations in 1071, the year when Bari capitulated to the Normans on 16 April and Holy Saturday fell on 23 April. The commemoration asks that Robert, Sichelgaita and their son, Roger, be remembered, and that their military exploits be blessed.³³ The inclusion of such references in a roll distinguished by a wind rose flanked by Nicholas is intriguing and strongly suggests a perceived relationship between the saint's intercession with the elements and the success of Robert's campaigns in the region. Anna Comnena's account of the destruction of his fleet off Glossa Point (modern-day Kepi i Gjuhëzës, Albania) in 1081, an event which claimed many of his men's lives and almost left him for dead, reminds us of the precariousness of such journeys, even in the summer months.³⁴ Robert's devotion may indeed have intensified significantly as time went on; by 1085 the duke had a seal that bore an image of Nicholas that identified the saint as none other than the patron of Bari.³⁵ It is perhaps worth reiterating at this point that this was still two years before Nicholas's relics made their way from Myra to Apulia. It was not simply the opportunities presented by proximity to holiness that inspired Guiscard's devotion.

There is further evidence that veneration for Nicholas was a family affair. Guiscard's brother, Roger I, was also clearly interested in Nicholas's protection. His devotion to the saint is documented by Geoffrey Malaterra, an eleventh-century Benedictine monk who left us an account of the two

³² 'Bari 1 has many names added, on front and back, including names of archbishops, popes, Byzantine emperors, local authorities, and Norman lords. The roll was altered, or portions added in margins or on the back, at least ten times between the making of the roll, sometime in the early years of the eleventh century, through the time of Archbishop Urso (1080–1089)': *ibid.* 190.

³³ 'Memorare domine famulorum tuorum ... lucidissimi ducis nostri domni Rubberti et domne Sikelgaite ac domni Rugerii et cunctum exercitum eorum et omnium circumstantium.' A later reference, which Kelly thinks may date to well after 1071, reads 'Memorare domine famulorum tuorum ducum nostrorum domni Robberti et domne Sikelgaite ac domni Roggerii cunctorumque exercituum eorum et omnium circumstantium': *ibid.* 215.

³⁴ *The Alexiad of Anna Comnena*, trans. Edgar Robert Ashton Sewter, London 1969, 132.

³⁵ Guerrieri, 'Dell'antico culto di S. Nicola in Bari', 257; Meisen, *Nikolauskult*, 66. Jones appears to identify this object as an icon: *Saint Nicholas of Myra*, 166.

men.³⁶ Geoffrey tells us about Roger's attack on Benarvet (Ibn el-Werd, the emir of Syracuse) in the spring of 1085, using the phrase 'joined himself to the danger of the sea' as he described Roger's departure for Syracuse.³⁷ The assault was an answer to Benarvet's raids in Calabria, during which a church dedicated to Nicholas was plundered.³⁸ Geoffrey also reveals that, understandably, the strategically important city of Messina was of key concern to the count as he began to consolidate his power on the island.³⁹ He began a series of building projects, one of which was a citadel. In addition, he had constructed in the city a church dedicated to Nicholas, which he generously endowed, and even made suitable to serve as a seat for a bishop, though he ultimately decided to unite this church with the cathedral of Troina, another of his foundations.⁴⁰ Indeed, when

³⁶ *De rebus gestis Rogerii, Calabriae et Siciliae comitis, et Roberti Guiscardi ducis fratris eius, auctore Gaufrido Malaterra*, ed. Ernesto Pontieri, Rerum Italicarum Scriptores, 2nd edn, v. 1927–8, trans. Kenneth Baxter Wolf in *The deeds of Count Roger of Calabria and Sicily and of his brother Duke Robert Guiscard*, Ann Arbor 2005. Jones concluded that devotion to the saint in Norman Sicily 'was moderate at best': *Saint Nicholas of Myra*, 164–5, 412 n. 16. My argument here and in a forthcoming article on Roger II is that this is not an accurate assessment.

³⁷ 'navali periculo sese committens': *De rebus gestis Rogerii, Calabriae et Siciliae comitis*, 85. My translation. Wolf translates the Latin phrase as 'taking up this maritime challenge': *Deeds of Count Roger*, 177.

³⁸ 'Sicque ante Regium veniens, ecclesiam haud longe in honore beati Nicolai, et aliam in beati Georgii sitam depopulat, sacras imagines deturpando conculcat, sacras vestes vel vasa suorum usibus aptando asportat': *De rebus gestis Rogerii, Calabriae et Siciliae comitis*, 85 ('Making their way to Reggio, they plundered the nearby church built in honor of St Nicholas and another dedicated to St George, trampling and defiling sacred images and carrying off holy vestments and vessels to be adapted for their own use': *Deeds of Count Roger*, 177).

³⁹ 'Eodem anno idem comes, sumptibus pluribus apparatus, undecumque terrarum artificiosis caementariis conductis, fundamenta castelli, turresque apud Messanam jacens, aedificare coepit; cui operi studiosos magistratus, qui operariis praessent, statuit. Interdum ipse visum veniens, ipsos per semetipsum cohortando festinantiores reddens, brevi tempore turrum et propugnaculum immensae altitudinis mirifico opere consummavit. Et, quia hanc, quasi clavem Siciliae, aestimabat prae caeteris urbibus quas habebat, fidelibus tutoribus deputatis, arctiori custodia observabat': *De rebus gestis Rogerii, Calabriae et Siciliae comitis*, 77 ('In that same year, the count having accumulated a great deal of revenue, brought in skilled masons from all around and began to lay the foundations for a fortress and a tower in Messina. He appointed for this task zealous contractors who were expert in carrying out such projects. Meanwhile he himself came to observe, making them work even faster with his own encouragement. In a short time they completed the high ramparts and a tower of wonderful workmanship. He valued this city over the rest of the cities that he held, as if it were the key to Sicily. So after appointing faithful men to guard it, he observed its care very closely': *Deeds of Count Roger*, 162).

⁴⁰ 'Ecclesiam etiam in honore sancti Nicolai in eadem urbe cum summa honorificentia construens, turribus et diversis possessionibus augendo dotans, clericis ad serviendum deputatis, pontificali sede aptavit; sed eam cum Traynensi cathedra univit':

his son Jordan died in 1092, Roger directed that his funeral ceremony take place at the cathedral and that his remains be interred in its portico.⁴¹ Roger may have also established the monastery of St Nicholas of Fico, near Raccuia, sometime before 1101.⁴² Given their location in the vicinity of the Strait, it is very possible that the count perceived an intimate relationship between the veneration of Nicholas and Sicily's security. And, sometime before 1112, Roger's third wife, Adelasia, either founded or rebuilt the monastery of St Nicholas of Pelleria, located near modern Randazzo.⁴³ In addition to Roger's immediate family, there is evidence of devotion to Nicholas in yet another Hauteville line. A charter from 1108 records the gift of Guiscard's nephew, a son of the duke's half-brother, Drogo. In April 1108 Richard Senescalculus gave the church of St Peter 'de Slavezolis', located near his castle in Gioia, to the church of St Nicholas. In this document we also learn that Richard's nephew, Alexander, had been buried next to the basilica in Bari 'where the relics

De rebus gestis Rogerii, Calabriae et Siciliae comitis, 77 ('He also constructed a church in the same city in honor of St Nicholas, endowing it with towers and various possessions to provide revenues for it. After appointing priests to administer the church, he prepared it to serve as an episcopal see, though it was to be tied to the cathedral of Troina': *Deeds of Count Roger*, 163). The see of Troina was transferred to Messina in 1096. See Loud, *Latin Church in Norman Italy*, 194.

⁴¹ 'Comes itaque, funus decenter ordinans, Traynam corpus, ad porticum sancti Nicolai, solemniter humandum deducit, multa beneficia eidem ecclesiae, sed ed aliis, pro redemptione animae eius conferens: anno Domini incarnationis MXCII': *De rebus gestis Rogerii, Calabriae et Siciliae comitis*, 98 ('The count, organising the funeral in an honorable manner, solemnly brought the body to Troina for burial in the portico of the church of S. Niccolo. He conferred many benefits on the same church and on others for the redemption of his son's soul, in the year of the Incarnation of the Lord 1092': *Deeds of Count Roger*, 197).

⁴² Lynn Townsend White, Jr, *Latin monasticism in Norman Sicily*, Cambridge 1938, 43. Raccuia (previously Racuja) is located in the modern province of Messina. The question of whether Roger founded the monastery cannot be answered with certainty, as the charter on which the claim is based is an early modern Latin forgery of a now missing Greek source. There is some speculation as to whether Roger actually founded the monastery or if the document was created simply to increase the house's stature and age. See *Documenti latini e greci del conte Ruggero I di Calabria e di Sicilia*, ed. Julia Becker, Rome 2013, 264–8, no. 170, at p. 265.

During the eleventh and twelfth centuries there were numerous monastic and secular dedications to Nicholas in Sicily and on the mainland whose origins are unknown. In addition, images of him appear in southern Italian churches dedicated to other saints. A late eleventh-century Nicholas fresco was discovered in the church of San Donato al Pantano (San Donato di Ninea, Calabria) in 2003–4, so others may still be found: Lorenzo Riccardi, 'Le pitture murali della chiesa di S. Donato al Pantano di San Donato di Ninea (Cs)', *Calabria Letteraria* lxix (2011), 50–60.

⁴³ White, *Latin monasticism in Norman Sicily*, 43.

of the saint repose'.⁴⁴ Three years later, Richard gave the castle itself to the same church, repeating that his nephew's remains were in Bari, worthily and honourably interred in close proximity to the saint.⁴⁵

Commercial rivalry and economic opportunity

Of course, interest in Nicholas in southern Italy was demonstrated most dramatically by the translation of the saint's relics to Bari in 1087. The theft of Nicholas's relics may have been, at least in part, an attempt by *Baresi* merchants to relieve some of the economic pressures that the city was facing during the late eleventh century, including competition from Venice.⁴⁶ That said, at the end of the eleventh century and into the twelfth century, Bari enjoyed significant and sustained economic growth, largely due to an increase in olive cultivation.⁴⁷ The *Baresi* came to specialise in this form of agriculture and, in the process, proved to be successful enough olive growers to fuel a robust export market, so much so that a credit market, based mainly on olive oil speculations, appears to have developed along with it.⁴⁸ Indeed, the basilica's records document numerous credit transactions, as does the cathedral's.⁴⁹ As the most important port in Apulia (which, incidentally, by this time had served as a strategic naval base for many years), Bari was well positioned, quite literally, to enhance its maritime presence in the region. It is not surprising, then, that as time went on its economy became more dependent on long-distance commercial activity. The potentially lucrative journeys between ports that Bari and its neighbouring cities came to rely on – even more so in the twelfth century – were always at the mercy of the sea. It should not, therefore, escape notice that most of the men involved in the translation were merchants. Nicholas's intercession became even more important as Apulian trade routes expanded into the eastern, northern and northwestern Mediterranean as well as into the eastern Adriatic.⁵⁰ Although a legally defined merchant class does not appear to have developed in southern

⁴⁴ 'Domnique Alexandri strenui militia filii eius [Rocce]. Cuius corpus iuxta sancti Nicolai basilicam in civitate Bari deo opitulante hedificatam ubi sancte eius reliquie requiescunt': *Codice diplomatico barese*, V: *Le pergamene di S. Nicola di Bari, periodo normanno (1075–1194)*, ed. Giambattista Nitto de Rossi and Francesco Nitti di Vito, Bari 1897, 91–3, no. 50, at p. 92.

⁴⁵ 'domnique Alexandri strenui militis filii eius cuius corpus iuxta sancti Nicolay basilicam in civitate Bari deo opitulante edificatam ubi sancte reliquie requiescunt, digne et onorifice tumulatur': *ibid.* 102–3, no. 57.

⁴⁶ Patrick Geary, *Furta sacra: thefts of relics in the central Middle Ages*, rev. edn, Princeton 1990, 95, 101–2.

⁴⁷ Jean-Marie Martin, *La Pouille du VIe au XIIIe siècle*, Rome 1993, esp. pp. 362–6.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 477–85.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 477.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 439.

Italy during this period, such men probably existed, perhaps referred to in the documents as *naucleri*.⁵¹ These men enjoyed a significant degree of wealth and social standing as they earned a living by engaging in activities that involved the sea, though the extent of the markets in which they participated is unclear.⁵² Along with this economic context, however, it is important to keep in mind that the mission to bring the saint to Bari was also fuelled by religious devotion; without it, the deed would have been meaningless to the Christian world.⁵³ Much of the evidence for the translation echoes the fictional elements often found in the *furta sacra* genre, which should not be a surprise since it appears to have been largely inspired by the *Translatio Sancti Marci*.⁵⁴ If the *Baresi* could not effectively compete with Venice's economic power, they could offset the challenge by leveraging spiritual authority that could also be converted into economic gain.⁵⁵

That said, once the common elements are stripped away, unique details remain – and they help to explain why the reception of Nicholas's relics was important to the people of Bari. The translation was a reaction to the threat that the Venetians were posing to Bari's economy, vibrant though it may have been at this time.⁵⁶ The three-year siege that the Normans launched against the town, beginning in 1068, as well as their campaigns against the Byzantine Empire, hurt Bari, particularly by disrupting its trade in Apulian grain. Bari's loss was Venice's gain as the latter capitalised on the

⁵¹ Paul Oldfield, *City and community in Norman Italy*, Cambridge 2009, 254. In n. 64 the author notes that the word comes from *naukleros* (ναύκληρος), a Greek term that in the classical period could mean 'shipowner,' 'merchant,' 'sailor,' or 'skipper'. For specific references to these men see also Martin, *La Pouille*, 439.

⁵² Oldfield, *City and community*, 254–5.

⁵³ Geary, *Furta sacra*, 95.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 98–100. There are three versions of the translation. One was written during the first half of the twelfth century by a *Barese* monk named Nicephorus and today may be found in Cod. Vat. Lat. 5074, fos 5v–10v. Another version, contained in Cod. Vat. Lat. 477, fos 29–38, was purportedly written in the late eleventh century by John of Bari, an archdeacon who worked under Archbishop Ursone of Bari. These two accounts contain many of the same details and their differences are mainly in the authors' discussions of the final location of Nicholas's relics. Francesco Nitti di Vito (1872–1944), palaeographer, secretary of the Commissione Provinciale di Storia Patria, and later archdeacon of the basilica of St Nicholas, believed that both accounts were suspect and were probably altered in the twelfth century to support the competing claims of various parties as they fought over the jurisdiction of the basilica. Nitti di Vito thought that the original account of the saint's translation had been captured in a fourteenth-century Russian manuscript, though Geary notes that this cannot be known with certainty. All three versions of the translation may be found in Nitti di Vito, 'La traslazione delle reliquie di San Nicola', *Iapigia* viii (1937), 295–411 at pp. 336–56, 357–66, 388–92 (transliterations from fourteenth- and sixteenth-century codices, offered side-by-side, followed by an Italian translation, respectively).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 102–3.

⁵⁶ By the early twelfth century, however, Bari's commercial relationship with Venice – as well as with northern Italy as a whole – had changed: Oldfield, *City and community*, 248–9.

opportunity to maximise trading privileges with the Byzantine Empire. By 1082 Venice's merchants were the fortunate recipients of a Chrysobull which exempted them from any tariffs. This greatly promoted their economic prosperity.⁵⁷ The *Baresi* maintained hopes for a prosperous future but after 1085, a year which saw the Norman defeat off the coast of Butrinto and the death of Robert Guiscard, they began to lose faith that they would one day dominate grain trade in the East. They reconciled themselves to this fact and developed a new strategy for competing with Venice. In addition to specialising in olive cultivation and export, they would foster a pilgrimage economy.⁵⁸ The sack of Myra by the Seljuk Turks in 1087 offered Bari an opportunity to claim a high-profile saint for itself – one who was as important as Venice's patron, St Mark the Evangelist.⁵⁹

The translation of the saint's remains to a city already primed to receive him resulted in greater fame, wealth and spiritual importance. Of course, if Nicholas had not wanted to be translated, he would not have allowed himself to be moved, especially since he had such influence over the very sea across which he was transported. In addition, the successful transfer of the saint's remains to Bari might have been seen as divine approval of Norman rule.⁶⁰ The sixty-two sailors who took part in the translation received numerous privileges for having participated in such an important event, benefits that even extended to their descendants.⁶¹ The size of the

⁵⁷ Geary, *Furta sacra*, 102.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* Another factor that may have made the acquisition of Nicholas's relics attractive to the people of Bari was that the Venetians might have been planning to steal the saint's body.

⁵⁹ That the Seljuk Turks had diminished the status of Nicholas's shrine when they destabilised Byzantine rule in the region should be kept in mind when the role of the saint in Norman Italy and Sicily is considered. Jones notes that before the arrival of the Turks, Nicholas's tomb was a popular pilgrimage shrine as the myrrh and other of the saint's relics circulated throughout Christian Europe: *Saint Nicholas of Myra*, 173. There was also a belief that Nicholas's tomb enjoyed divine protection from Muslim threats. Given the earlier history of the saint's cult and the wider context in which it became energised in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, it is not surprising that Nicholas would be seen as an ally of these rulers, many of whom were now locked in their own struggles to the south and east against Muslim armies.

⁶⁰ Chibnall, 'Translation of the relics of Saint Nicholas', 38.

⁶¹ *Codice diplomatico barese*, v. 73–5, no. 42 as well as *Codice diplomatico barese*, VI: *Le pergamene di S. Nicola di Bari, periodo svevo (1195–1266)*, ed. Francesco Nitti di Vito, Bari 1906, 34–5, no. 20. See also Loud, *Latin Church in Norman Italy*, 376. The first of these documents (June 1105) suggests that by the early twelfth century the Gregorian Reform movement may have encouraged church leaders to revoke one of the sailors' privileges as they strove to limit participation in church affairs. Leo Pillius, one of the *Baresi* sailors who participated in the saint's translation but later renounced his privileges in the Church, stated that 'Concessit etiam michi habere partem meam in oblatione que offertur omnibus annis in festivitate translationis corporis sancti Nycolai secundum scriptum quod communiter factum est pro omnibus sociis. Modo vero intellexi per sapientes ecclesiasticos viros quod peccatum esse et

basilica's crypt and the design of the stairways that led to it suggest that those who were involved in building it were expecting sizable crowds.⁶² Robert Guiscard's sons, Roger Borsa and his half-brother, Bohemund, requested the dedication of the new church in 1089, an event – according to a document attributed to Pope Urban II – that was witnessed by 'a great and joyful crowd of people'.⁶³ Bohemund is also recorded as a patron of the basilica's hospital, having given it part of an olive grove sometime before May 1101; lord of Bari since 1089 or so, his support may be in part explained by the political value of having crusaders pass through Bari on their way to Palestine.⁶⁴ The hospital was unable to accommodate the number of pilgrims that the city began to attract. Another hospital was constructed just outside the city by Henry, a wealthy man from Nancy who was hoping that Nicholas would help to cure his paralysis.⁶⁵ The basilica even hosted civic rituals such as the manumission of slaves.⁶⁶ Overall, Bari fared well – in spite of the setbacks of 1085 and increased competition from Venice. In something of a role reversal, the Venetians themselves betrayed signs of envy in the twelfth century as they pressed claims to the possession of part of Nicholas's body as well as of the remains of his uncle.⁶⁷

Bari's ecclesiastical politics

Bari's internal politics should also be factored into a consideration of the early growth of the saint's cult. For example, there appears to have been significant tension between the supporters of Archbishop Urso (r. 1080–9) and his eventual successor Abbot Elias (r. 1089–1105).⁶⁸ Given that Urso was

contra legem ecclesiasticam atque canones ut laica persona haberet aliquid dominium in ecclesia vel rebus ecclesie excepto concessum commune introitum ad orandum et officium audiendum.' For a full list of the sailors see *Codice diplomatico barese*, v. 280–1, no. 164.

⁶² Geary, *Furta sacra*, 103.
⁶³ Loud, *Latin Church in Norman Italy*, 212. 'Cum magna itaque undique confluentis populi frequentia letitiaque beati Nicolai in locum parati aditi transferentes contra morem nostre romane et [apostolice] ecclesie te dilectissime frater in sede propria consecravimus': *Codice diplomatico barese*, I: *Le pergamene del duomo di Bari (952–1264)*, ed. Francesco Nitti di Vito, Bari 1902, 62, no. 33.

⁶⁴ *Codice diplomatico barese*, v. 61–3, no. 33. See also P. Gerardo Cioffari, *Storia della basilica di S. Nicola di Bari*, I: *L'epoca normanno sveva*, Bari 1984, 80.

⁶⁵ Cioffari, *Storia della basilica di S. Nicola*, i. 80.

⁶⁶ *Codice diplomatico barese*, v. 251–2, no. 146; Loud, *Latin Church in Norman Italy*, 377.

⁶⁷ Geary, *Furta sacra*, 103. The author notes that Benevento would make a similar claim by 1090.

⁶⁸ See, for example, Nicephorus' account, which is available in English translation in Gerardo Cioffari, *Saint Nicholas, his life, the translation of his relics and his basilica in Bari*, Bari 1994, 53–68 at pp. 64–5. The longevity of these camps has been questioned recently by Paul Oldfield, but they appear to have existed – at least for a time. See his

closely aligned with the Normans and an ardent supporter of Robert Guiscard, this struggle may be interpreted as a reaction to Norman rule by the *Baresi*, to whom Elias appeared a more palatable choice.⁶⁹ There was also the papal schism, which pitted Pope Urban II (r. 1088–99) against the antipope Clement III (r. 1080–1100). The former was an old friend of Elias and together they shared a desire to reform the Church. The latter, on the other hand, was known for his strong connections to the German Empire. Elias invited Urban to Bari to consecrate the crypt church, which in turn emphasised the connection between the city and the Gregorian reform. Neither Urban nor the Normans wanted southern Italy to return to the Byzantine orbit.

At the same time, however, Urban was interested in healing the schism between the eastern and western Churches. Pope Gregory VII and the Emperor Michael VII had discussed the possible reunification of the Churches in the early 1070s, a goal that they were not able to achieve.⁷⁰ But Urban was in a different position and may have seen the translation of Nicholas to Bari as an opportunity to try again.⁷¹ He declared 9 May, the anniversary of the translation, a feast not only for Bari but also for the universal Church. In 1098 he convened the Council of Bari, an attempt to heal the schism by addressing theological disagreements between the Churches, at the shrine dedicated to the saint. Calling a council at Bari, a major Adriatic city in southern Italy in close proximity to Byzantium, meant that attendance was as convenient as possible for the leaders of the Orthodox Church. As an important Orthodox Christian recently severed from the wider Christian world but now reintegrated with respect and dignity into its western half, Nicholas became to many a powerful symbol of ecumenical exchange. In short, the arrival of Nicholas in Bari provided Urban with an opportunity to heal the schism between the Churches, reassert Latin Christianity in a region with a strong Greek presence and, in so doing, further his claim as rightful pope.

Sanctity and pilgrimage in medieval southern Italy, 1000–1200, Cambridge–New York 2014.

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⁶⁹ The position of Nitti di Vito that this tension was the result of infighting between an aristocratic, Grecophile camp, led by Archbishop Urso and associated with Bari's cathedral, on the one hand, and the common population, supportive of the Normans and led by Abbot Elias on the other, cannot be sustained: *La ripresa gregoriana di Bari (1087–1105): e i suoi riflessi nel mondo contemporaneo politico e religioso*, Trani 1942. Urso was a staunch supporter of Robert Guiscard. The archbishop was also backed by Rome, having been translated from the see of Rapolla to Bari by Gregory VII in about 1080. See Francesco Babudri, 'Le note autobiografiche di Giovanni arcidiacono Barese e la cronologia dell'arcivescovado di Ursone a Bari', *Archivio storico pugliese* II (1949), 134–46. ⁷⁰ Jones, *Saint Nicholas of Myra*, 210–11. ⁷¹ *Ibid.* 211.

The pressures of the First Crusade

The complicated background to Nicholas's reception was made even more so by the development of the First Crusade. By the 1090s Bari had become not only a major pilgrimage site but also a busy point of embarkation for ships sailing to the Holy Land. This was an extraordinarily important venture to many, including Bohemund, lord of the city that housed Nicholas's remains. It was an enterprise that generated a great deal of support and participation in the region, drawing on some of the most prominent families in southern Italy.⁷² When Bohemund took the city of Antioch, he sent the tent of Kerbogha, atabeg of Mosul, to the basilica in celebration.⁷³ Given Nicholas's own history, it is hard not to read into this gesture. Suddenly, Apulian ports, including the one at Bari, took on increasing importance as many western Christians sailed to Macedonia on their way to recapture Jerusalem.⁷⁴ That said, the accounts of Fulcher of Chartres and the Monk of Bec suggest that for some the journey to Bari itself may have been a sufficient pilgrimage.⁷⁵ But for many others it was not. Fulcher recounts how one contingent of would-be crusaders returned home as cowards, partly on account of an uncooperative sea:

We, on the other hand, going through the middle of Campania, came to Bari, a wealthy town situated on the edge of the sea. There in the Church of Saint Nicholas, we prayed to God effusively. Then, approaching the harbour, we thought to cross the sea at that time. But since opposition of the sailors, fickle fortune, and winter weather, even then bearing down upon us, all exposed us to danger, it was necessary that Count Robert of Normandy withdraw to Calabria and spend the severe winter weather there. Yet, at that time, Count Robert of Flanders with his cohort crossed the sea.

Many of the people, deserted by their leaders and fearing future want, sold their bows, took up their pilgrims' staves, and returned to their homes as cowards.

⁷² Graham A. Loud, 'Norman Italy and the Holy Land', in B. Z. Kedar (ed.) *The Horns of Hattin*, Jerusalem 1992, 49–62 at p. 50, repr. in Graham A. Loud (ed.), *Conquerors and churchmen in Norman Italy*, Aldershot 1999.

⁷³ 'et fecit Curbanæ tentorium per mare conduci Barim ad Sanctum Nicolaum, ut lætaretur omnis Christiana plebs de triumpho quem dedit populo suo Dominus super paganorum gentem': Peter Tudebode, *Historia peregrinorum euntium Ierusalymam ad liberandum Sanctum Sepulcrum de potestate ethnicorum* in *Recueil des historiens des Croisades: historiens occidentaux*, Paris 1866, iii. 206 ('and [Bohemund] arranged for the tent of Kerbogha to be transported by sea to [the basilica of] St Nicholas of Bari, so that all Christian people might rejoice in the victory which God gave to his people over the race of pagans': my translation). See also Cioffari, *Storia della basilica di S. Nicola*, i. 92. The tent probably arrived in late July or August 1098.

⁷⁴ Loud, 'Norman Italy and the Holy Land', 53.

⁷⁵ Jones, *Saint Nicholas of Myra*, 218–19. See also Charles Wendell Davis, *Robert Curthose, duke of Normandy* (1920), New York 1982, 98 n. 47.

For this, they were held worthless by God as well as by man, and they became utterly disgraced.⁷⁶

Fulcher continues his account by relating that the following spring (1097) Counts Robert of Normandy and Stephen of Blois – as well as their parties – attempted to make their way across the Mediterranean again. This time they decided to embark at Brindisi, just seventy miles south of Bari. Though the city changed, the perils persisted. Fulcher tells us about a ship that suddenly broke apart not far from the coast. Many had already drowned and numerous others were struggling to survive:

Of the others now wrestling with death, only a few lived. Horses and mules were destroyed by the waves, and much money was lost, too. When we saw this misfortune, we were confused with so great a fear that very many of the weak-hearted ones, not yet aboard the vessels, went back to their homes, having abandoned the pilgrimage, and saying that never would they place themselves on the deceptive water.⁷⁷

Fulcher writes that those who stayed placed their hope in God, entrusting themselves to the sea as a calm wind led them from the shore. It took them four days to reach the Albanian coast, largely because the wind stopped, detaining them at sea. Some of the fleet's ships made their way to Durazzo and others to Epidamnus. Fulcher ends the section about the sea passage by remarking that they 'joyfully [*laetabundi*] ... resumed [their] dry-land journey'.⁷⁸ Clearly the Mediterranean crossing was a concern for Fulcher and became a worry for many others as the First

⁷⁶ *The First Crusade: The chronicle of Fulcher of Chartres and other source materials*, ed. Edward Peters, 2nd edn, Philadelphia 1998, 60; 'Nos autem per mediam Campaniam euntes, venimus Barum, quae civitas optima in maris margine sita est. Ibi in ecclesia beati Nicolai fuis ad Deum precibus oravimus; deinde portum adeuntes transfretare tunc putavimus. Sed obsistentibus nautis et praevaricante fortuna, tempore tunc etiam hiemali imminente, quod nobis nocuum obiecerunt, oportuit Robertum comitem Normanniae in Calabriam secedere et toto tempore brumali illic hiemare. Tunc tamen Robertus, comes Flandriae, cum cohort sua transfretavit. Tunc vero plurimi de plebe desolate, inopiam etiam futuram metuentes, arcubus suis ibi venditis et baculis peregrinationis resumptis, ad domos suas ignavi regressi sunt. Qua de re tam Deo quam hominibus viles effecti sunt et versum est eis in opprobrium': Fulcher of Chartres, *Fulcheri Carnotensis Historia hierosolymitana (1095–1127)*, ed. Heinrich Hagenmeyer, Heidelberg 1913, 166–8.

⁷⁷ *The First Crusade*, 61; 'De reliquis autem iam cum morte luctantibus vix pauci vitam sibi retinuerunt. Equi vero et muli sub undis extincti sunt, pecunia quoque multa perdita est. Quod infortunium cum videremus, pavore grandi confusi sumus, in tantum ut plerique corde debiles, nondum naves ingressi, ad domos suas repedarent, peregrinatione dimissa, dicentes nunquam amplius in aquam sic deceptricem se infingere': *Fulcheri Carnotensis Historia hierosolymitana*, 170–1.

⁷⁸ *The First Crusade*, 61; 'Tunc quidem iter siccum laetabundi resumpsimus': *Fulcheri Carnotensis Historia hierosolymitana*, 171–2.

Crusade gained momentum and such journeys became more frequent. As Nicholas's shrine drew people to Bari and its surrounding ports at a time when the First Crusade was underway, the need for the saint's intercession increased. An eleventh-century crusader song captures the fear of sea travel and the desire for Nicholas's protection:

O blessed Nicholas!
Bring us to the port
[and away] from the strait of death.⁷⁹

The relationship was symbiotic. As Nicholas's cult benefitted from the Crusade, so the crusaders drew strength from their belief in the efficacy of the intercession of Bari's patron saint. Bohemund, as both crusading leader and lord, had much to gain.

Political instability amid the basilica's rising prominence

It is no surprise, then, that the basilica became a focus of attention and a priority for the town. Bohemund, having invested heavily in the success of the First Crusade, appears to have had a strong attachment to the shrine.⁸⁰ A document records that he invited Urban to consecrate Elias archbishop and officiate at the transfer of Nicholas's relics to the church, very much a work in progress at this time.⁸¹ Given this level of support, a notable curiosity in its history is that although the crypt church was indeed consecrated in 1089, the upper church was not consecrated until 1197. Gerardo Cioffari argues that, although complete in the early

⁷⁹ 'O beate Nicholae!/nos ad maris portum trahe/de mortis angustia!': Édélestand du Ménil, *Poésies populaires latines antérieures au douzième siècle* (1843), Bologna 1969, 172. See also Gertrude Franke, 'Der Einfluss des Nikolauskultes auf die Namengebung im französischen Sprachgebiet', *Romanische Forschungen* xlviii (1934), 1–134 at p. 9, and Jones, *Saint Nicholas of Myra*, 218–19. The song is apparently an adaptation of an earlier hymn.

⁸⁰ *PL* clxiii.178; Johannes arcidiaconus Barensis, *Historia inventionis s. Sabini episcopi Canusini*, in *Acta Sanctorum*, February 9, II, 331; *Codice diplomatico barese*, i. 61–3, no. 33; 64–5, no. 34; Niccolò Putignani, *Vindiciae vitae et gestorum Sancti Thaumaturgi Nicolai archiepiscopi Myrensis*, Naples 1757, ii. 312, 341; Giulio Petroni, *Della storia di Bari: dagli antichi tempi sino all'anno 1856*, Naples 1858, i. 224. See also Jones, *Saint Nicholas of Myra*, 218, and Ralph Yewdale, *Bohemond I: prince of Antioch*, Princeton 1924, esp. pp. 31–2, 107, 133.

⁸¹ 'Dilectissimorum filiorum romane ecclesie Rogerii ducis et fratris eius Boamundi atque vestris deprecationibus invitati [civitatem] vestram pro beati confessoris Nicolai dilectione precipua visitavimus': *Codice diplomatico barese*, i. 61–3, no. 33. Graham Loud has noted that since bishops were often important to the spiritual lives of their parishioners, the Norman rulers of southern Italy were frequently interested in the political leanings of these prelates: *Latin Church in Norman Italy*, 119.

twelfth century, the upper church was not consecrated until much later simply because it did not need to be; the prestige of the saint himself rendered the rite unnecessary and what transpired in 1197 was rather a religious event held on account of Emperor Henry VI's plans for a new crusade, drawing attention to Bari as the last western port before departure for the Holy Land.⁸² Another possible explanation, however, is that – whether or not the church was complete in the early twelfth century – significant political turmoil prevented the consecration of the upper church. It is true that the building campaign enjoyed the support of powerful Norman leaders during its early years. However, the Normans lost control of Bari in 1111, the year in which both Bohemund and Roger Borsa died. Their deaths were followed by a period of unrest and civil war, during which the city was practically ungovernable.⁸³ The tension between the cathedral and the basilica was serious and Archbishop Riso (murdered in 1117), leader of an independence movement who attempted to raise funds for the city's fortifications, may have been plotting to take possession of Nicholas's church.⁸⁴ This period of disorder was brought to a close with the emergence of Grimoald Alferanites, self-styled prince of what was now for all intents and purposes an independent city noted for having ties with Venice and the Byzantine Empire, who in 1129 and again in 1132 would become embroiled in a revolt against Roger II. The royal citadel was destroyed during the latter. From 1137 to 1139 Bari was again in revolt against the king, this time with the cooperation of Holy Roman Emperor Lothar III and Pope Innocent II. Bari paid dearly and Roger rebuilt the castle that he had promised not to just seven years earlier. Even more turmoil was in store for the city in 1156, when Roger's son, William I, faced down yet another revolt during which the citadel was destroyed once more. The *Baresi* begged the king for mercy. William granted them two days to collect their chattels and leave. Then he attacked the city. So-called Hugo Falcandus leaves us with a disturbing image: 'That is why the most powerful city of Apulia, celebrated by fame and immensely rich, proud in its noble citizens and remarkable in the architecture of its buildings, now lies transformed into piles of rubble.'⁸⁵

It is striking that St Nicholas's basilica was one of the few structures to be spared; even the cathedral had been destroyed. Although the damage to

⁸² Cioffari, *Storia della basilica di S. Nicola*, i. 185–6.

⁸³ *Ibid.* 120.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 122. See also Loud, *Latin Church in Norman Italy*, 81.

⁸⁵ *The history of the tyrants of Sicily by 'Hugo Falcandus'*, 1154–69, trans. Graham A. Loud and Thomas Wiedemann, Manchester 1998, 74; 'Ita prepotens Apulie civitas, fama celebris, opibus pollens, nobilissimis superba civibus, edificiorum structura mirabilis, iacet nunc in acervos lapidum transformata': *La historia o Liber de Regno Sicilie e la epistola ad Petrum Panormitane ecclesie thesaurium di Ugo Falcando*, ed. G. B. Siragusa, Rome 1897, 21.

Bari does not appear to have been as devastating as Falcandus would lead us to believe, and the city was repopulated relatively quickly, it must have taken some time and a significant amount of resources to rebuild. Whether the prospect of an upper church would have been appealing at this time, especially as the rebuilding of the cathedral began in earnest soon after, is a question. If the upper church of Bari's basilica had not been consecrated before 1197, the city's complicated political history probably helps to explain why not. Indeed, the language of the commemoration plaque in the upper church, attributed to Conrad of Hildesheim, bishop and chancellor under Emperor Henry VI, makes it clear that representatives from all over the empire were present at the consecration in 1197, including Germans and 'other races'. Henry's position as Holy Roman Emperor as well as king of Sicily – as well as Conrad's as an administrator of both Sicily and Apulia – may have finally provided the high-level political stability necessary to perform the rite in such a contested region.⁸⁶

There were numerous reasons why St Nicholas was an important presence in later eleventh-century Bari. For the Norman conquerors of the region, devotion to the saint might have had its roots in a Norman cult that had existed since at least the tenth century. Once in the *Mezzogiorno*, Normans came into contact with a pre-existing Orthodox cult that had been fostered by their Byzantine predecessors, as evidenced by churches dedicated to the saint that predated the Norman conquest as well as by the Bari Exultet. Commercial pressure from other cities, especially Venice, probably accentuated the potential economic value of the saint to Bari; the size of the basilica suggests that those involved in its construction correctly anticipated that Nicholas would attract large numbers of pilgrims. The importance of the sea to the region had been clear for a long time but became even greater as far as the Normans were concerned at the close of the eleventh century as plans for the First Crusade were underway. As a result, Nicholas's protection became even more valuable to Christians making sea crossings as part of their journeys to the Holy Land; Fulcher of Chartres is just one of many medieval authors who leave us with accounts of the dangers that the various parts of the Mediterranean posed, perils that threatened not just crusaders but also those who engaged in the mundane maritime activities upon which many relied. The potential ecclesiastical and theological significance of Nicholas to Church hierarchs such as Pope Urban II and Abbot Elias, who were looking to bring reform to the Western Church and affect a *rapprochement* between Orthodox and Roman Christianity, was made manifest by the Council of Bari of 1098. Indeed, in the later eleventh century there

⁸⁶ Cioffari, *Storia della basilica di S. Nicola*, i. 186.

was a confluence of numerous disparate interests, expressed by highly placed power-brokers and commoners alike, that rendered Nicholas an ideal intercessor and advocate for both the rulers and subjects of Norman-controlled Bari.

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The Eusebius Essay Prize *The World Christianities* *Essay Prize*

The *Journal* now offers two annual essay prizes of £500 apiece. The *Eusebius Essay Prize* is awarded to be best essay submitted on a subject connected with any aspect of early Christian history, broadly understood as including the first seven centuries AD/CE. Scholars of any relevant discipline (theology, classics, late antique studies, Middle Eastern Studies etc.) are encouraged to enter the competition. The new *World Christianities Essay Prize*, now offered for the first time, will be awarded to the best essay submitted on any aspect of the history of Christianity beyond Europe and North America since the year 700, and is likewise open to scholars of any relevant discipline. Both competitions are open to scholars regardless of seniority, although submissions from junior scholars are particularly welcomed. Submissions for either prize should not exceed 8,000 words, including footnotes. Submissions should be made by 30 September 2016 (for the *Eusebius* prize) or 30 March 2017 (for the *World Christianities* prize): the winning essays will be published in the *Journal*, probably in the numbers appearing in July 2017 (*Eusebius*) and January 2018 (*World Christianities*). Other submissions entered into the competition may also be recommended for publication. The editors reserve the right not to award either prize if no essay of sufficient quality is submitted. All essays should be sent by email attachment (with the name of the relevant prize in the subject line), prepared to *Journal* style, to Mrs Mandy Barker at jeh@robinson.cam.ac.uk