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## Texture, Colour and Surface Appearance of the Cividale Stuccoes

Bente Kiilerich

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*Abstract. The article discusses the material and aesthetic qualities of the female stucco saints in the Tempietto Longobardo at Cividale del Friuli (c. AD 750). The stuccoes combine two artistic and technical traditions: marble statuary of antique derivation and figural stucco relief. The surface texture of stucco differs considerably from that of marble: while marble is shiny, stucco tends to be dull. Since colours enhanced the visual impact of the saintly figures in the Tempietto, the polychromy – of which only very faint traces remain – was probably the most important aspect of the sculpture. It is a matter of speculation whether the viewer would have perceived any physical difference in surface appearance between the painted stucco and painted stone when seen from a distance. In order to gain an idea of the aesthetic impact of the reliefs when painted and perhaps gilded, the article presents hypothetical reconstructions of colour based on the wall paintings preserved in the Tempietto.*

Located in the *gastaldaga*, the seat of the Longobard king's representative at Cividale del Friuli (Udine), Sa Maria in Valle, better known as the Tempietto Longobardo, served as a palatine chapel.<sup>1</sup> The dedicatory inscription mentions 'pies auctores'.<sup>2</sup> These 'pious founders' were plausibly the Longobard king, Aistulf (749–756), and his wife Gisetrude. Upon the death of Aistulf, Gisetrude became a nun. A local tradition has it that a certain Pertrude, by some scholars identified with Gisetrude, founded the monastery of Sa Maria in Valle.<sup>3</sup> Whatever the case, at least the importance bestowed upon female saints in the decoration of the chapel, and the marked interest in issues of fashion and design evidenced in their vestments, may bespeak the presence of a female patron.

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<sup>1</sup> Main publication L'Orange & Torp 1977–79 (Torp 1977: architecture; L'Orange 1979: sculpture). For a summary of the research with bibliography, see Torp 2006. I am grateful to Alessandra Quendola and Luca Villa for giving Hjalmar Torp and me access to the scaffolding that was set up on the west wall in September 2010. This made it easier to check details and to study and take photographs of the stuccoes and some of the paintings.

<sup>2</sup> Mor 1982.

<sup>3</sup> Mor 1977, 255.



Fig. 1 Tempietto Longobardo, Cividale. West wall of aula with the six stucco figures above painted lunette of Christ in a vine-scroll frame. Photo: Bente Küllerich 2008 ©.

The Tempietto Longobardo consists of an aula covered by a groin vault and a lower presbytery covered by three parallel barrel-vaults. The interior of the chapel is lavishly decorated in various artistic media: architectural sculpture, including spolia, a black and white *opus sectile* pavement, wall revetment in marble, wall paintings as well as figural and ornamental stuccoes (Fig. 1). Fragments prove that, in addition to the six female stuccoes that flank the window of the west wall of the aula, two further series, each consisting of three figures, occupied the space between the windows of the north and south walls, thus giving a total of twelve saints.<sup>4</sup> Scattered tesserae indicate that mosaics decorated the vaults of the presbytery and the aula.

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<sup>4</sup> Fragments of male or female figures, L'Orange 1979, 16, 23–25.

### The enigmatic stucco saints

With its varied artistic material and media, the decorative programme of the Tempietto is the outcome of a multi-cultured artistic milieu. The wall paintings follow eastern iconographical models and are made in a Byzantine style, laid out according to a Byzantine system of proportions.<sup>5</sup> The painters may have fled from Constantinople, which in the mid-eighth century was under iconoclastic rule, or they may have arrived from a Romano-Byzantine centre, such as Rome or Ravenna (Aistulf conquered Ravenna in 751). Still, no comparable paintings have survived from either place. As for the stuccoes, these are particularly difficult to account for. In Neon's Baptistry in Ravenna, stucco reliefs with traces of polychromy are preserved in the zone between the mosaics and the marble revetments.<sup>6</sup> However, these reliefs, made some three centuries before the Tempietto, differ considerably in style from the Cividale stuccoes and could therefore hardly have served as direct 'models'. The male figures at Ravenna are of varied types with somewhat awkward proportions. And, whereas the comparatively small prophets in the baptistry display swirling garment folds suggesting some sort of movement, the female saints at Cividale are presented in a solemn hieratical stance. They stand as if frozen, devoid of any possibility for motion. Moreover, the surface treatment also differs considerably: only at Cividale do we encounter the elaboration of garment details, the varied ornamentation and the concern with accessories and insignia. The closest comparison to the concept of large-scale figures is furnished by the fragmentary single figures of prophets or apostles in high relief placed under arcades from Vouneuil-sous-Biard, near Poitiers, *c.* 500. They are, however, considerably less accomplished than the Cividale stuccoes.<sup>7</sup>

Stucco was modelled in both the East and West throughout Antiquity and the Middle Ages, but since no figural works in stucco comparable to those in the Tempietto survive, we are precluded from reaching a final conclusion with regard to provenance, workshop organisation and other aspects of production.<sup>8</sup> At least, the stucco figures and open work vine scrolls were made in situ in the Tempietto, and thus can be designated 'Longobard' inasmuch as they were produced for Longobard patrons. The name Paganus, preserved in a graffito in the niche of the central window on the western wall, may refer to one of the artists. The stuccoes and the paintings are laid out according to a coherent design and an identical system of proportions with stucco zone and painted zone of equal height. It has been observed that the stuccoes were applied to the wall before the wall paintings were executed, as some wall paintings overlap the stucco in places.<sup>9</sup> Because of

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<sup>5</sup> Torp 1984, 92–103; Torp 2006, figs. on pp. 28–30. Torp 2006, 68 proposes the presence of a Byzantine artist among the painters.

<sup>6</sup> Pasquini 1999, 26–37, figs 19–37.

<sup>7</sup> Sapin (ed.) 2009.

<sup>8</sup> L'Orange 1979 discusses local as well as Sasanian decorations in stucco, concluding, 59 that the Tempietto stuccoes belong to a Romano-Byzantine tradition of the West. Other researchers, for instance Vaj 2002, has argued for Sasanian influence. For various views, see Pasquini 1999, 84–91.

<sup>9</sup> Observation in situ, Torp 1953, 5.

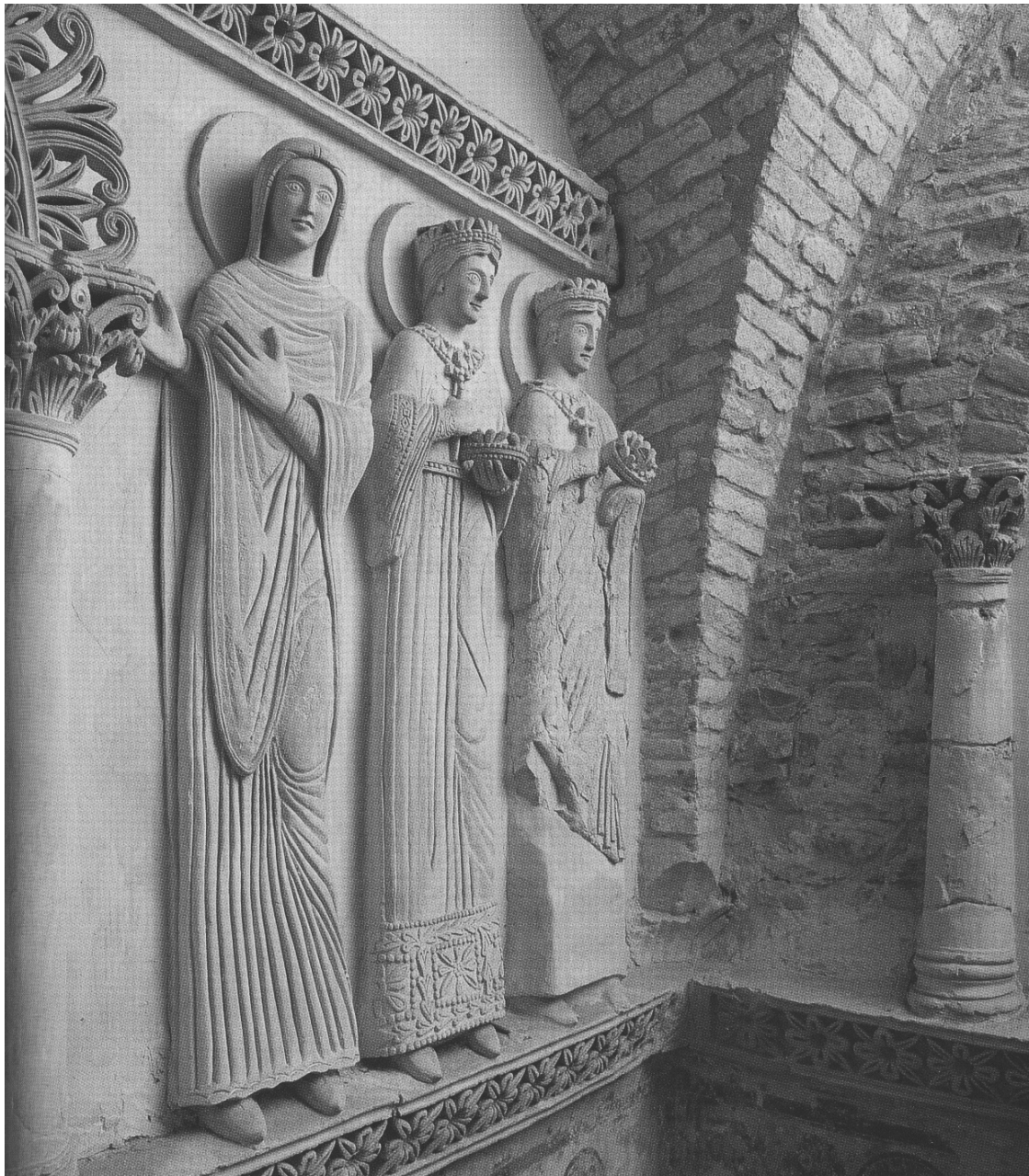


Fig. 2 Tempietto Longobardo, Cividale. West wall of aula, saints 'D', 'E' and 'F'. Photo: Elio Ciol, archive: Hjalmar Torp ©.

the integrated layout, it is reasonable to assume a common workshop. Given that the wall-painters also painted the stuccoes, it is likely that they used the same pigments for both types of work. A chromatic correlation between the painted and the plastic saints can therefore be surmised.





Fig. 3 Tempietto Longobardo, Cividale. Detail of saint 'B'.  
Photo: Bente Küllerich 2010 ©.

### The perception of material: stucco versus stone

Although the six over life-sized (c. 1.90 to 2.00 m) female figures (their identity being unknown, I shall refer to them by the letters 'A' to 'F') are neither free-standing nor worked fully in the round, the high relief makes them look like statues standing with their backs against the wall (Fig. 2). If the intention was to present statues, one may wonder why stucco rather than stone was employed at Cividale. The obvious answer is that in the years around 750, no workshop

in Northern Italy, Rome, Constantinople or elsewhere had the required capacity to provide newly-manufactured marble sculpture. The manufacture of statues and high relief in marble had come to an end around 600.<sup>10</sup> The carving of marble requires training and expertise gained through years of practice; it is not a skill that can be revived *ad hoc*. Thus, had the patrons at Cividale wanted marble, it would have entailed searching for antique statues and re-carving them. But such re-carving would also have required considerable skill. Working in stucco demanded qualified artisans, but it was not the same degree of highly specialised expertise required as for marble. The lime or gypsum-based plaster was easier to work, somewhat like fashioning figures of clay.<sup>11</sup> Chalk and gypsum were readily available and were much cheaper than marble.

To some extent, stucco could be a substitute for marble. Seen from a distance a work in stucco may look not unlike one in stone. But stucco differs considerably from stone with regard to technique: the working procedure of stone is subtractive, that of stucco is additive.<sup>12</sup> While marble is extremely well-suited to carving sculpture in the round, the brittle stucco is unsuitable for large-scale statues, as it requires some sort of support. In large-scale works it will generally be affixed to a background. In the Tempietto, the figures were worked separately in successive layers of a gypsum-based plaster, with the innermost layer adhering to the wall. The outer layer was fabricated from a finer, whiter matter than the innermost core. The top part of each figure, especially the head, stands out from the

<sup>10</sup> Küllerich 1993, 95–97; Anderson 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Penny 1993, 190–199 presents an overview of the characteristics of stucco. For technical aspects, see Kühn 1995.

<sup>12</sup> For subtracting versus adding as fundamental sculptural practices, see Wittkower 1979, 127.



Fig. 4 Tempietto Longobardo, Cividale. Close-up view of saint 'C' showing red on lips and eyes. Photo: Bente Küllerich 2010 ©.

ground in higher relief than the body; a characteristic trait is a slight tilt of the head. When the figures had been modelled, surface details, such as the pearls that line ornamental bands and insignia, were plastically added and the patterns on garments were incised with a pointed instrument (Fig. 3).<sup>13</sup> While marble glimmers, plaster tends to be dull, and the Tempietto saints, although impressive for their sheer size and solemn demeanour, lack a vital element: colour. To brighten the dull, grainy surface of the stucco, the figures must have been painted.<sup>14</sup> The use of paint, and perhaps gilding, would have made for a rich and varied surface texture.

### Colours, gilding and surface aesthetics

In connection with Galla Placidia's Church of the Holy Cross (Santa Croce) in Ravenna, erected around the mid-fifth century, Bishop Agnellus (556–570) uses the term *gipsea metalla sculta* and *metalla gipsea auro*, which indicates that stuccoes could be gilded (*Liber pontificalis ecclesiae Ravennatis. De sancto Iohanne, XX*).<sup>15</sup> Writing in the ninth century, Hrabanus Maurus mentions '*plastice parietum ex gypso effigies signaque exprimere, pingereque coloribus*' (*De Universo XXI, 8*), that is the practice of decorating walls with images (*effigies*) and figures (*signa*) in stucco (*plastice ex gypso*) and painting them with colour.<sup>16</sup> Thus there is little doubt that late antique and medieval stucco was painted and that it may at times have been gilded.<sup>17</sup> A problem concerning the polychromy of stucco from various parts of the world

<sup>13</sup> L'Orange 1979, 27–30. The metal cramps belong to nineteenth-century restorations.

<sup>14</sup> As L'Orange 1979, 30, acknowledged: 'Manca tuttavia il tocco finale: il colore.' ('the final touch colour is missing') without, however, entering into a discussion of potential hues. Pro polychromy: Casadio et al. 1995, 48; Becherini et al. 2016, 375. Already Toesca 1927, 792, suggested that colour might have covered the stuccoes.

<sup>15</sup> Pavan 1980; Pasquini 1999, 24–26. *Metallum* (μετάλλον) indicates a metal, gold, silver, iron etc. The term *metalla* is also used about gold and glass mosaics, suggesting luminous and shining substances in general.

<sup>16</sup> L'Orange 1979, 37; Küllerich 2008, 10.

<sup>17</sup> Möller 1995 presents later examples from Erfurt and Halberstadt, showing the continual practice of colouring stucco.





Fig. 5 Tempietto Longobardo, Cividale. Wall painting, Christ and archangels, west wall. Photo: Bente Küllerich 2008 ©.

is that most pigments have faded. Moreover, in the instances when stuccoes do show vivid colour, this has often turned out to be the result of modern restoration.<sup>18</sup>

It may be surprising that, except for red on lips of 'B', red on lips, irises and eyebrows of 'C' (Fig. 4), purple on eyebrows of 'D' and some residue of blue as background for the vine scrolls in the zone below, there are no visible traces of colour on the Cividale stuccoes.<sup>19</sup> Residue of paint might be expected to be found not least in the depth of folds.<sup>20</sup> Still, the lack of colour traces may be explained by the fate of the stuccoes over the years. After an earthquake in 1222, the interior of the chapel was open to the air until

<sup>18</sup> See, e.g. from the Seljuk period, Heidemann et al. 2014, also addressing the issue of authenticity. Colour is well-preserved on many Gandhara stuccoes, e.g. Bussagli 1996, figs on pages 28, 39, 68, 69, 82, 274, 337. Again, the paint has often been touched-up in recent times.

<sup>19</sup> L'Orange 1979, 30, refers to the colours. Faint traces of red were visible from the scaffolding in 2010.

<sup>20</sup> For instance, in some large-scaled, twelfth-century figures from Arles-sur-Tech in France, blue is clearly visible in the depth of folds, Palazzo-Bertholon 2009, 291, fig. 1.

1242, during which time it was subject to degradation from humidity. Rain and snow may cause paint layers to detach from the plaster. Furthermore, in the thirteenth century, some of the original wall paintings were painted over with totally new motifs (the later paintings were removed in the 1950s). The Longobard stuccoes may similarly have been judged old-fashioned and either left to decay on their own or given a heavy make-over in the form of surface abrasion. In more recent times, restorations and interventions were carried out in 1860 and again in the years between 1902 and 1915. During these interventions, the badly damaged saint 'F' at the far right was almost totally redone and some amount of retouching was applied to all six statues.<sup>21</sup> Thus, it is perhaps not all that surprising that practically no traces of colour can be seen with the naked eye.<sup>22</sup>

Because of the lack of physical traces, the reconstruction of potential polychromy is bound to be hypothetical. In order to suggest colours for the Tempietto saints we may take recourse in written sources and archaeological and art historical material.<sup>23</sup> Since the main parts of the surfaces to be covered consist of garments, remains of textiles as well as represented dress items furnish important comparative material.<sup>24</sup> If the wall-painters were also in charge of painting the stuccoes, the pigments in the paintings are of special importance as they indicate chromatic preferences.

### The wall paintings in the Tempietto

Paintings are preserved in the zone below the stuccoes: in the lunette on the west wall Christ is flanked by the archangels Michael and Gabriel (cf. *Fig. 1*); the damaged lunette on the north wall depicts the Virgin and Child, similarly flanked by the archangels. In the lateral fields are single figures of male saints: a bishop and a soldier martyr (south), two soldier martyrs (west) and two more military saints (north); the one to the left of the lunette is inscribed Sanctus Hadrianus. All are presented frontally. Except for the bishop, they are dressed in tunic and *chlamys* (cloak) and carry either cross or martyr's crown. In some instances, there are still remains of a painted architectural setting that provides a backdrop for the saint.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> For detailed descriptions of the interventions, see Foramitti 2008. The reference to the refashioning of the ornaments on the garments in 1860, ('a tutte le statue vennero rimessi gli ornamenti deperiti nelle vesti', p. 99) may include a potential removal of paint, in accordance with a 'classicistic' aesthetic. For their physical condition today, cf. Becherini et al. 2016.

<sup>22</sup> In autumn 2010 samples of the stucco decoration were sent to a laboratory in Venice to be examined for potential remains of pigments. Unfortunately, the results of the tests have to the best of my knowledge never been published. (In email correspondence, November 2011, Lorenzo Lazzarini, head of the Venice laboratory informed me that he was not allowed to reveal the results of the tests prior to the forthcoming publication by Luca Villa).

<sup>23</sup> Küllerich 2008; Küllerich 2010; Küllerich 2015.

<sup>24</sup> Küllerich 2014, 440–444.

<sup>25</sup> Colour photographs of the paintings in Torp 2006, pl. 16–23; Torp 2015, figs. 1–8, 12.



The colours of the wall paintings have changed over the centuries. Some pigments have been subjected to various chemical reactions. Thus, the background, which in certain areas has turned green, was originally blue. Where pigments have faded, the clothing is now almost colourless. This means that the visual impression gained now differs considerably from that of the early medieval period. Working in the Tempietto, Hjalmar Torp recorded the following colours: ‘red and dark red tending to porphyry or purple, various yellow and greens, blue, brown and two kinds of white’.<sup>26</sup> Pigments from the Christ lunette have subsequently been attested by chemical analysis as yellow ochre, red ochre, terra verde and chalk white. The blue is a so-called ‘false blue’, a colour without blue pigments which appears bluish to the eye.<sup>27</sup> Variant purples, such as dark bluish purple and reddish purple, were achieved by mixing red and false blue and by mixing red and black.<sup>28</sup>

Christ (in the lunette below the female saintly zone) has long light brown hair. His tunic is a faded blue; his *pallium* (mantle) a medium red-violet. This hue is also used for the *clavi* (ornamental bands) on the white tunics of the archangels. The archangels’ *pallia* are yellow; their wings purplish red (Fig. 5). The Virgin (north lunette) wears a dark red-purple *palla* (mantle) and a blue tunic, which in its present degraded state appears closer to green. The Christ child is dressed in a light blue tunic with a cloak in golden yellow and purple. His hair is a violet hue; the nimbus is dark blue.<sup>29</sup> As in the western lunette, the archangels wear white tunics with reddish purple *clavi* and yellow ochre mantles.

The male saints are of particular interest for exemplifying a deliberate use of chromatic contrast, both within the individual figures and in the variation of colour from one figure to the next. Yellow ochre is best preserved, whereas some bluish and purplish hues can only with difficulty be discerned by use of digital zooming. Moving clockwise from the south-east, the general disposition of main colours for tunic and mantle appears as follows: on the south wall, the partly preserved bishop wears a white *dalmatica* (over-tunic) with purple *clavi*, and the martyr wears a blue tunic and yellow *chlamys*. Turning the corner onto the west wall, a badly preserved martyr is dressed in yellow, and possibly a bluish-purple mantle. By contrast the martyr on the right side of the Christ lunette has a now faded (bluish?) tunic with golden appliqué topped with a *chlamys* that retains some red. The martyr Hadrianus on the adjacent north side wears a now faded purplish (?) tunic and a dark yellow cloak (Fig. 6). Finally, on the north wall stands a martyr dressed in a yellow tunic and purple cloak. In sum, the general pattern is dialectic, mainly alternating dark and light, purple and golden yellow. The yellow clothes are usually modelled with a dark reddish purple that may appear brownish.

<sup>26</sup> Torp 1953, 4: ‘rosso, e rosso oscuro che passa in rosso porfido o purpureo, differenti colori gialli e verdi, azzuro, marrone e due specie di bianco’.

<sup>27</sup> Cagnana et al. 2004.

<sup>28</sup> Cagnana et al. 2004; Küllerich 2008, 16.

<sup>29</sup> Torp 1999, 586.



Fig. 6 Tempietto Longobardo, Cividale. Wall painting, two male saints, NW corner. Photo: Bente Küllerich 2010 ©.

As far as one can tell, the prevailing clothing colours on the walls are yellow and purple (of which the reddish hue is better preserved than the bluish hue): a dark red purple for the Virgin's *palla*, a medium red-purple for Christ's *pallium* and for the *chlamys* of the soldier saint on the north wall. Reddish purple is also used for *clavi*. In addition to the artists' obvious interest in chromatic variation, with no two saints being identically dressed, it is noticeable that the individual parts of the outfits were originally endowed with various kinds of ornaments: this is still faintly discernible in the yellow border appliqué that lines the side and hem of one tunic.

It is reasonable to assume that the same artists painted the walls and the stuccoes, but the *modus operandi* must have differed in some respects. While modelling and shading are prevalent in the wall paintings, unshaded colour blocks are more likely for the stuccoes. Furthermore, in the wall paintings the skin colour for the faces was created using *terre verde*, in combination with and on top of which artists painted new coats of skin colour. The stucco faces already had a three-dimensional, plastic appearance and did not need the same

degree of modelling. So, the manner of applying paint to the faces of the stucco saints must have differed from that of the painting of the skin part of the two-dimensional figures. Plausibly, faces and hands were only given a light sheen to smooth the plaster and make the female faces lucid. The slight remains of red on lips, iris and eyebrow (if these traces are indeed original!) may indicate pigments used in combination with other pigments, or they may have been underpainting for gold.

### Reconstructing lost colour

Although many possibilities exist with regard to the clothes of the female saints, certain principles would have applied. First, the individual sculptures must have been painted with an eye to the adjacent ones so that the chromatic scheme took account of all six figures. Second, the colours of the jewelled and pearl-lined garments would have been chosen to express a high social standing and followed the conventions of late antique and early Byzantine courtly attire. The cut and design of their garments reflect Italo-Byzantine art (e.g. San Vitale, Ravenna, Sa Maria Antiqua, Rome). To judge from the few extant representations in stone and the archaeological evidence, Longobard fashion differed considerably: While early Byzantine women wore high-belted wide-sleeved dalmatics, Longobard women had low-set belts and adorned their garments with fibulae; and while Byzantine ladies wore their hair tied up, the Longobards wore long braids hanging down over the shoulders.<sup>30</sup> Given that the individual outfits comprise several items, the intention must have been to make each part of the outfit stand out: the more layers of expensive clothing, the higher the prestige. In all figures, the outer garment leaves a part of the inner garment visible; this suggests the use of contrasting colours, not unlike the clothing of the male saints. For the individual dress elements, suggested hues are based on degree of saliency and contrast effect and the chromatic range is decided from the evidence of represented clothes and textile remains. The Byzantine predilection for strong colours, as witnessed in the Theodora mosaic from San Vitale in Ravenna, makes it likely that the patrons at Cividale wanted an equally lively effect, although not necessarily the exact same colours as in the mosaic. At least, to be clearly visible, each pigment had to be highly saturated and set off clearly from the neighbouring areas.<sup>31</sup>

The figures 'C' and 'D' (closest to the central window) wear identical garments: an under-tunic, visible only at the wrists, a *dalmatica* and a *palla*, also known as a *maphorion*, which covers the head and falls to below the middle of the body. This is identical to the Virgin's attire. To distinguish the saints from the Virgin, their garments probably differed somewhat from her purple *palla* and blue *dalmatica*. Both items could have been purple or in slightly different shades of purple, which is the most common in images of holy women.

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<sup>30</sup> Kiielerich 2009; Kiielerich 2014. For an overview of late antique garments, see Harlow 2004. Sculpted images of Longobard women, Bibliotheca Ambrosiana, Milan, e.g. Priester 2004, fig. on p. 124.

<sup>31</sup> In addition to the tentative reconstructions presented in the present article, I refer to Kiielerich 2008; Kiielerich 2010 and Kiielerich 2015. See also Percivaldi 2015, 72, presenting two of my drawings.



Fig. 7 Tempietto Longobardo, Cividale. Hypothetical reconstruction of polychromy on saints 'A', 'B' and 'C'. Photo: Colour drawing, Bente Küllerich 2008 ©.

Another possibility is a combination of purple and yellow. In the mosaics of the cathedral of Euphrasius at Porec, c. 550, John's mother Elizabeth is represented in a yellow mantle and purple tunic. If depicted in contrasting colours rather than sharing a single hue, it was easier to tell the two dress items apart (Fig. 7). A purple *palla* and yellow *dalmatica* is a combination seen for instance in Sa Maria Maggiore in Rome.<sup>32</sup>

The richest attire is worn by saint 'A': tight-sleeved under-tunic, wide-sleeved tunic, *dalmatica*, diagonal *dalmatica* decorated with floral medallions and a *palla* thrown over her left shoulder.<sup>33</sup> Thus some five pieces of clothing are shown. Patterned fabrics required the use of strong colours for the best effect.<sup>34</sup> For saint 'A', I have suggested a red flower on a purple ground encircled by a golden pearl border, but other combinations are

obviously conceivable, for instance, a silk fragment from Antinoe in Egypt shows a related design of a red flower, with green and yellow on a blue ground.<sup>35</sup> Since 'A' is the most lavishly dressed, her outfit most likely was imperial purple. Both 'B' and 'E' wear a tight-sleeved under-tunic and a wide-sleeved tunic. On top of this 'B' displays a *dalmatica* with *clavi*, and 'E' one without but with a broader decorated band at the hem. The *dalmatica*, or over-tunic, was the standard female dress in Late Antiquity. It came in a variety of colours and was made of linen, wool or silk. It could be decorated with *clavi* down the front, with ornate hemlines, sleeve-bands and collars. The more elaborate the ornaments, the more expensive the garment, and thus the higher status. It was usually worn with a high-set belt in a different colour. Having proposed purple as the main colour for four saints, it is plausible that 'B' and 'E' wore other hues. In the wall paintings, yellow is prevalent and

<sup>32</sup> Küllerich 2008, 18, fig. 21.

<sup>33</sup> Originally 'F' was presumably dressed in much the same manner, but her apparel is for the main part restored.

<sup>34</sup> Küllerich 2008, 15, fig. 12, the figure must be corrected with regard to its proper right shoulder: close-up study in 2010 revealed that the shoulder is damaged, and that the *Juwelkrage* continued here.

<sup>35</sup> Martiniani-Reber 1997, no. 53, 106, with colour plate p. 21. The colours have faded.





Fig. 8 San Zeno chapel, Basilica of Sa Prassede, Rome. Sa Prassede. Photo: Marconi, Genova. Tempietto Longobardo, Cividale, hypothetical reconstruction of saint 'E'. Colour drawing, Bente Kiilerich 2008 ©.

in mosaics from Rome and Ravenna, female saints are often dressed in golden garments, a striking example being the procession of holy women in the nave of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, c. 560. Closer in time to the Tempietto, saints in Sa Prassede, Rome, c. 810, don yellow attire (Fig. 8). Since the designs worn by 'B' and 'E' differ, they plausibly also differed in colour. This means that if one of these saints wore a yellow tunic the other may have sported another bright hue. Dalmatics with *clavi* are often depicted white with dark bands. In that case, the stucco would have been covered with a layer of chalk white and polished. White does not mean colourless, as the hue ranges from what the medieval viewer might have seen as *albus*, *candidus*, *niveus* or *lactus*. Light yellow, mixed from ochre and chalk white, or the red ochre used in the wall paintings could also have been chosen. Finally, although I find purple less probable, it is worth calling attention to the purple dalmatic with floral *clavi* worn by the lady next to Theodora in the San Vitale



Fig. 9a-d Tempietto Longobardo, Cividale. Hypothetical reconstruction of polychromy on saint 'B': yellow, white, red and purple versions. Photo: Bente Küllerich 2010 and colour drawing 2019 ©.

mosaic. In fact, white, yellow, red and purple are all likely hues, which are also attested in the wall paintings (Fig. 9 a-d).<sup>36</sup>

A marked colour contrast can be surmised for the ornaments of hemlines and cuffs. Three different designs are modelled on the hem lines of figures 'A', 'B' and 'E' (the lower part of 'F' is not preserved). These intricate, regular-patterned borders would certainly have stood out in salient hues to convey the impression of rich woven or embroidered textiles. To give an idea of the range of possibilities, I present some tentative reconstructions for the border of 'B', which sports a comparatively simple stylised vegetal motif (Fig. 10 a-d), and for the broader border of 'E', which displays a more elaborate design (Fig. 11 a-d). The choices of colour are based on the pigments used in the paintings.

<sup>36</sup> For a discussion of analogous material and references, see Küllerich 2008, with figs 19–21.





Fig. 10a-d Tempietto Longobardo, Cividale. Suggestions of colours for hemline of saint 'B'. Photo: Bente Küllerich 2010 and colour drawing 2019 ©.

Even with a limited palette of four to five basic hues – yellow, red, blue, green, purple – the potential combinations are more numerous than the hypothetical reconstructions show. The pearls were certainly white and must have closely followed the schema of the wall paintings, where white pearls are visible on, for instance, the gospel book held by Christ and on his nimbus. As for the shoes, these were undoubtedly red, the ubiquitous choice for high-status footwear in Byzantium.

The objects that were made of gold in real life, namely crosses and crowns, could have had an application of thin gold foil. Still, artists were able to mimic the effect of gold in yellow ochre, as it was done in the paintings. Painted imitation of stones in jewelled collars, crowns and crosses would have provided the female figures with a sense of opulence.<sup>37</sup> The intricate and rich Longobard gold jewellery with inlays in red, green and

<sup>37</sup> One may refer to the practice of painted imitations of stones in crowns in medieval wooden sculpture, e.g. Kollandsrud 2014, 54, fig. 3 (Virgin from Hedalen, Norway).



Fig. 11a-d Tempietto Longobardo, Cividale. Suggestions of colours for hemline of saint 'E'. Photo: Bente Küllerich 2010 and colour drawing 2019 ©.

blue semi-precious stone gives a general idea of a Longobard jewelled aesthetic.<sup>38</sup> The pierced earlobes indicate that the finishing touches would have included the insertion of earrings. These accessories must have been in a Byzantine style to match the richness of the garments. Bronze wire with pendants of semi-precious stone or glass, a material used in the ornamental stuccoes, could give the impression of earrings with precious stones.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> For example, a gold leaf cross with inlays in grenadine, lapis lazuli and aquamarine from Cividale, c. 650; Cividale, Museo Archaeologico Nazionale; Menis 1991, fig. 19.

<sup>39</sup> For different types of early Byzantine earrings, see Baldini Lippolis 1999, 67–112. Although the Longobards wore earrings, they were much less common than their favoured type of jewellery, the fibula.





Fig. 12 Tempietto Longobardo, Cividale. West wall of aula with hypothetical polychromy. Photo: Colour drawing, Bente Küllerich 2008 ©.

### Saints and relics

In the present article I have focused on technical and material aspects of the stuccoes and the visual and aesthetic impact of potential colour and gilding. There is little doubt that the fine attire is influenced by late antique imperial and aristocratic fashion. However, these are not fashion-shots of Longobard mannequins. The haloes and the crosses and crowns held by the female figures stress that the 'ladies of the court' are saints. At this point it is pertinent to take into account the religious setting of the images and the liturgical function of the chapel. The Longobard king, Aistulf, is known to have been an avid collector of relics. He brought relics (*'sanctorum corpora'*) from various parts of the Roman Empire to his headquarters at Pavia. S. Martino at Pavia, a church of all saints (*'omnium sanctorum'*), which is said to have housed relics of eighteen saints.<sup>40</sup> It may be a coincidence, still, with the original twelve (female) stucco saints and six male painted saints, the holy martyrs in the

<sup>40</sup> For the argument, see Torp 2006, 14, 66.

Tempietto similarly numbered eighteen. As for the relics that can be imagined to have been originally present in the chapel, first-hand information as well as physical evidence is lacking. However, referring to the year 1242, written sources mention that relics were found under the altar of the Tempietto in a ‘very old reliquary’ (*capsa multum antiqua*). In any event, both the three-dimensional female and the two-dimensional male representations of saints reflect a cult of martyrs and must be understood in this connection.

### Conclusion

It is uncertain whether the eighth-century viewer perceived the stucco images as *gipsea sculta*, sculpted stuccoes, or as statues in the antique tradition, and whether that distinction mattered at all. If painted, the coarseness of the material would not have been a problem. In fact, seen from a distance, the viewer would hardly have been able to tell whether the material under the paint layer was stone or stucco. When estimating the nature of the polychromy, the very coarseness of the fabric suggests that whereas a fine marble invited a nuanced and subtle use of pigments, stucco called for opaque paint layers. Based on analogy, and especially on the pigments used in the Tempietto wall paintings, we have proposed purple and golden yellow as the main hues, while the ornaments and borders of the dresses must have been set in strong, contrasting colours. Green is likely to have been applied as a contrast to red in the textile ornaments. Since the background was probably blue, this colour must have been confined to ornamental details in the garments. Variations of white would have been significant both for the many pearl borders and as a variant hue. In the reconstruction of polychromy, attention must be paid not only to the individual figure but to the aesthetic impact of the sculpted and painted stuccoes as a whole (Fig. 12).

By now, the colour has disappeared, leaving the elongated female figures somewhat ghostlike. Originally, the interplay of colour on surfaces, multi-coloured garments and gilded crowns and crosses, as well as glass and metal accessories, animated the stuccoes and made them come alive. By means of polychromy, the figures appeared as convincing physical presences of female saints. In the palatine chapel, the artists succeeded in marrying courtly and heavenly splendour.

Bente Kiilerich  
Professor, Art History  
Dept of linguistic, literary and aesthetic studies  
University of Bergen  
Pb 7805  
N-5020 Bergen  
bente.kiilerich@uib.no

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