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978-0-521-25551-6 - The Latin Church in Norman Italy

G. A. Loud

Excerpt

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The kingdom of Sicily was created by the coronation of its first ruler, the former Count Roger II of Sicily, in Palermo cathedral on Christmas Day 1130. The kingdom that was born then lasted, despite many vicissitudes, and even some lengthy periods of division, until the creation of modern Italy in 1860. The papal bull that sanctioned the creation of this new kingdom recorded that this was proper since God had granted Roger 'greater wisdom and power' than other princes, and in recognition of the loyal service to the papacy of his parents and himself.¹ The pope, Anacletus II, was obviously seeking justification for his action, and the reasons for such a grant were in fact considerably more complex, and will be discussed in a later part of this book (below, chapter 3). Yet as Roger's own contemporary biographer noted, without mentioning the papal role in the conferment of the new royal title at all, it was appropriate that one who 'ruled so many provinces, Sicily, Calabria and Apulia and other regions stretching almost to Rome, . . . ought to be distinguished by the honour of kingship'. After raising a spurious and unhistorical, if attractive, theory that Sicily had once, in ancient times, been a kingdom, he concluded:

now it was right and proper that the crown should be placed on Roger's head and that this kingdom should not only be restored but should be spread wide to include those other regions where he was now recognised as ruler.²

Alexander of Telese undoubtedly had a strong case that the unification of southern Italy justified a new and superior status for its ruler. That unification had largely been accomplished by Count Roger during the previous three years, since the death of his childless cousin, Duke William of Apulia, the nominal ruler of much of the mainland part of southern Italy, in July 1127. This meant that the new Duke of Apulia (and

¹ J. Deér, *Das Papsttum und die süditalienischen Normannenstaaten 1053–1212* (Göttingen 1969), 62.

² *Al. Tel.* II.1–2, pp. 23–5.

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subsequently king) ruled not just the island of Sicily but also the southern third of the Italian peninsula. Although this new royal status was far from popular, not least with the eastern (Byzantine) and western (German) emperors, both of whom had long-standing claims to rule over some or all of southern Italy, over the decade following his coronation, King Roger succeeded, albeit with some difficulty, in consolidating his rule throughout his mainland dominions. In 1140 he was even able to extend his kingdom northwards into the Abruzzi region, hitherto a debatable area, indeed a buffer zone, between the southern lands and the kingdom of (northern) Italy, ruled – albeit usually from afar – by the German emperors. From 1140 onwards it was clear that the kingdom of Sicily was there to stay as part of the political firmament of Latin Christendom.

However, the story was considerably more complicated than that. To begin with, the new kingdom was not simply an amalgam of various more local political units. These had themselves been created, or in the case of the principality of Capua, taken over, by the Norman conquest of the previous century. Over a period of almost ninety years groups of French warriors, many though by no means all from the duchy of Normandy, had settled in southern Italy, at first primarily as mercenary soldiers, and then bit by bit taken over almost the whole region. Only a few embattled, but well-fortified cities, notably Amalfi, Naples and Benevento, had managed to preserve their independence, and of these three only the last was ultimately, under papal rule, to resist King Roger's drive to consolidate his power. Roger himself was by paternal ancestry a Norman: his grandfather, Tancred de Hauteville, had been a minor landowner in the Cotentin peninsula in western Normandy, blessed with limited lands and a superfluity of sons, most of whom ended up in southern Italy.³ But the Normans, and their French allies, were never very numerous. Their conquest in the south was explicable as much in terms of the divisions among the native inhabitants and the availability of local allies as of their own strength and prowess; however much their own contemporary historians might exalt the virtues of their race. While many of the new aristocracy who emerged in the wake of the conquest were indeed Normans, there was never such a wide-ranging and complete takeover as there was in, for example, Norman England. In parts of the mainland, especially in the former 'Lombard' principalities, indigenous aristocratic families remained as part of the power structure, and new Norman lords often had Lombard vassals. Furthermore intermarriage rapidly diluted any sense of conqueror

³ *Malaterra*, I.4–5, p. 9, provides the most detailed account of Tancred's family.

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and conquered.⁴ By the mid-twelfth century the word ‘Norman’ was rarely used in ‘Norman’ Italy. It had, in a very real sense, become redundant.⁵

What, however, made southern Italy so complex was not simply the presence of an (initially) alien ruling class, but the diversity of its existing population. Much of the region had at some time or other been under the rule of the Byzantine emperors of Constantinople, and when the Normans arrived in Italy significant parts – southern Apulia, much of Lucania and Calabria, and parts of the island of Sicily – were Graecophone, and following the rites of the eastern (Orthodox) part of the Church. This was not as significant a factor as it would become in later centuries – Latin and Greek were still parts of one and the same Church, and in southern Italy there was often close and friendly contact between Greek- and Latin-rite Christians, even if tensions were already growing between Rome and Constantinople. But there was a cultural, as well as linguistic, divide between Greeks and Latins, and in this respect southern Italy was very much on the frontier of Latin Christendom. That frontier was even more apparent on the island of Sicily, which the Normans, under the leadership of King Roger’s father, Count Roger I (d. 1101), wrested from Muslim rule in a thirty-year struggle, between 1061 and 1091. For conquest did not mean conversion, and the majority of the population of the island remained Muslim for many years after 1091. Furthermore, most of the Christians on the island in the early years of Norman rule followed the Greek rite. Admittedly immigration and acculturation changed the demographic balance, and increasing numbers of Latin Christians settled in eastern Sicily. But much of the west of the island remained speaking Arabic, and following the teachings of Islam, until the early years of the thirteenth century. On the island Latin Christianity had to be introduced, and a Latin Church created from scratch. That was a long and difficult process. At Agrigento, which was the seat of one of the six Latin bishoprics founded by Count Roger I, the later thirteenth-century historian of the see recorded that: ‘there were few Christians there before the death of King William II’ (in 1189).⁶

Roger II was recorded by one contemporary as remembering his Norman origin and retaining a partiality for those who came from north

⁴ See especially, G. A. Loud, ‘Continuity and change in Norman Italy: the Campania during the eleventh and twelfth centuries’, *Journal of Medieval History* 22 (1996), 323–32.

⁵ Not all historians of the region would agree with such a dogmatic statement, but for justification see G. A. Loud, *The Age of Robert Guiscard. Southern Italy and the Norman Conquest* (Harlow 2000), 278–89.

⁶ *Le più antiche carte dell’archivio capitolare di Agrigento (1092–1282)*, ed. P. Collura (Documenti per servire alla storia di Sicilia, Ser. I.25, Palermo 1960), 307.

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of the Alps.⁷ Yet while there were instances of newcomers, especially (although not exclusively) from the Anglo-Norman world, being employed and favoured in the twelfth-century kingdom of Sicily, in fact what was more significant was the role of the native peoples in its government. Both of Roger's chief ministers, in his early years Cristodoulos, and then George of Antioch, after 1130, were Greeks. Many of the other administrators he and his successors employed, especially in their financial administration, were Arabic – albeit that conversion to, at least outward, Christianity was mandatory for such senior officials. The Latin element grew increasingly important as the twelfth century progressed, and in the reign of William II (king 1166–89) Latin bishops played, for the first time, a prominent role as royal ministers. But up until the fall of the Norman dynasty in 1194 its functionaries continued to be drawn from different cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds. Furthermore, a degree of tolerance was extended to the practice, not just of Greek Christianity, but of Islam and Judaism too. Such tolerance was pragmatic rather than principled; a price that had to be paid for the stability of the state. But it was enough to appear unusual to those coming from the monocultural Christian world of northern Europe. If the kingdom of Sicily had therefore something of an exotic appearance to foreign contemporaries, this is not surprising.⁸

Nonetheless, if one fundamental theme might be identified in the history of southern Italy under the Norman rulers it would probably be the growing predominance of the Latin Church. An area that was religiously and culturally mixed in the early Middle Ages was by 1194 much more securely incorporated within Latin Christendom. Latin-rite Christianity had spread southwards into the Greek areas. Latin bishops had been installed in formerly Greek sees, Greek monasteries taken over by Latin ones, and sometimes converted to Latin, Benedictine, observance. A Latin Church had been created, and increasingly predominated, in Sicily. Certainly this process was slow, and far from complete by the end of the twelfth century; there were still Muslims in Sicily, and Greek Christians both there and on the mainland. Messina, for example, remained a primarily Greek city until well into the thirteenth century.⁹ Indeed, the Greek

⁷ *Falcandus*, 6 (translation, *Tyrants*, 58).

⁸ See most recently G. A. Loud, 'The kingdom of Sicily and the kingdom of England, 1066–1266', *History* 88 (2003), 540–67; and H. Houben, 'Religious toleration in the south Italian peninsula during the Norman and Staufen periods', in *The Society of Norman Italy*, ed. G. A. Loud and A. Metcalfe (Leiden 2002), 319–39.

⁹ V. von Falkenhausen, 'The Greek presence in Norman Sicily: the contribution of archival material in Greek', in *The Society of Norman Sicily*, 276, 282–3.

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rite persisted in southern Calabria through to the end of the Middle Ages and beyond. The last Greek bishopric to survive in that region was not finally converted to the Latin observance until 1573. But the religious balance of power had changed irrevocably. *How* it changed is worthy of examination.

However, the development of the Latin Church in southern Italy involved far more than simply its expansion at the expense of its Greek counterpart, or the eventual conversion or displacement of the Muslims of Sicily. The Church itself changed greatly over the century and a half between the establishment of the Normans and takeover of the kingdom by the German emperor in 1194. In itself, this is not surprising. This was, after all, the great formative period of the medieval Church, when the diffuse, localised Church of the early Middle Ages became the centralised, increasingly monolithic Catholic Church of the Lateran Councils and the so-called 'papal monarchy'. Such developments inevitably affected the south Italian Church, not least because of its physical proximity to Rome and the papal court. Indeed, during this period the popes acquired their own enclave within southern Italy at Benevento, surrendered to Gregory VII by its last Lombard prince in 1073, which over the next century was to be a frequent residence and valuable bolt-hole for his successors. Furthermore, southern Italy was even more closely linked to the Curia because from 1059 onwards its Norman rulers acknowledged themselves to be papal vassals, holding their lands as fiefs from the pope. Innocent III in 1198 went so far as to claim that 'among all the various regions in which the Christian name is honoured it [the kingdom of Sicily] has remained almost always more active and devoted to the service of the Roman Church [than others]'.¹⁰

On the other hand, the significance of this relationship remains disputed. It might be argued – indeed it will be argued below – that the Norman rulers in 1059 sought merely to justify and to legitimise their usurpation of power through papal recognition, as indeed did Roger II in 1130, and that they served the popes loyally only when it was in their interests to do so, although to be fair it often was. Nor was their treatment of the Church in their own dominions always considered to be a model of Christian rulership. 'The king of Sicily', wrote the Englishman John of Salisbury in the 1160s, 'after the fashion of tyrants has reduced the Church in his kingdom to slavery.'¹¹ Such a view was extreme, and its validity

¹⁰ *Die Register Innocenz' III. 1 Pontifikatsjahr 1198/9*, ed. O. Hageneder and A. Haidacher (Graz/Cologne 1964), 616–18, no. 411.

¹¹ *The Historia Pontificalis of John of Salisbury*, ed. and trans. M. Chibnall (London 1956), 65.

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requires examination. But there is at least some evidence to support it, not least in the powers claimed as a consequence of the rights over the churches under his rule conceded to Roger I by Pope Urban II in 1098, and later by the ecclesiastical concessions granted to King William I by John of Salisbury's friend Adrian IV at the treaty of Benevento in 1156 (see chapter 3 below). These claims were to prove controversial not just during the twelfth century, but for centuries thereafter, especially when they were revived by the Spanish government of the kingdom during the sixteenth century: to such an extent that no less a scholar than Cardinal Baronius was to maintain that Urban's alleged grant was in fact a forgery.¹² The 'Apostolic legation' of the Sicilian kings was only finally abolished in 1715. But we need to examine not just what powers and rights might in theory be granted or claimed, but how they were exercised, and what effect they had in practice upon the government of the Church. One needs therefore to study not just the relationship between the papacy and the rulers of southern Italy, important as that was, but also papal policy towards the churches of the Mezzogiorno.

Furthermore, the structure and organisation of the Latin Church in southern Italy underwent far-reaching changes in the century or so after 1050. In other peripheral, but long-Christianised areas of Europe, notably England and Germany, the diocesan structure changed little after c. 800.¹³ But in southern Italy new bishoprics, archbishoprics and provinces were created, existing provinces reorganised, and an ecclesiastical structure was established on the island of Sicily, and thereafter considerably reorganised. There was also a degree of internal reorganisation within dioceses, although this was more marked in some than others, and is not always easy to document. The papacy was inevitably closely concerned with changes to the diocesan structure, but it was not simply a matter of papal pressure or initiative, and also reflected the concerns of secular rulers, developments in the structure of settlement, and a legacy of administrative confusion from the pre-Norman era. Furthermore, we need to look at who bishops were, what they actually did (or did not do), at the clergy who staffed the cathedral chapters and local churches, and to what extent the Church provided a ministry for the population as a whole. Perhaps inevitably, this last aspect is the least satisfactory.

¹² A. D. Wright, 'Medievalism' in Counter-Reformation Sicily', in *Church and Chronicle in the Middle Ages. Essays Presented to John Taylor*, ed. G. A. Loud and I. N. Wood (London 1991), 233–49.

¹³ C. N. L. Brooke, 'Rural ecclesiastical institutions in England: the search for their origins', in *Cristianizzazione ed organizzazione ecclesiastica delle campagne nell'alto Medioevo: espansione e resistenze* (Settimane di studio del centro italiano di studi sull'alto Medioevo 28, Spoleto 1982), 688–90.

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In addition, the period after 1050 saw, as elsewhere in Christendom, a significant expansion of monasticism. However, there were important facets of this development that differed considerably from the expansion in other areas. South Italian monasticism came to be dominated by great Benedictine congregations, whose wealth and influence far outweighed those of the bishoprics of the secular Church, and whose patronage networks dominated particular regions. Furthermore, there was extensive colonisation of areas that had before the early eleventh century received little or no monastic settlement. This Benedictine predominance was maintained right through the twelfth century, while the influence of the so-called 'new religious orders' only began to be significant at the very end of the period. There were reforming impulses within south Italian monasticism not dissimilar to those in other parts of Christendom, and in particular the desire for solitude and the eremitic life. But in the Mezzogiorno these were for the most part soon domesticated within a more conventional observance. A study of Latin monasticism needs to examine both those houses such as Montecassino that were already long-established when the Normans arrived, and more recent creations, including those founded by ascetic reformers such as William of Vercelli in the early twelfth century, as well as the extent to which south Italian monasticism (and the Church as a whole) was open to outside influence. Monastic provision for women, already relatively well-established in some parts of the region before the Normans arrived, also needs examination. Patterns of benefaction may tell us much about contemporary piety.

Of all the outside influences that were brought to bear upon the south Italian Church, perhaps the most notable was that of the Normans themselves. (The word 'Norman', used by the contemporary south Italian sources, will continue to be employed as a portmanteau term here; although it should be understood that the newcomers also comprised a minority of men from other parts of France.)¹⁴ Given the importance of the Church to the fabric of medieval society and the *mentalité* of its inhabitants, and that major churches were extensive property-holding corporations, the arrival of the Normans inevitably affected it. In the initial phase of the conquest the Church was a source of plunder and remuneration. Subsequently, as the Normans transformed themselves from invaders into rulers, it was potentially a vital source of support, and by founding and patronising churches the new ruling class had a means of acquiring

¹⁴ I have discussed this issue in a number of publications, but especially in *The Age of Robert Guiscard*, 81–91.

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legitimacy, as well as saving their souls. But, as with so many other aspects of this subject, the extent to which the Normans colonised, took over or influenced the south Italian Church has never been fully examined, not least because to do so effectively requires study of an extensive surviving documentation, by no means all of it available in published editions.

The historian of Norman Italy is to some extent at a disadvantage when compared with those of other areas of Europe in the Central Middle Ages. Certainly the narrative sources from the region, while individually interesting and rewarding, are relatively few compared with, for example, the kingdoms of England or Germany, and there are periods – the first two decades of the twelfth century, the last decade of King Roger's life, and the 1180s – when our knowledge of events is relatively thin. Nor, despite the clerical provenance of most of their authors, do all the chroniclers provide us with much detailed information about the Church. The purely monastic histories, from Montecassino and St Vincent on Volturno, and from the Abruzzi abbeys of Casauria and Carpineto, are, obviously, an exception, but their focus tends to be local and self-regarding.¹⁵ Furthermore, the hagiographical literature from the period, while interesting, is similarly limited in extent. What we do possess is an abundance of documentary evidence. Its scope may, to an extent, be misleading: there is extensive documentation surviving from the monasteries, that from cathedrals and the secular church is less satisfactory, and has suffered greater losses, including in relatively recent periods. A number of sees in Apulia lapsed as a result of population changes in the later Middle Ages, and others, especially in Campania, were suppressed by Pius VII in the early nineteenth century: hardly any charters have survived from these dioceses. In other cases fire, whether accidental or arson, has destroyed the records. Earthquake damage has also exacted a heavy toll, especially in Calabria.¹⁶

We are therefore overly dependent on those relatively few cathedral archives where extensive documentation has been preserved: particularly Bari and Troia in Apulia; Aversa, Benevento, Capua and Salerno in

¹⁵ The *Chronicon Vulturnense*, although written in the early years of the twelfth century, has anyway little detailed information after the 1060s.

¹⁶ Thus, in the principality of Capua the cathedral archives of Teano perished in a fire in the early sixteenth century, those of Suessa were burned by the French in 1799 and those at Isernia by Garibaldi's troops in 1860. In Apulia, the archives of Otranto cathedral were lost in the sack by the Turks in 1480, and those of Siponto in the sack of Manfredonia, also by the Turks, in 1620. The archives of Torremaggiore were presumably lost when that abbey was destroyed by earthquake in 1627. In Calabria there have been severe losses through earthquakes, notably at Malvito in 1638 and at Mileto in 1783, while the cathedral archives of Squillace, and those of the abbey of St Michael of Montescaglioso in Lucania, were lost in the destruction of the Archivio di Stato of Naples in 1943.

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Campania; and Lipari and Cefalù in Sicily. Even for these sees the number of episcopal *acta* surviving (as opposed to documents concerning the cathedral) is relatively limited in comparison to other parts of medieval Europe, although this probably reflects the lack of active diocesan government.¹⁷ However, by contrast three of the most important south Italian monasteries of the Norman era still exist today: Montecassino, Cava and Montevergine, with their archives largely intact (and covering not just the mother-house but a number of dependencies as well), while much of the original archive of St Sophia, Benevento, suppressed as late as 1806, also survives at the Museo del Sannio in Benevento. For several other monastic houses we have chartularies, either original or in later antiquarian copies. The scale of this monastic documentation is considerable; at Cava, the largest medieval archive in southern Italy, there are, for example, more than 5,000 original charters from the eleventh and twelfth centuries, of which fewer than a third have been edited in print. What follows has drawn heavily on this charter evidence, both published and, in the cases of Cava and St Sophia, Benevento, also in manuscript. But the evidence that survives today, even for those churches that are well documented, is undoubtedly much less than once existed.¹⁸ Furthermore, the focus of our evidence is uneven. We know far more about the institutions, resources and politics of the Church than we can ever discover about its mission, and more about the upper levels of the clerical hierarchy than about those who served the spiritual needs of the majority of ordinary Christians.

¹⁷ R. A. Fletcher, *The Episcopate in the Kingdom of Leon in the Twelfth Century* (Oxford 1978), 87–8, for example, lamented the paucity of surviving episcopal documents from this region; however, we have much less documentation from many south Italian sees than from most of the Leonese ones. For the activity of cathedral chapters compared with the frequent passivity of bishops, R. Brentano, *Two Churches. England and Italy in the Thirteenth Century* (Princeton 1968), 97–9.

¹⁸ Thus, at Bari in 1067 a priest receiving a church accepted, among its property, no fewer than 48 charters relating to it, none of which now survives, *Cod. Dipl. Barese*, i.44–6 no. 26, at 46.

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CHAPTER I

The Church in southern Italy before the Normans

Shortly before the year 980 a Greek monk called Nilos, a celebrated holy man from Calabria, who was the abbot of a monastery near Rossano, on the northern side of the Sila mountains, tired – so we are told – of the pressures of his renown and his would-be disciples, and worried about the danger of a Muslim attack, decided to abandon the abbey that he had founded, and leave for pastures new. Despite his considerable age – for he was then already about seventy – he travelled northwards into the Campania, the area on the western, or Tyrrhenian, coast of the peninsula, which was ruled not, as was Calabria, by the Byzantine Empire, but by the various petty native princelings who still described themselves as ‘Lombards’, but whom we may consider as, by this time, indigenous Italians. According to his biographer:

Fleeing from the honour in which he was held among them [the Greeks], he preferred to dwell among the Latins, since he was unknown to them and not held in respect among them. He did indeed take great care to avoid honours, but by doing so he became more famous and distinguished in the sight of Heaven, and he was received by all as if he was one of the Apostles, and equal reverence was shown to him.¹

Not surprisingly, his merits soon became clear to his hosts, and the Prince of Capua, Pandulf, sought to make him a bishop, or so the biographer claimed. That miscarried; presumably it was quite contrary to what Nilos wanted, but with the prince's support the abbot of the great local monastery of Montecassino allowed him and his handful of companions to settle on the lands of that house at Valleluce, about 10 km to the north of Montecassino itself, where he founded another monastery. There Nilos remained for some fifteen years, before, disillusioned by the internal disputes of the princely family and by the behaviour of Abbot Manso of Montecassino, a relative of

¹ *Vita Nili*, c. 72; Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, 120, col. 124.