Arabic Administration in Norman Sicily
The Royal Diwan

Jeremy Johns’ book represents the first comprehensive account, in any language, of the Arabic administration of Norman Sicily. It argues that the Arabic bureau, established by Roger II and his successors, was closely modelled upon that of the Fāṭimid caliphs of Egypt, and was designed less as an efficient organ of administration, than as a medium for the projection of the royal image.

In the traditional literature, it has been assumed that the Norman rulers simply inherited the Arabic administration of the Kalbid emirs of the island. In fact, on the completion of the Norman conquest in 1092, Greek administrators were employed to adapt Arabic records and these formed the basis of the post-conquest distribution of the land and its population. With the passing of the first generation of administrators, however, new Arabic records ceased to be issued and Arabic disappeared as a language of central administration for the following twenty years. It was only after the coronation of Roger II in 1130, that a new and highly professional Arabic bureau – the royal diwan – began to issue a series of Arabic and bilingual (Arabic-Greek and Arabic-Latin) documents. A close analysis of these, and of the diwan that produced them, reveals that the main inspiration for the renaissance of the royal diwan came from the contemporary Islamic Mediterranean and, in particular, from Fāṭimid Egypt. An examination of the competence and reach of the Norman diwan suggests that its primary function was not administrative efficiency, but the projection of the Arabic facet of the Norman monarchy.

Jeremy Johns is University Lecturer in Islamic Archaeology in The Oriental Institute, University of Oxford, and Fellow of Wolfson College, Oxford.
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DEDICATION

To Sarah, Emma, and Jacob

‘… se io non avessi fatto altro se non che indovinare, non si poteva indovinare più giusto; e … l’inventore di una produzione così singolare sarebbe, mi si permetta il dirlo, di un ben tutt’altro merito che il traduttore modesto d’una raccolta di lettere arabe riunite nella Cancelleria, nel tempo che li Arabi dominarono in Sicilia.’

Giuseppe Vella, c.1811
(from Varvaro 1905, p.328)
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Preface

This book has taken a long time to reach its present form. It began as part of my doctoral thesis, ‘The Muslims of Norman Sicily, c.1060–c.1194’, in the Faculty of Modern History at Oxford in 1983. Six years later, while I was Lecturer in Early Islamic Archaeology in the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, I completed the first draft of what was then called ‘Duana Regis: Arabic administration and Norman kingship in Sicily’. A second, heavily revised draft, known as both Duana Regis II and Duana Regia – and referred to as ‘forthcoming’, ‘imminent’ and even ‘in press’, by myself and over-trusting friends and colleagues – was produced in 1989, circulated in typescript, and then shelved. In 1990, Duana Regia returned with me from Newcastle to Oxford. On three or four occasions thereafter, during long vacations or terms of sabbatical leave, individual chapters were revised, but the whole remained incomplete. In the end, only by persuading the University and Wolfson to grant me a full sabbatical year ‘in anticipation of the allowance’, and by ‘mortgaging’ myself to the University until well into what was then the next millennium, was I able to revise and to rewrite the whole book so swiftly that by the time I reached the end I was still content with the beginning. To all those who, for nearly twenty years, have kindly continued to express an interest in this tardy book, I offer sincere apologies, but no excuse except that it is better now than it would then have been.

Henry Mayr-Harting, then of St Peter’s College, Oxford, was my first supervisor, and he gave me two terms of excellent advice and boundless enthusiasm, while energetically seeking his successor. I believe that it was Peter Holt who gave him the name of Michael Brett, then Lecturer in African History at the School of Oriental and African Studies, at the University of London. Michael was a model supervisor: intellectually uncompromising; meticulous about the detail of argument and apparatus, with a clear vision of shape and structure; enthusiastic, loyal, supportive, and endlessly patient with my struggle to repaint myself as a trompe l’œil Islamicist. I wish that I were half as good a supervisor as he. From 1976–9, I was a Postgraduate Scholar at Balliol College, and was supported by a Full Postgraduate Award from the Department of Education and Science. When that came to an end, I was lucky enough to be awarded a Study Abroad Scholarship by The Leverhulme Trust, which enabled me to spend more than two years in Palermo, under the benevolent wing
of the late Monsignor Paolo Collura, Professor of Latin Paleography at the University of Palermo. I do not have words to express adequately my gratitude to The Leverhulme Trust for permitting me the luxury of the extended spell in the archives, libraries, and landscape of Sicily that was to be crucial not just to the formation of this book but also to my career and, indeed, much of my life. I am particularly grateful to Miss Joan Bennett, then Administrative Secretary to The Trust, for her wholly exceptional kindness and support. In 1982, I returned to Oxford as Junior Research Fellow in Medieval History at Wolfson College, Oxford. Wolfson gave me the opportunity to write up eight years of research in easy reach of one of the best libraries in the world, and within a true community of scholars.

I am keenly aware of how fortunate and privileged I was to be given eight years of funding, which not only covered all University and College fees, but also included more than generous allowances for living, research, and travel expenses. It is with dismay and foreboding that I compare my good fortune with the grim circumstances in which my own students must work: those without independent means must incur heavy debts in order to conduct research, and all are harried by the authorities to complete within three or at most four years. In the humanities, especially in inter-disciplinary fields and in those requiring competence in one or more languages that were not studied for a first degree, this short-sighted policy is already stifling intellectual curiosity and threatens to provoke a serious decline in academic standards.

I am deeply grateful to many other individuals and institutions, only some of whom I can name here. In addition to those mentioned elsewhere, I wish to thank the following for their intellectual and professional generosity: Henri Bresc, Diego Ciccarelli, Piero Corrao, Vincenzo D’Alessandro, Franco D’Angelo, Adalgisa De Simone, Gioacchino Falsone, Marisa Famà, Ernst Grube, Ernst Kitzinger, Donald Matthew, Ferdinando Maurici, Annliese Nef, Beatrice Pasciuta, Carlo Pastena, Donald Richards, Umberto Rizzitano, Benedetto Rocco, Emilie Savage-Smith, Marina Scarlatta, Lucia Travaini, Vincenzo Tusa, Roger Wilson, and Vladimir Zorić; the directors and staff of the Archivio Diocesano (Catania), the Archivio Diocesano (Palermo), the Archivio Diocesano (Patti), the Archivio di Stato (Palermo), the Biblioteca Centrale della Regione Siciliana (Palermo), the Biblioteca Civica (Catania), the Biblioteca Comunale (Palermo), the Biblioteca della Società Siciliana per Storia Patria (Palermo), the Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris), the Biblioteca Vaticana, the British Library, the Library of the Oriental Institute (Oxford), the Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, the Library of the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, and the Oriental Library of the University of Durham. For almost thirty years, I have regularly abused the unfailing courtesy, good-humour, kindness and patience of the staff of The Bodleian Library, and especially of the Oriental Reading Room: the late Eliahu Ashtor once described them to the incredulous guests at a Palermitan dinner party as gli angeli in un piccolo paradiso, and he was right.

I am especially grateful to the late Albrecht Noth for his encouragement, generosity and kindness. It is a great loss to scholarship that he was unable to
complete the projected edition of the Arabic documents of the Norman rulers of Sicily. His preliminary study of the Arabic documents of Roger II included a list of those in the Archivo General de la Fundación Casa Ducal de Medinaceli which, with one exception, remain unpublished. Despite Albrecht Noth’s best efforts on my behalf, I have not been able to gain access to these. However, I am extremely grateful to Aldo Sparti of the Soprintendenza Archivistica per la Sicilia (Palermo) for providing me with photocopies of prints of microfilms of them, and with a copy of the catalogue of the 1994 Messina exhibition in which they are reproduced as much reduced colour plates. With these, I have made the least bad readings possible in the circumstances.

Many friends and colleagues have sent me their own publications which I have found indispensable while preparing this study, but I wish to celebrate especially one act of singular generosity. Soon after I moved to Newcastle from Oxford, and beyond easy reach of any library with good holdings on medieval Sicily, Denis Mack Smith invited me to take all books that might be of use from his own collection. And so I came to have at my elbow scores of books which were not held, if anywhere in Britain, by any library between Edinburgh and Cambridge. When I reminded him of this, many years later, he pretended to have forgotten; but I suspect that he was anxious to forget the two bottles of cheap wine which, at the low ebb of my fortunes, was all that I could offer in thanks. But I remember them, and blush, every time that he pulls another venerable bottle from his cellar.

David Abulafia, Michael Brett, Vera von Falkenhausen, Geert Jan van Gelder, Alex Metcalfe, Michael Prestwich, and John Wansbrough all read various drafts of this book, and made many valuable comments. I am grateful to Marigold Acland and Paul Watt of Cambridge University Press for overseeing the process of production, and especially to Valina and Tony Rainer, respectively my copyeditor and proofreader.

Because I have relied so heavily upon the mastery – especially the linguistic mastery – of others, and should otherwise have been Jack of all trades and master of none, I have mastered the art of sticking to my own mistakes against the best advice.

*   *   *

James and Lisa Fentress have been the best of friends, the most generous of hosts, and the most challenging and stimulating of colleagues and critics, in Oxford, Rome, Sicily, and Tuscany. Dr Filippo Cucinella made a generous gift of his professional services on the sole condition that I wrote ‘good things about Sicily’. The late Maria Stella De Simone Wirz, her son Gustavo Wirz, and Sylvia Wirz, were the most gracious, kind, and hospitable landlords in the Villa De Simone at Partanna in 1980–82. For nearly twenty years, Paolo and Costanza Sallier de la Tour, their elder son Filiberto and his wife Domitilla, their daughter Ariane, and many other members of their family and household, have shown me and mine the sort of boundless and unconditional generosity, hospitality, and love that lesser
mortals restrict to family. Renata Pucci dei Benisichi Zanca has been a fascinating, generous, and loyal friend, who introduced me not only to the Wirz and the Sallier de la Tour, but also to Sicily itself.

My research on Sicily could never have been undertaken without the love and support of Leslie and Violet Johns, Sarah Johns, and Doris and Fred Blau. I can repay my debt to none of them.

Nadia Jamil was always there to help throughout the writing of the final version of this book and has suggested innumerable clarifications, corrections, and improvements. Were it not for her faith in the book, and in me, it would never have been finished, but I might well have been.
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Abbreviations

AASLAP  Atti della Accademia di Scienze, Lettere e Arti di Palermo
ADM    Archivo General de la Fundación Casa Ducal de Medinaceli
AdS    Archivio di Stato
AG     Agrigento (Sicily)
Arch. Dioc. Archivio Diocesano
ASCL   Archivio Storico per la Calabria e la Lucania
ASPN   Archivio Storico per le Provincie Napoletane
ASS    Archivio Storico Siciliano
ASSO   Archivio Storico per la Sicilia Orientale
BAS\textsuperscript{1} Biblioteca arabo-sicula, ossia raccolta di testi Arabici che toccano la geografia eccetera della Sicilia. Testi arabici, ed. Michele Amari, 1 vol. and 2 appendices, Leipzig, 1857–87 (reprinted and extensively revised as BAS\textsuperscript{2})
BAS\textsuperscript{1}(It.) Biblioteca arabo-sicula, ossia raccolta di testi Arabici che toccano la geografia, la storia, le biografie e la bibliografia della Sicilia. Traduzione italiana, ed. Michele Amari, 2 vols and 1 appendix, Turin, 1880–9 (reprinted and extensively revised as BAS\textsuperscript{2}(It.))
BAS\textsuperscript{2} Biblioteca arabo-sicula, ossia raccolta di testi Arabici che toccano la geografia, la storia, la biografia e la bibliografia della Sicilia, 2nd rev. edn, ed. Michele Amari and Umberto Rizzitano, 2 vols, Edizione nazionale delle opere di Michele Amari, Palermo, 1988
BAS\textsuperscript{2}(It.) Biblioteca arabo-sicula, ossia raccolta di testi Arabici che toccano la geografia, la storia, la biografia e la bibliografia della Sicilia. Raccolti e tradotti in Italiano, 2nd rev. edn, ed. Michele Amari, Umberto Rizzitano, Andrea Borruso, Mirella Cassarino and Adalgisa De Simone, 3 vols, Edizione nazionale delle opere di Michele Amari, Palermo, 1997–8
BGA Bibliotheca geographorum Arabicorum, ed. Michael Jan de Goeje \textit{et al.}, Leiden
Bibl. Com. Biblioteca Comunale

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>BSOAS</td>
<td><em>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</em> (University of London)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BZ</td>
<td><em>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CL</td>
<td>Caltanissetta (Sicily)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS</td>
<td>Cosenza (Calabria)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT</td>
<td>Catania (Sicily)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CZ</td>
<td>Catanzaro (Calabria)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPSASDS</td>
<td><em>Documenti per Servire alla Storia di Sicilia</em> (Società Siciliana per la Storia Patria, Palermo)</td>
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<tr>
<td>EI</td>
<td><em>The Encyclopaedia of Islam</em>, ed. Martijn Theodor Houtsma <em>et al.</em>, 1st edn, 4 vols and supplement, Leiden, 1913–38</td>
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<tr>
<td>EN</td>
<td>Enna (Sicily)</td>
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<td>FG</td>
<td>Foggia (Apulia)</td>
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<tr>
<td>FSI</td>
<td>Fonti per la Storia d’Italia (Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo, Rome)</td>
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<td>JA</td>
<td><em>Journal Asiatique</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>JESHO</td>
<td><em>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ME</td>
<td>Messina (Sicily)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MT</td>
<td>Matera (Basilicata)</td>
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<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Naples (Campania)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Palermo (Sicily)</td>
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<tr>
<td>QFIAB</td>
<td><em>Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>RC</td>
<td>Reggio di Calabria (Calabria)</td>
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<tr>
<td>RG</td>
<td>Ragusa (Sicily)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RIS</td>
<td>Rerum Italicarum Scriptores; raccolta degli storici italiani dal cinquecento al millecinquecento ordinata da Ludovico Antonio Muratori, 2nd series, Bologna</td>
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<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>Salerno (Campania)</td>
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<td>SR</td>
<td>Syracuse (Sicily)</td>
</tr>
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<td>TP</td>
<td>Trapani (Sicily)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VV</td>
<td>Vibo Valentia (Calabria)</td>
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</table>
THE HOUSE OF HAUTEVILLE (1)

Murielle (1) = Tancred = Frésende (2)

WILLIAM IRON-ARM
Ct of Apulia
1042–6

DROGO
Ct of Apulia
1046–51

HUMPHREY
Ct of Apulia
1051–7
d.1063

GEORGE
Ct of Capitanata
Serlo

Serlo
Ct of Apulia
1042–6

ROBERT GUSCARD
Ct and Duke of Apulia
1057–85

Alberada
Ct and Duke of Apulia
1057–85

Sichelgaita

Mauger

Aubrey

William
Tancred
Humbert

Fresenda

BOHEMOND I
Prince of Antioch
1099–1111

ROGER BORSA
Duke of Apulia
1085–1111

two sons and
seven daughters

Judith of Évreux (1) = Eremberga of Mortain (2) =

1. ROGER I = ADELAIDE OF VASTO
Ct of Sicily
d.1101
Regent
1101–12
d. 1118

BOHEMOND II
Prince of Antioch
1111–30

WILLIAM
Duke of Apulia
1111–27

(lleg.)

Jordan
d. 1092

daughter

Adelisa
Geoffrey
d.post-1096

d.post-1098

Mauger
Munella
daughter

Judith

Geoffrey

Ct of Ragusa
d.pre-1120

Matilda
Emma

Matilda
Maximilla

Flandina

(1?)
(1)
(2)
(2)
(2)
(2)
(2)

Geoffrey

Ct of Sicily
1101–5

Matilda

2. ROGER II
(see below)

Maximilla

www.cambridge.org
THE HOUSE OF HAUTEVILLE (2)

Elvira of Castile (1) = 2. Roger II
Ct of Sicily 1105–28
Duke of Apulia 1128–30
King of Sicily 1130–54

= Sibyl of Burgundy (2)

= Beatrice of Rethel (3)

Frederick Barbarossa
Emp. of Germany 1152–90

7. Constance = Henry VI
Queen of Sicily 1195–8
Emp. of Germany 1190–7

Simon
Pr. of Taranto

8. Frederick II
Pr. of Taranto
King of Sicily 1197–1250

Roger
Duke of Apulia d.1140

Tancred
Pr. of Taranto and Bari d.1139?

Alfonso
d. 1144

Henry
Adelaide

5. Tancred
King of Sicily 1190–94

= Sibylla of Acerra

3. William I = Margaret of Navarre
King of Sicily 1154–66

6. William III
King of Sicily deposed 1194

Roger
Duke of Apulia d.1161

Robert

4. William II = Joanna of England
King of Sicily 1166–89

Henry
Prince of Capua d.1172
In the Arabic-Latin estate register of Santa Maria di Monreale (Diwān 44), the Arabic mudd is translated into Latin as salma, a measure of area equivalent to 1.75 hectares (4.3 acres). In the absence of evidence to the contrary, I have assumed that this was the area of the mudd throughout western Sicily in the Norman period, and that the Greek modion, whence the Arabic mudd (and the Latin modius) were derived, had the same area. The Arabic zawja (Greek boidion or zeugarion, Latin pariculum) comprised thirty mudds of land (52.5 hectares, 130 acres): in all three languages, the term refers to a yoke of oxen, and is here translated by the English ‘plough-land’.

The terms modion, modius, mudd and salma were also used for dry measures, on the principle that one mudd of grain was required to seed one mudd of land. In medieval and early modern Sicily, there was considerable local variation in the dry salma, presumably because the sowing rate varied according to both the crop and the quality of the land. The salma used for wheat in the region of Palermo was therefore adopted as a general measure for the whole island, and was equivalent to 2.75 hectolitres (7.5 bushels). Again in the absence of evidence to the contrary, I have assumed this to be the size of the dry modion, modius, mudd and salma in western Sicily during the Norman period.