

INTRODUCTION

At first glance the fractious political history of medieval southern Italy, stretching from the Abruzzi to Sicily, makes a study of the region's urban societies a problematic endeavour. From the mid-eleventh to the early thirteenth century the political map of mainland southern Italy was in an almost unabated flux. A snapshot of the region in 1050 would see the zones of Apulia and Calabria under the distant rule of the Byzantine emperor, Lombard principalities centred on Benevento, Capua and Salerno and some small, but independent, duchies on the Tyrrhenian coast at Amalfi, Gaeta and Naples. In the backdrop were bands of Norman adventurers, who had been slowly infiltrating the region for the previous half-century. Initially appearing around 1000 as a mixture of pilgrims and mercenaries, these Normans soon settled and placed increasing pressure on the existing governing authorities. By 1100 the Normans had transformed the South Italian political landscape immeasurably. Byzantine rule was no more, and the Lombard principalities were without their Lombard princes. Apulia, Calabria (along with the island of Sicily, which was previously under Muslim rule), the duchy of Amalfi and the principality of Salerno were controlled by Norman dukes of the Hauteville dynasty. Capua was still governed by a prince, but one from the Norman Quarrel kin-group, while Benevento had placed itself under papal rule. Naples retained a precarious independence under its ancient ducal rulers. In 1139, after twelve years of conflict, all of these lands, except for Benevento, were united, with Sicily, into one central kingdom. The architect of this new realm was Roger II of Sicily, a 'scion' of the Hauteville lineage. I Roger's direct descendants ruled the kingdom until 1189, when conflict over the succession erupted. The contest for the throne was finally settled in 1194 with the successful invasion of the German emperor, Henry VI, who took the crown. But

¹ Alex. Tel., Bk I.I, p. 6.



Introduction

the death of Henry in 1197 and that of his Sicilian wife, Constance, in 1198 left a three-year-old son, Frederick II, and a huge political vacuum. The resultant anarchy in the region was not fully quelled until after Frederick's return to southern Italy in 1220.

Despite the manifest instability, southern Italy's urban centres stand out as a notable constant. While political boundaries moved and regimes fell the city and its community remained. Civic life did not merely subsist though, and particularly in the twelfth century it evolved and thrived. This dichotomy of political volatility and urban evolution was found throughout Europe. However, in its European, and even Italian, context southern Italy (often termed the Mezzogiomo) has received limited attention, both in broad terms and especially in relation to the study of its urban society. Even Nicholas's immense work, The Growth of the Medieval City, barely refers to the southern part of the Italian peninsula.² There is, of course, a relative plethora of studies on Italian urban life though in most cases Rome is as far south as the coverage is taken.³ The concentration on the centre and north of the peninsula is understandable not only because of the vast source material available. It was in this part of Italy where the majority of the significant developments in medieval urban life evolved into their most dynamic formats - communal government and consular administration by the twelfth century, the rise of the popolo in the thirteenth and striking inter-city rivalry. Moreover, wider historical developments, notably the Renaissance, owe much to the evolution of the independent city-states of central and northern

By contrast the emergence of the Normans and the establishment of a strongly centralised kingdom in southern Italy (the type of which was absent further north) are considered to have oppressed the vitality of urban society and to justify passing over an examination of the region. The formation of the kingdom in 1139 is presented as a significant but disruptive watershed. Analyses of the development of urban society before that date are tinged with a sense of a fast-approaching and fateful decline, an 'if only' scenario. After 1139 this 'decline' was supposedly in progress – the cities were economically, politically and even culturally

² D. Nicholas, The Growth of the Medieval City: From Late Antiquity to the Early Fourteenth Century (New York, 1997).

³ See for a typical example D. Waley, *The Italian City-Republics* (London, 1969); P. Jones, *The Italian City-State: From Commune to Signoria* (Oxford, 1997), where some South Italian evidence is intermittently incorporated.

⁴ C. Wickham, 'City society in twelfth-century Italy and the example of Salerno', in *Salemo nel XII secolo. Istituzioni, società, cultura. Atti del convegno internazionale* [June 1999], ed. P. Delogu and P. Peduto (Salerno, 2004), p. 12; J. H. Mundy, 'In praise of Italy: the Italian republics', *Speculum* 64 (1989), p. 816.



Introduction

smothered by the kingdom – and the community lost its voice. As Hyde set the parameters for his work on civil life in medieval Italy we are informed that 'the growth of the *vita civile* is the centre of interest throughout and for this reason the South largely drops out of the picture after the Norman conquest.' This is a common supposition. It is equally common to find descriptions of southern cities in the twelfth century saturated with pejorative adjectives such as 'doomed', 'repressed' and 'stunted'. Kreutz maintains that the Normans did not 'live progressively and creatively with cities' and 'deliberately extinguished' their 'spirit'. Even Evelyn Jamison asserted that 'genuine city life was killed' by the Norman monarchy.

It would seem that this over-simple representation of urban society in southern Italy is linked to the way the region has been understood in broader terms. Some scholars have seen medieval southern Italy as a channel through which Byzantine and Islamic culture was transmitted to Western Europe. Others have focused admiringly on the constitution of the Norman kingdom as a precursor to the modern state.8 For the most part, however, attention on southern Italy has focused on the region as a 'problem area' which confusingly embodied luxury and poverty in equal measure. It appears that this interpretation of the medieval South had its origins in the early Renaissance period, and was accentuated by the works produced in northern Italy during the era of Italy's unification (the Risorgimento), achieved in 1870. The scholars writing them worked in an age in which the North's drive towards an Italian state was considered to have been obstructed by the 'reactionary' Bourbon kingdom in southern Italy and the perceived apathy of its inhabitants.9 The invectives aimed at the 'absolutist' Bourbon kingdom presented 'the people and society of southern Italy as "corrotto" (corrupted) and "abbrutito" (become brutish) by centuries of bad government'. 10 A host of cultural stereotypes developed in the North (and elsewhere in Europe)

⁵ J. K. Hyde, Society and Politics in Medieval Italy – The Evolution of Civil Life, 1000–1350 (London, 1973), p. 9.

⁶ B. Kreutz, Before the Normans – Southern Italy in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries (Philadelphia, 1991), p. 157.

E. Jamison, 'The Norman administration of Apulia and Capua more especially under Roger II and William I, 1127–1166', PBSR 6 (1913) [reprinted as a separate volume, Aalen, 1987], p. 235;
 B. Croce, History of the Kingdom of Naples, trans. H. Stuart Hughes (Chicago, 1970), believed that the Norman monarchy repressed 'with the severest vigour all signs of communal formation', p. 11.
 A. Marongiu, 'A model state in the Middle Ages: the Norman and Swabian kingdom of Sicily',

⁸ A. Marongiu, 'A model state in the Middle Ages: the Norman and Swabian kingdom of Sicily', Comparative Studies in Society and History 6 (1963–4), pp. 307–20.

H. Hearder, Italy in the Age of the Risorgimento 1790–1870 (Harlow, 1983), pp. 125–53, 218–51.
 N. Moe, "This is Africa": ruling and representing southern Italy, 1860–61, in Making and Remaking Italy – The Cultivation of National Identity around the Risorgimento, ed. A. R. Ascoli and K. von Henneberg (Oxford, 2001), p. 126.



Introduction

which emphasised the South's backwardness and saw Europe as ending at Naples. A moral map of Italy gradually emerged depicting the North as progressive and virtuous and the South gripped by vice. After the South's integration into the Italian state, some northern politicians saw themselves as 'doctors' healing the 'wound' of an uncivilised South incapable of self-government.11 It was possible to link the Bourbon kingdom's roots with the twelfth-century monarchy and to trace the origins of southern Italy's so-called modern socio-economic problems back to the Norman period. As foreign misgovernment and a lack of civic spirit were put forward among the many reasons for the South's 'problems' the finger was often pointed at the Normans. More so because the exact opposite seemed to be occurring from the late eleventh century in the Centre and North, where an independent and energetic civic consciousness was visibly contributing to free enterprise and progress in areas which were subsequently seen as more developed in the modern era. Historians writing in the socio-political milieu of the nineteenth century could easily interpret evidence from the medieval period within the framework of a persistent North–South imbalance.

This understanding was underlined further by the intellectual tradition known as Meridionalismo, which addressed the so-called 'southern question' through comparisons with the North. The resultant analyses of the South 'essentially consisted of noting the absence of features found in the North [and] portraying the Mezzogiomo through a northern prism'. 12 As an approach it carries obvious negative consequences for an understanding of urban societies in the medieval South, as it encourages an interpretation through the framework of their more glamorous Northern counterparts. While Meridionalismo has recently begun to be questioned, its influence on the medieval period remains strong. In short, this period of history in the South has largely been seen as an abortive phase in the general framework of Italian history and has often been isolated from it. Even the hugely influential Neapolitan Benedetto Croce considered the history of the Norman monarchy as not identifiable with the history of southern Italy and lamented 'I can find no admirable traits among the peoples of southern Italy during the great period of Norman-Swabian domination, no stimulus to local pride, no comfort in examples of patriotic virtue." Later, Giovanni Tabacco

¹¹ Moe, "This is Africa", pp. 120-9, 133-7, 140.

J. Morris, 'Challenging Meridionalismo: constructing a new history for Southern Italy', in The New History of the Italian South – The Mezzogiomo Revisited, ed. R. Lumley and J. Morris (Exeter, 1997), p. 10.

¹³ Croce, History of the Kingdom of Naples, p. 23. For a stimulating discussion of these interpretative problems and a cogent argument for the Norman period to be placed within the South's history



Introduction

depicted the medieval South in part as 'more a passive object than an actor in history', a region that was often marginal to European events, 'following its own different rhythm, sometimes even in an opposing direction'.14

The stigma attached to the Normans, their 'omnipotent' kingdom and its successor's later dilatory contribution to Italian nationhood has influenced the study of medieval urban life in the South, even of the period before the Normans appeared. Perhaps, partly as a result, scholars of urban society have more regularly been attracted to the Centre and North, increasing the corpus of works and maintaining the sense of disparity with the South. This has been exacerbated by the fact that of the smaller body of works dedicated specifically to Norman southern Italy few have adequately examined urban life. Within the South Italian historiographical tradition a great deal of research has been carried out upon various aspects of Norman southern Italy. 15 The region's political organisation, religious establishments, settlement patterns, arts, social composition and legal and administrative structures have all received superb treatment. Yet few detailed works, modern or otherwise, exist on South Italian urban government and society. Carabellese's 1905 edition of L'Apulia ed il suo commune nell'Alto Medio Evo provides an invaluable background to urban government, but it must be used with caution. It focuses solely on Apulia, is over a hundred years old and was written in the generation following Italian unification. 16 In the 1920s Calasso produced an important study on South Italian urban legislation, the aim of which was to explore the nature of civic liberties but not to investigate urban society as such. 17 Later, M. Caravale added a useful chapter in his Il regno normanno di Sicilia, but its emphasis is largely on administrative structures. 18 More recently J-M. Martin published La Pouille du VI au XII siècle, a remarkable work that approached the study of medieval Apulia using an exacting methodology. 19 The work, however, is limited again to the region of Apulia and is not primarily an

see G. Galasso, 'Considerazioni intorno alla storia del Mezzogiorno d'Italia', in his Mezzogiorno medievale e moderno (Turin, 1965), pp. 13-59.

¹⁴ G. Tabacco, The Struggle for Power in Medieval Italy – Structures of Political Rule (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 6–7. 15 J-M. Martin, 'Historiographie récente de l'Italie Méridionale pendant le haut moyen age',

Cahiers de Civilisation medievale X-XII siècles, 41 (1998), pp. 331-51.

¹⁶ F. Carabellese, *L'Apulia ed il suo comune nell'Alto Medio Evo* (Bari, 1905); there is also a less wellknown follow-up volume published posthumously from the author's notes, F. Carabellese, Il comune pugliese durante la monarchia normanno-sveva (Bari, 1924).

F. Calasso, La legislazione statutaria dell' Italia meridionale: le basi storiche; le libertà cittadine dalla fondazione del regno all'epoca degli statuti (Rome, 1929).

¹⁸ M. Caravale, Il regno normanno di Sicilia (Rome, 1966), pp. 325–82.

¹⁹ J-M. Martin, La Pouille du VI au XII siècle (Rome, 1993).



Introduction

urban history. There are some more general works covering this period of South Italian history which do touch upon urban government and society. Most notable is Chalandon's *Histoire de la domination normande en Italie et en Sicilie*, published in 1907. Within its two huge volumes a good quantity of the material for a comprehensive study of urban life is included. Unfortunately it is mostly dispersed throughout the work in various chapters without a compact analysis on urban society. The more modern work, *The Norman Kingdom of Sicily*, by Matthew, also covers various important themes for an urban history, but, like Chalandon's, its focus lies elsewhere.²⁰ On the other hand one could compile a reasonable catalogue of modern works, mostly journal articles, which have explored individual cities or wider aspects of urban society.²¹ These individual works have been particularly important in highlighting the wide regional differences throughout southern Italy and cautioning against making generalisations.

In short, there has not been a broad study of urban government and society in southern Italy during the Norman period; and certainly not one that has drawn together the wealth of source material with the latest research, which tends to emphasise the need for certain revisions in our understanding. It is my aim to take a tentative step towards filling what is a significant void, to build on the wave of new works on individual cities and to challenge some of the assumptions that surround the subject by exploring these emerging ideas in greater detail. Did the Normans stifle urban autonomy and civic life in the South, and if so to what extent? Was the region developed economically and commercially? How complex was the social ordering of urban communities, and is there evidence for a sense of civic identity? What continuities or interruptions can be found in the cities? To answer these questions, an extensive range of charter material will be analysed, in order to reveal the minutiae of quotidian life in the city, without which we cannot begin to understand the bigger pictures in urban society. Hopefully such an investigation will bridge the gap that exists between the general histories of medieval southern Italy, which allude briefly to urban society, and those works which have looked exclusively at particular cities. While the need to apply 'historical specificity' to the South is clear, there should, and will, be room for constructive comparisons with the North.

The huge and relatively accessible quantity of material available to carry out an extensive analysis of medieval South Italian urban life means

²⁰ F. Chalandon, Histoire de la domination normande en Italie et en Sicilie, 2 vols. (Paris, 1907); D. Matthew, The Norman Kingdom of Sicily (Cambridge, 1992).

²¹ For which see the Bibliography.



Introduction

that the present study has had to impose certain limitations on itself, for obvious reasons of space. Most importantly the work concentrates primarily on the twelfth century, for the reasons already touched on. The decades immediately before and after the twelfth century have also been covered in order to provide a stronger framework. A steadily increasing body of charter material from the twelfth century facilitated this analysis, along with some fascinating narrative sources. The study's geographic scope focuses primarily on the most urbanised areas of southern Italy, Campania and Apulia, although Lucania will not be ignored. To avoid the work becoming gargantuan and overstretched, the areas of Calabria and Sicily had to be discounted. Not only is the source material for Calabria, an area with few urban centres, rather sparse, but both it and Sicily, with their stronger Greek and Muslim influences, would require an extensive survey in themselves. It is to be hoped that future research can explore both of these regions in the same way. Therefore, the present work essentially concerns itself with the traditional 'Latin' areas of the mainland. Within this area, as wide a comparative survey as possible has been undertaken of urban society. However, adopting such an approach is not intended to overlook the diversity of each individual city, shaped by its own unique history, culture and topography, or to minimise the regional heterogeneity of southern Italy.

It is worth briefly being precise about certain terminology. The use of the term 'Norman' is not intended to deny the existence of other 'French' groups subsumed within that label. Equally, for simplicity, the terms 'Norman' monarchy and 'Norman' Italy have been retained, although how 'Norman' South Italian society or the monarchy actually was is open to question. It should be acknowledged that this study on 'Norman' Italy also touches on the years 1194-1220, during which the term 'Norman' technically should be replaced by 'Staufen'. When used, the word 'communal' is employed as an adjective meaning 'that which relates to or benefits the community'. It is not to be associated with the commune as an institution, unless this is specifically indicated. Where the term 'urban/local government' has been frequently employed it is to denote the system of administration for the city which had both formal (a hierarchy of local public officials often linked to higher provincial ones) and informal (the role of private individuals/the citizenry) components. The powers of urban government varied, at times in connection with the city's position in any higher governmental framework. The urban government had a range of basic responsibilities: collection of various taxes and dues which were incumbent on the urban population and their transfer to a higher authority (if there was one), supervision of



Introduction

low criminal and civil justice, the regulation of trade and local customs, the organisation of civil order and defence. According to circumstances these powers could be notably extended to include, for example, high criminal justice, military and political policy and the control of public revenues.

Finally, in a medieval South Italian context what do we mean by a 'city'? A city could be defined by a combination of some, but not all, of the following: its size, its heritage, its function and its possession of a bishopric. It would seem too that a city is characterised by a reasonably dense population distribution and that a sizeable share of the inhabitants was devoted to non-agricultural occupations. But this is rarely straightforward, and there are variations and ambiguities inherent in the vocabulary employed for the region's urban settlements.²² Fortunately this mostly applies only to the lesser urban centres, some of which could actually be smaller than a castellum and were usually of more recent foundation (often from the tenth and eleventh centuries). Indeed some of these 'cities' were not endowed with a bishopric, which was often regarded as a key indicator of urban status.²³ The only reliable option is to follow Fasoli's simple criterion - 'to accept as cities those to which contemporaries awarded the title of civitas'. 24 In this case we can only adopt the usages found in the sources at our disposal. However, this does not always clarify the marginal point at which the city and the country, in a physical, legal, economic or psychological sense, locate their boundaries. A population of 2,000 is generally considered the minimum size at which a settlement could have an urban and not a rural status.²⁵ Yet one suspects that those smaller urban centres in southern Italy, which medieval sources considered as 'cities', may not even have surpassed that

²² J-M. Martin, 'Les communautés d'habitants de la Pouille et leurs rapports avec Roger II', in Società, potere e popolo nell'età di Ruggero II. Atti della terza giomate normanno-svevo. Bari 23–25 maggio 1977 (Bari, 1980), 73–98; V. von Falkenhausen, La dominazione bizantina nell'Italia meridionale dal IX all'XI secolo (Bari, 1978), pp. 145–8.

Foggia and Eboli were both settlements which were rapidly developing in the twelfth century and which at times were designated as a civitas without obtaining episcopal rank.

G. Fasoli, 'Città e ceti urbani nell'età dei due Guglielmi', in Potere, società e popolo nell'età dei due Guglielmi. Atti delle quarte giornate normanno-sveve. Bari, 1979 (Bari, 1981), pp. 148–9. The title urbs was also occasionally adopted, for example at Aversa, CDNA, p. 24 no. 16. According to J. F. Niermeyer, Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus (Leiden, 1976), it was 'used as a variant of civitas chiefly with reference to major cities', p. 1051.

²⁵ K. A. Lynch, Individuals, Families, and Communities in Europe, 1200–1800. The Urban Foundations of Western Society (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 25–7, in which a distinction is made also between town and city. Such a division does not seem entirely relevant in a South Italian context and is not made in the present study. The nearest intermediate term in the peninsula could be the rather infrequently used oppidum. In the preface to his comprehensive study Nicholas noted that 'English is the only west European language that distinguishes "town" from "city" functionally', Nicholas, Growth of the Medieval City, p. xiv.



Introduction

figure. The 'city' certainly extended beyond its walls, to include any suburbs and the immediate surrounding lands, but how far exactly remains unclear. Galasso has highlighted the fact that city and country were symbiotic, not separate, spheres and that the former could have strong rural characteristics.²⁶ The medieval use of the word *civitas* and *civis* (citizen) was certainly much more imprecise than the Roman conception. In consequence, the status of the wider territory assigned to a city was especially vague, as it was riddled with overlapping jurisdictions and inexact limits.²⁷

With all this in mind, a sample of urban centres, which qualify through having the title of civitas along with most of the other urban characteristics just discussed, has been selected and examined in depth as case studies (Aversa, Bari, Benevento, Capua, Conversano, Salerno, Trani and Troia). Significant evidence has also been drawn from other cities (most notably Amalfi, Gaeta, Melfi, Monopoli, Naples and Taranto). The main case studies were selected as they offer a representative survey of urban life in twelfth-century southern Italy and also possess the vital intensity of documentation. The case studies provide an even geographic distribution (four each from Apulia and Campania) and in terms of size comprise relatively small (Conversano, Troia), medium (Aversa, Capua, Trani) and large (Bari, Benevento, Salerno) agglomerations. The diversity of the cities' political and cultural histories was equally significant in their selection. Bari, Trani, Troia and Conversano had all been under Byzantine rule in the eleventh century. Indeed Bari had been the Byzantines' capital city in southern Italy, although all four cities had mostly Lombard populations. In Campania, Aversa was from its foundation in 1030 a military base for Norman mercenaries, ruled by a Norman count, and later incorporated into the principality of Capua. It had a strong Normanno-French population and was heavily influenced by their customs and practices. Capua, Benevento and Salerno had for centuries been the capitals of Lombard principalities until their Lombard princes were replaced in 1058, 1077 and 1076/7 respectively. The inclusion of Benevento in this study is important. All the cities chosen as case studies succumbed to the invading Norman bands in the course of the eleventh century, while Benevento avoided this fate by placing itself under papal rule (where it remained until 1860). For this reason Benevento, an effective papal enclave in Norman southern Italy, has often been dealt with separately from the rest of the region,

²⁶ Galasso, 'Le città campane nell'Alto Medioevo', in *Mezzogiorno medievale e moderno*, pp. 83-4.

²⁷ Often called its contado, while Latin sources use phrases such as in territorio, pertinentia, finibus, confinibus civitatis.



Introduction

and especially so after 1139. However, having a papal rather than a Norman lord does not alter the fact that the city was South Italian.²⁸ A comparative study can only benefit from incorporating Benevento, where illuminating developments took place in the twelfth century. Fortunately some of these were recorded in great detail in the remarkable work of Falco of Benevento, one of the earliest genuine civic chronicles of the medieval period.

Much of the primary material for the main case studies has been assembled from cartulary collections, which have provided thousands of private and public documents. For Apulia most of these charters have been edited in the *Codice diplomatico barese* series (of which later volumes are known under the title of *Codice diplomatico pugliese*). Collectively these volumes have yielded a wealth of documentation on Bari, Conversano, Monopoli, Trani and Troia. Numerous other collections provide additional charter evidence for the cities of Apulia: for example volume IV of *Le colonie cassinesi in Capitanata* provides around 40 documents on Troia, and Prologo's edition of the metropolitan archive at Trani contains some 100 charters for that city.

There is a similar abundance of material for the cities of Campania. For Aversa the main charter collections are contained in the Codice diplomatico normanno di Aversa and the Codice diplomatico svevo di Aversa. These two sources also provide a handful of charters on Capua although the core material for this city is in Le pergamene di Capua (volumes I and II), Le pergamene normanne della Mater Ecclesia capuana, Le pergamene sveve della Mater Ecclesia capuana (2 volumes) and the Regesto di S. Angelo in Formis. For Benevento and Salerno, as well as a host of printed collections, there is still a sizeable quantity of unpublished documents. At Benevento these are mostly deposited in the Fondo S. Sofia at the Museo del Sannio and in the Pergamene Aldobrandini, formerly at the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticano.²⁹ The main printed collections for the city are found in Le più antiche carte del capitolo della cattedrale di Benevento, Le più antiche carte dell'abbazia di San Modesto in Benevento, the Chronicon Sanctae Sophiae and the Codice diplomatico verginiano (13 volumes up to the year 1210, which also provide documents on Aversa, Capua, Salerno and

A point argued by G. A. Loud, 'Politics, piety and ecclesiastical patronage in twelfth-century Benevento', in Cavalieri alla conquista del Sud. Studi sull'Italia normanna in memoria di Léon-Robert Menager, ed. E. Cuozzo and J-M. Martin (Bari, 1998), pp. 283–312 [reprinted in G. A. Loud, Montecassino and Benevento in the Middle Ages (Aldershot, 2000)].

²⁹ G. A. Loud, 'The medieval records of the monastery of St Sophia, Benevento', Archives 19 (1991), pp. 363-73 [reprinted in Loud, Montecassino and Benevento]. Translations of unpublished documents from Benevento were obtained courtesy of the generosity of G. A. Loud.