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Manager
Claudia Napolitano

Editing
Francesca Petrucci

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From Islam to Christianity: the Case of Sicily

Charles Dalli
University of Malta

L-istorja ta' Sqallija mis-seklu disgħa sas-seklu tnax intisġet madwar sensiela ta' ġrajjiet li bidlulha darba għal dejjem il-karattru tagħha. Sakemm ħakmu l-gżira minn idejn il-Biżantini, l-Għarab damu mis-sena 827 sas-sena 902. Il-kontroll ta' l-ikbar gżira Mediterranja tahom is-setgħa li jikkolonizzawha, u dan wassal sabiex l-ilsien, it-twemmin u l-kultura tad-dinja Għarbija rabbew l-għeruq bis-saħħa tal-klassi ġdida mexxejja u ta' parti mdaqqsa mill-popolazzjoni li waslet hekk kif il-gżira saret parti minn Dar l-Islam. Madankollu, fi Sqallija tas-seklu ħdax kien għadhom jgħixu eluf ta' nsara Griegi, kif ukoll għadd imdaqqas ta' Lhud. Il-ħakma Normanna ta' Sqallija ġabet magħha bidla kbira fil-ġerarkija politika u soċjali tal-pajjiż. Minn tmiem is-seklu ħdax il-gżira ssieħbet ma' l-Ewropa Latina, u dan nissel tibdil mill-qiegħ fl-istrutturi tal-ħajja u fl-identitajiet individwali u kollettivi ta' saffi differenti. Fis-seklu tnax Sqallija kellha sehem ewlieni fit-tfassil tas-Saltna Normanna, u l-belt ewlenija tagħha, Palermo, nbidlet minn metropoli Għarbija f'belt kapitali rjali. Dan l-istudju qasir jifli l-iżviluppi li seħħew taħt in-Normanni, u jingħaqad ma' storiċi ta' żmienna li leħħnu dubji dwar il-kwadru pożittiv ta' tolleranza reliġjuża u etnika fl-istorjografija tradizzjonali ta' Sqallija minn Ruġġieru II sa Federiku II. Minflok, qegħdin joħorġu iżjed ċari t-tensjonijiet u l-firdiet bejn komunitajiet differenti Sqallin skond twemmin reliġjuż u nisel etniku. Sa nofs is-seklu tlettax, il-popolazzjoni Musulmana ta' Sqallija kienet għebet għal kollox, bl-aħħar ftit eluf itturufnati fil-belt ta' Lucera; fil-waqt li l-kultura nisranija Griega ġiet imwarrba, u l-Għarbi baqa' mitkellem biss mill-minoranza Lhudija, flimkien man-nies ta' Malta, Għawdex u Pantellerija. L-iSqalli ta' tmiem is-seklu tlettax ftit li xejn kellu x'jaqsam ma' l-imgħoddi Għarbi tal-gżira, bħallikieku l-istorja ta' Sqallija bdiet fl-1091.

The history of high medieval Sicily bears all the hallmarks of a regional crossroads which, between the 9th and 11th centuries, exchanged hands between three major civilizations[1]. The island's political upheavals, military confrontations, social change and cultural transformations read like an index page to central Mediterranean history[2]. The fall of Muslim Palermo to the Norman conquerors in 1072 was a landmark in the high medieval wave of Latin Christian expansion across the Mediterranean world[3]. The defeat of the island's Muslim rulers was completed within twenty years of the fall of the capital city, but the last Muslims of Sicily left the island one hundred and eighty years later, towards the end of Frederick II's reign[4]. Beyond the formal political chro-

nology, three, more or less equal, yet distinct epochs, mark the transition from Muslim to Latin Christian Sicily: 1072 to 1130, during which period the Norman conquest of the island, launched in 1060, became first a feasible reality, then a political fact consolidated with the establishment of the Regno[5]; 1130 to 1190, when the relationship between the island's Christian rulers and inhabitants and the subject Muslim populations was gradually entrenched in terms of feudal bondage[6]; and 1190 to 1250, which was marked by Muslim armed resistance, the setting up of a rebel polity under the last Muslim leader of Sicily, and Frederick II's 'extermination' of Islam[7].

Sicily's 'disengagement' from the world of Islam was lived out by a population caught in the grips of a tumultuous historical transformation which it itself had helped author. It was a transition marked by contrasting, rather than complementary, identities, which can only be reconstructed in the coarse brushstrokes permitted by a fragmentary and frequently partial documentation. In the early decades of Norman conquest, the Latin lord took his place alongside newly installed western Christian bishops in wielding power and authority over a fledgling community of settlers. Gradually these settlers emerged from the margins of Sicilian society to become the mainstream community, pushing subject Muslim populations to the edges of the social framework. For native Christian populations, most of whom were Greek speaking, social and cultural integration within the new dominant Latin environment beckoned. Cutting across linguistic boundaries, recent historiography has 'rediscovered' the Arab Christian, and the Arabic-speaking Jew of Sicily. And, in contradistinction to the inexorable decline of the native Muslim population into land bound servitude, exile or deportation, the all-powerful, foreign-born caste of 'palace saracens' take their exclusive place at the heart of the island's Norman regime, and disappear only with its downfall. Their artificially engineered identity symbolizes the predicament of non-Christian subjects faced with the choice of assimilation or relegation, to which they replied with dissimulation or rebellion.

The present survey provides an overview, rather than a comprehensive discussion, of the historiography of Sicily's transformation from a province of Dar al-Islam into a Latin Christian society[8]. Whether one agrees or not with the epithet of *terra senza crociati* [a land without crusaders][9], the island's experience constituted an important chapter in the history of military confrontations between Christian and Muslim forces extending from the Latin East to the Spanish peninsula and beyond[10]. Nonetheless, it was also part of a wider phenomenon of Latin Christian expansion across the Mediterranean world which was not to be reduced to a chronology of military victories, nor its effects confined to newly conquered territories opened up for Christian settlement and colonization at the expense of Islam[11]. According to some estimates, Frederick II deported around twenty-five thousand Muslims to Lucera in the 1220s to 1240s; these deportees made up only one-tenth of the quarter of a millions Muslims subjected to Christian rule in 1091[12]. 'Deislamicization', the other side to 'Latinization', was not simply a soldier's achievement. "Conquest, colonization, Christianization: the techniques of settling in a new land, the ability to maintain cultural identity through legal forms and nurtured

attitudes, the institutions and outlook required to confront the strange or abhorrent, to repress it and live with it, the law and religion as well as the guns and ships"[13].

An outpost of the eastern Roman empire until the 9th century, the island bore the brunt of Muslim raids across the strategic sea channels separating it from the north African mainland throughout the 700s[14]. The Muslim conquest of Sicily, under way from 827, climaxed with the fall of its capital, Syracuse, in 878, but was only completed in 902 with the storming of Taormina[15]. Arab control of Sicily paved the way for its integration into Dar al-Islam. The influx of Muslim settlers from north Africa did not cancel the presence of Greek Christian and other populations, which were transformed into subject communities[16]. The island became an outpost of the Fatimid empire, governed from around 950 by emirs belonging to the Kalbite family, who transformed Palermo into the thriving capital city described by the Iraqi traveller Ibn Hawqal[17]. Muslim resistance frustrated Constantinople's vain efforts, particularly under Michael IV (1034-41), to restore Byzantine rule in Sicily, but it proved ineffective against the Norman forces empowered by the support of the Roman Church and the material resources of their southern Italian bases[18].

According to some Arab accounts of the Norman conquest of Sicily, it was one of the Muslim chiefs of the island, Ibn al-Thumna lord of Syracuse who treacherously appealed to Robert Guiscard and his brother Roger for their help against rival faction leaders[19]. The Normans had already established their control across southern Italy, and in 1059 obtained the Church's blessing for their next major venture, the annexation of Muslim Sicily. The discord among the Arabs of Sicily was no secret[20]. No central force had emerged to fill the power vacuum created by the downfall of the Kalbite emirate. Contrary to the rapid advance by the Byzantine invasion of Sicily in 1038-40, which was called off by Constantinople, the Norman conquest spanned a much longer period of three decades, between 1060 and 1090, but in the end produced a permanent regime change[21]. The island's Muslim populations, largely made up of Arabs, Berbers, and native converts to Islam, capitulated and pledged their tribute and obedience[22]. Those who could leave, apparently did so, seeking refuge in North Africa[23]. The rest were forced to live under Christian overlordship[24].

The island conquered by the Normans was a multicultural world[25]. Local Greek Christian communities, which had survived especially in north-eastern Sicily as *dhimmi* under Muslim rule, generally welcomed the new Christian rulers[26]. Perhaps the best known sign of their status as *dhimmīyūn* was their obligation to pay the *jizya*, or poll tax, and the *kharāj* or land tax. Under Arab rule there were different categories of *jizya* payers, but their common denominator was the payment of tribute as a mark of subjection to alien rule[27]. As Sicily was also home to substantial Jewish communities (about 1,500 Jewish residents in the capital alone, according to the traveller Benjamin of Tudela) who were similarly burdened by precise fiscal obligations, it was a subjection shared across religious boundaries[28]. The Latin Christian conquerors came across a vast population of *ahl al-dhimma*, made up of non-Muslim communities subjected to their erstwhile Muslim rulers. The radical change in the balance of power after 1091 transformed this reality, but it did not dissolve it. Different categories of subjection tended to merge over

time, but a complex variety of factors determined the manner in which the individual would bear his burdens, and the extent to which he would be able to position himself to survive. It was the turn of the Muslim inhabitants to be subjected to 'dhimmitude', but their one-time subjects did not necessarily fare better. Although forms of bondage varied in degree and kind, in many cases the servitude of Greek villagers subjected to the feudal lordship of the principal landlord families and establishments remained a fact under Norman rule. Bondage was not limited to the non-Latin peasantry, for different categories of town dwellers were also burdened by payments and corvées. The Jewish example remained the classic one. Regarded as royal property, the Jews were denoted as *servi camere regie* (loosely translatable as servants of the Crown) and, under Frederick II, this ambiguous Latin phrase was extended to Muslim subjects at Lucera, in a clear effort to underline absolute royal authority over them.

The Norman annexation opened the way for Greek-speaking, as well as Lombard, immigrants from Norman-held lands in southern Italy, but these were joined by 'Latin' settlers from all over the Italian peninsula and beyond[29]. As early as the 1090s, the right to settle at the *castrum* of Patti was offered only to *homines quicumque sint Latine lingue*, excluding Greek and Arabic speakers[30]. But this policy could hardly have been applied across the chequered board of a conquered society. Norman policy was based on "a formula of unequal coexistence"[31]. Nevertheless, for decades the Norman creation outwardly seemed to overcome the challenges posed by its composite character. The "Kingdom of Sicily", established officially from 1130 onwards with Roger II's coronation, also comprised the whole of southern Italy[32]. The new framework of Latin Christian rule encompassed a network of communities as characterized by their diverse ethnic, linguistic and cultural identities as by their distinct religious affiliations[33]. In the 1140s, Roger II extended his overlordship across central Mediterranean waters into the eastern Maghrib, but this Latin Christian expansion was checked and reversed by 1160 when the Almohad conquest of North Africa was completed[34]. His successors William I 'the Bad' (1154-66), and William II 'the Good' (1166-89) had to face open baronial rebellions, urban revolts, as well as the enmity of emperors both east and west. Outbursts of ethnic and religious strife, denoted by chroniclers as *perturbationes*, seemed to spell the end of the mirage of Sicilian *convivencia*.

That the regime survived all of these threats testifies to the ampleness of its resources and the loyalty of its skilled servants, soldiers and administrators. As conqueror of Sicily, Roger retained large parts of the island as his personal domain, but loyal supporters were granted fiefs in reward for their services, creating a Latin feudal class. Beyond the dazzling urban spectacle of royal rule under Roger II, there evolved a feudal countryside where authority was exercised as much by the main baronial families and powerful religious establishments, as by royal governors. Nonetheless, the size of the royal domain and the efficiency of their administrative machinery guaranteed the Norman rulers the means to govern Sicily and to embark on ambitous foreign ventures.

Besides the material means which reportedly aroused the jealousy of their royal counterparts in Europe, the kings at Palermo also commanded the loyalty of some brilliant

servants with colourful biographies. The emir Christodoulos, also known as ᶜAbd al-Rahmān, moved from his native Calabria to serve Roger II eventually becoming his chief minister. His protegee George of Antioch started his career in the Byzantine East and Zīrid Ifrīqiya before settling in Sicily. Possibly arranging his mentor's downfall, George rose to become Roger II's chief minister, designing the royal dīwān (administration) and commanding the expeditions against North Africa[35]. Maio of Bari rose from a lowly administrative rank to become William I's 'great admiral' and chief minister, only to be assassinated by the baronial rebels in 1160. Peter, a qā'id (leader), royal eunuch and 'palace saracen' of possible Djerban origin, commanded the fleet and acted as chief minister to Queen Margaret at William I's death until his defection to the Almohads. Another qā'id and eunuch, the 'palace saracen' Martin, led the royal reprisal against the rebels of 1160-61, while qā'id Richard led opposition to Stephen of Perche, archbishop of Palermo.

The royal court was characterized by a numerous caste of 'palace saracens', including eunuchs, slave-girls and concubines. Drawing their identity from their attachment to the palace, on which they were completely dependent, these saracens fulfilled diverse tasks. Some of them worked in the royal factories, kept the king's animals, ran his kitchen and formed his personal guard. A number of them advanced to top administrative posts, or were even entrusted with military command and admitted as royal familiars. Royal generosity could quickly turn to wrath at the least hint of disloyalty. A top palace saracen, Philip of al-Mahdīya, commander of an attack on Bône, was burnt at the stake at the end of 1153 According to Ibn al-Athīr, Philip was executed for showing clemency to the people of Bône, but in Romuald of Salerno's account he was accused of practising Islam in private whilst professing Christianity in public. Many palace saracens were massacred in 1161 by supporters of the rebel barons, among them a young Tancred of Lecce, an event described vividly by 'Hugo Falcandus'. Yet twenty-four years later Ibn Jubayr was astonished at discovering black Muslim slaves guarding William II, and a royal staff made up of Muslim slave-girls, eunuchs and concubines.

From the 1160s, the internal stability which had characterized much of Roger II's reign in Sicily was torn apart by baronial revolt against royal rule, and by Latin Christian attacks on Muslim communities[36]. The island's kings, Roger II, William I 'the Bad' (1154-66), and William II 'the Good' (1166-89) managed this problem in contrasting ways[37]. In the last decades of the 12th century, the island's remaining rural populations of Muslim peasants were to be found mainly serving as bondsmen on the estates of leading Church establishments and feudal landholding families[38]. The crisis of the dynastic state after the death of William II in 1189, during which Tancred's troubled tenure of the Sicilian throne was openly contested by Henry VI of Germany, was exacerbated by a large scale Muslim rebellion which broke out in 1190. A new chain of events triggered by organized resistance and systematic reprisal marked the final chapter of Islam in Sicily[39]. The Muslim problem characterized Hohenstaufen rule in Sicily under Henry VI (1194-97) and his son Frederick II (1197-1250)[40]. In the 1220s, in order to stamp out the Muslim rebellion, Frederick adopted a programmatic extermination of Sicilian Is-

lam, marked by expulsion and forced deportation to the Apulian town of Lucera[41]. The annihiliation of Sicilian Islam was completed by the late 1240s, when the final deportations to Lucera took place[42].

The 'father of Sicilian historiography' the Dominican friar Tommaso Fazello viewed the Arabs of Sicily as foreign occupiers of rightfully Christian land. His was a prevalent opinion shared by many erudite authors both in Sicily and beyond[43]. Arabic epigrapical, numismatic, monumental, and other archaeological remains aroused antiquarian interest. This material was often included unsystematically in geographical dictionaries[44]. Nevertheless, the turning point was reached in the late eighteenth century. Much has been written about the notorious fabrication of a 'Sicilian Arab' codex by an eighteenth century Maltese forger with powerful backers at court, Abate Giuseppe Vella[45]. In reaction to Vella's inventions, the scholar Rosario Gregorio published a learned rebuttal[46]. Fortunately, the study of medieval Sicily proceeded apace, undeterred by Vella's charlatanism, in the scientific direction established by Gregorio's meticulous research[47].

Students of the island's tectonic movement from one civilization to another stand on the solid, if not altogether secure, shoulders of giants: the publication of substantial collections of narrative and administrative sources in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries provided a vital stimulus to the island's historiography[48]. The Latin narratives include the texts of Geoffrey Malaterra, William of Apulia, Amatus of Montecassino, Romuald of Salerno, Richard of San Germano, and 'Hugo Falcandus'[49]. Scholars still rely on Del Re's edition for basic Latin narrative sources, such as Falco of Benevento's *Chronicon*, the *Gesta Rogerii Regis Siciliae* by Alexander of Telese, Niccolo Jamsilla's history of Frederick II and his children, and the *Rerum Sicularum Historia* by Saba Malaspina[50]. By contrast, there are no native Greek and Arab histories of Sicily, though the island and its affairs featured in Greek historians such as Michael Psellus and John Skylitzes, Niketas Choniates and John Kinnamos[51].

The study of Muslim and Norman Sicily still benefits from the towering achievement of the nineteenth century achievement of Michele Amari. His collection, of over one hundred texts, entitled *Bibliotheca Arabo-Sicula*, compiled principal Arabic narrative sources for Muslim and Norman Sicily like Ibn Hawqal, al-Idrīsī, Ibn Jubayr, Yāqūt, Qazwīnī, Ibn al-Athīr, al-Tījānī, al-Nuwayrī, Ibn Khaldūn, Ibn Hamdīs, and ʿImād al-Dīn[52]. Amari's corpus of texts, complemented by his ephgraphical studies, remains the major reference work, and his three-volume history of Muslim Sicily continues to command study of the period. Nevertheless, important additions have considerably expanded knowledge of these periods, including the discovery of a cosmographical treatise 'without precedent' entitled *The Book of Strange Arts and Visual Delights* composed around the mid-eleventh century[53], the poetry of Ibn Qalāqis[54], as well as the later medieval geographical dictionary of al-Himyarī[55].

It has been noted how, during the Muslim and Norman periods, there were frequent opportunities for Arabic-Greek bilingualism, while Arabic-Latin bilingual intercourse is attested in the later Norman and Hohenstaufen epochs[56]. The collection of charters

in the three administrative languages of Norman Sicily by Salvatore Cusa and his students remains, to date, "an essential tool for researchers" despite containing some serious errors and the fact that the planned translations and annotations of the documents were never published[57]. These charters – forty-six in all, dating between 1093 and 1242 – were composed in Arabic, together with Greek and/or Latin. The elegant creation of the royal Dīwān, they frequently noted land grants to the new class of Latin owners, some registering the ancient boundaries (*dafātir al-hudūd*), others providing a list – a *jarīda* or *plateia* – naming the Muslim and Greek cultivators bound to the estates (*jarā'id al-rijāl*). Beyond their utilitarian purpose, they came to symbolize the Norman administration they were designed to serve[58]. These charters symbolized, in a powerful way, autocratic royal authority over all subjects making up Sicily's *populus trilinguis*[59].

For scholars who, since the days of Charles Haskins[60] upheld 'the Norman achievement' in 12th century Europe the documents were powerful reminders of a unique society created under the aegis of the Norman conquerors, marked by an exceptional multicultural coexistence. It was an achievement mirrored as much in the pragmatic adoption and application by the rulers of institutions from subject communities, as in the transmission of knowledge enabled by Sicilian translator. It was reflected as much in Roger II's *Assizes*, as in the monumental statements made by the Palatine Chapel, the Martorana, and the churches at Monreale and Cefalù. Critics of this approach do not deny the remarkable cross-fertilization which took place in Sicily – but they question its extent, and indeed its relevance beyond the palatial walls of the Norman regime, down the social strata of the island's communities[61].

Until their expulsion in 1492, the Jews of Sicily were an Arabic speaking minority with different types of contacts all over the Mediterranean world, as well as constituting a living link with the island's long gone Muslim past. Goitein's systematic investigation of their network of contacts in the Cairo Geniza documents sheds vital new light on Sicilian Jews and their country, bridging the last decades of Islamic rule and the Norman period[62]. In his comprehensive study of Sicilian Jewry, Bresc makes ample use of the Geniza material to underline the originality of these communities which remained 'anchored' in their Arabic and Norman past, whilst adopting in later medieval times the 'European' material culture of their Christian counterparts[63].

One proponent of the Norman achievement was forced to admit, "Norman and Lombard, Greek and Saracen, Italian and Jew – Sicily had proved that for as long as they enjoyed an enlightened and impartial government, they could happily coexist; they could not coalesce"[64]. Comparisons between the two insular kingdoms under Norman rulers seem tenuous at best, and recent scholarship has generally discarded the concept of a 'Norman achievement' in Europe as a historiographic tool. This historical rethinking has been marked, over the past four decades, by a remarkable increase in teaching, research, and scholarly output on Norman and Hohenstaufen history, both in Italy and abroad. For instance, the acts of the *Giornate di Studi* organized, since 1973, by the "Centro di studi normanno-svevi" at the University of Bari, form a veritable encyclopedia on the Norman and Hohenstaufen south. The ongoing publication of the Latin

charters from the chancelleries of the Norman rulers in the *Codex diplomaticus regni Siciliae*[65] provides a vital tool for the study of Norman Sicily.

Royal patronage of the Church and religious establishments provided the regime with an efficient manner to legitimize an authority acquired by conquest, and to consolidate it. Count Roger, who claimed legatine powers throughout his conquered realm, established Latin bishoprics and Churches, providing them with substantial endowments. His successors emulated his example. Religious establishments became powerful agents of the feudal regime. In a famous example, King William II established Monreale Abbey in 1174 and over the next twelve years endowed it with more than 1,200 square kilometres of land in western Sicily cultivated by around 1,200 Muslim serfs who dwelled in some one hundred villages[66]. Lighter forms of Muslim serfdom – called *muls* as distinguished from the strict bondage of the *hursh* – were done away with. This 'Muslim reserve' was closely encircled from the rest of Sicily by a network of castles[67].

The Norman regime owed less to the institutions which preceded it than previously thought, although one can hardly cast doubt on its pragmatic ability to reconcile disparate elements. The very continuity between the administrative system of Muslim Sicily and the Arab clerks who staffed the Norman dīwān has been questioned. Titles and practices were consciously imported from Fātimid Egypt and then adapted to the local situation. By emulating the Egyptian model, argues Johns, the Norman rulers hoped to underline their royal authority in no uncertain way[68]. The pragmatic approach is also evident in the different management of territories across the Mediterranean. Contrary to 'Norman Africa', where Roger II governed the communities subjected to his overlordship via their own local Muslim leaders, the 'Palace Saracens' serving the Crown in Sicily were royal dependants, not community leaders[69]. Johns argues that all the eunuchs at court were foreign slaves, unrelated to the island's Muslim population and therefore unfettered by any obligation towards family and community. "It was their social isolation and their utter dependence upon the king, as much as the act of castration, that distinguished the eunuchs"[70].

By contrast, native Muslims of noble birth were given little political space. In 1185 Ibn Jubayr met Muhammad Abū l-Qāsim ibn Hammūd, a qā'id in royal administration who was regarded by Sicilian Muslims as their hereditary leader. The Muslim traveller was moved to tears at ibn Hammūd's confession that he would rather be sold with his family into slavery in some foreign land, so that he might one day reach a Muslim country, than continue to bear the tyranny of the Christian ruler. "Were he to convert to Christianity", reported Ibn Jubayr, "there would not remain a single Muslim on the island, who would not do as he did"[71]. The same Arab author remarked about ibn Hammūd's wealth and generosity. The rich Muslim possessed substantial property in Palermo and Trapani, and was known for his charitable help to the poor and to pilgrims. His loyalty was convincing enough to have been employed in the royal dīwān, but there were reports that a pilgrim who had benefited from his generosity conveyed the Sicilian's appeal to Saladin to come to his brethren's help. Ibn Jubayr dismissed as false the allegation that ibn Hammūd had asked the Almohads for their aid, but it was one of the charges which led to his house arrest[72].

In the early decades of Norman rule Greek Christians 'kept the balance between Christian and Muslim on which the whole future of Norman Sicily depended'. They also helped counterbalance the claims of the Roman Church with regard to Sicily, with Nilus Doxopatrius, Archimandrite of Palermo, dedicating a treatise to Roger II in 1143 upholding the primacy of the Patriarch of Constantinople[73]. Open royal patronage of basilian communities on both sides of the Straits was matched by large-scale employment of Greeks in royal service. Greek Christians played a key role in mediating between the upper class of Latin lords and the subject populations of Muslim serfs[74].

Apart from their Christianity which they shared with the Latin ruling class, Greek Christians enjoyed a decisive strategic advantage over their Muslim neighbours. The Greek communities formed part of a much larger Greek world which extended across the Regno's southern Italian mainland, and could rely on the support of their numerous brethren. On the other hand, the Muslims of the Regno were confined to Sicily and the smaller islands (that is, before the making of Muslim Lucera), and could not appeal beyond their king and community without committing treason. It goes unsaid that the Jewish condition was even worse, for a Muslim qā'id might appeal to a Saladin, while the Jews had no one to turn to.

Faced sternly with the choice of departure or subjection to Christian rule, many Muslims will have chosen the former option, provided they were able to do so. Indeed, Muslims were prohibited from living under non-Muslim rule if they could help it. "The transformation of Sicily into a Christian island", remarks Abulafia, "was also, paradoxically, the work of those whose culture was under threat"[75]. According to Ibn Jubayr, many of William II's Arab servants were secretly Muslim and practised *taqiya*, (that is, pretending to be Christian), and Muslim slave-girls at court even managed to convert Christian women to Islam. Ibn Jubayr's testimony could not have been altogether unbiased; but his reference to sons and daughters accepting baptism to escape the authority of their Muslim parents rings true, if only with reference to teenage rebellion.

Despite the presence of an Arab-speaking Christian population, it was Greek churchmen who seemed to have attracted Muslim peasants to accept baptism. Arab converts normally adopted Greek Christian names; in several instances, Christian serfs with Greek names listed in the Monreale registers had living Muslim parents[76]. Contrary to Malta, where an Arab-speaking Christian population was created as a result of conversion from Islam, the descendants of Sicilian converts from Islam do not seem to have retained their language[77]. Nonetheless, onomastic evidence has been compiled to make the case for rural, as well as town-dwelling, Christian Arab communities[78].

How 'Greek' were the island's 'Greek Christians'? "Latin sources tended to separate 'Latin' Catholic Christians from the 'Greeks' of the Eastern church on confessional/linguistic lines", remarks Metcalfe. "As such, it was possible for the Latin sources to refer to the Christians as 'Greeks' even when some of them lived in amongst Arabic-speaking Muslim communities, and were likely to have been Arabic speakers or Arabic-Greek speakers themselves"[79]. This is not to deny that the interplay between the different eth-

nic groups was probably too constricted by social, economic, religious and linguistic barriers to stimulate their fusion. "The immigrant Latin and indigenous Arab communities of Sicily", affirms Johns, "were separated from each other by a cultural barrier which, if anything, grew less permeable with time; and the manner in which the Greek community acted as an intermediary between the Latin and the Arab may even have increased their distance from each other"[80]. Norman success in fusing together the disparate elements of their kingdom was, at best, limited.

Christianization did not necessarily lead to Latinization, as shown by the Maltese case[81]; nevertheless, it might be retorted that the isolated southerly example of Malta is the exception which proves the rule. Moreover, it is easy to forget that Latinization was ongoing not only in Sicily, but also across the mainland half of the Regno, where Greek lost ground to 'Italian' dialects. The advance of Latinization ultimately took place at the expense of the other elements; but survival strategies were devised, including "the option of either feigning conversion or of making a social realignment that was sufficient to smudge the defining margins of one's identity and thus benefit from the protection that might offer...it was relatively easy for Muslims to slip into the guise of Arabic-speaking Christians"[82]. In other words, their response to the threat of assimilation was the strategy of dissimulation.

This strategy might guarantee individual survival, but it could not be a long-term solution. The dividing line between Muslims and Christians in Sicily became increasingly geographical in the final decades of Norman rule. 'Lombard' pogroms against Muslims had taken place since the 1160s. In the years after Ibn Jubayr's visit to Sicily, the island's Muslims were mainly confined behind an internal frontier which divided the south-western half of the island and the Christian north-east. An unfree and subjected population, Sicilian Muslims depended on the mercy of their masters and, ultimately, on royal protection. When this was removed, hell broke loose. King William's death in 1189 opened the way for widespread attacks against the island's Muslims. The author of the *Epistola ad Petrum* remarked that "it would be difficult for the Christian population not to oppress the Muslims in a crisis as great as this, with fear of the king removed" and predicted that Muslims would respond by occupying mountain strongholds[83].

History proved the anonymous author right. The turning point of 1189-90 destroyed any lingering hope of coexistence, however unequal that might have been. Henry VI's death in 1197, followed by that of his wife Constance a year later, plunged the Regno into a deep crisis. With 'fear of the king removed', to echo the author of the *Epistola*, and with Frederick II still an infant in papal custody, the Regno became a battleground for rival German and papal forces. The island's Muslim rebels sided with German warlords like Markward von Anweiler; declaring a crusade, Innocent III alleged that Markward had made an alliance with the Saracens of Sicily: "he called on their help against the king and the Christians; and so as to stimulate their spirits more keenly to the slaughter of our side and to increase their thirst, he has spattered their jaws already with Christian blood and exposed captured Christian women to the violence of their desire"[84] Yet in 1206 the same pope addressed a letter to the Muslim leaders and the whole Saracen

population of Sicily urging them to remain loyal towards Frederick. By this time the Muslim's strongholds included Jato, Entella, Platani and Celso, all mentioned in the letter. Other records mention also Muslim control of Calatrasi, Corleone (taken in 1208), Guastanella and Cinisi. In other words, the Muslim revolt extended throughout a whole stretch of western Sicily. The rebel polity was led by Muhammad Ibn ᶜAbbād, who called himself 'prince of believers', minted his own coinage, and sought Muslim help from abroad.

Frederick II's response to this internal challenge was determined. In a series of campaigns against the Muslim rebels, launched in 1221, the forces of the Hohenstaufen ruler faced the resolute defenders of Jato, Entella, and the other fortresses. In 1223, the first deportations to the Muslim garrison town of Lucera started in earnest. A year later, expeditions were sent against Malta and Djerba, to establish royal control and prevent their Muslim populations from helping the rebels. Frederick II Hohenstaufen "was not a Sicilian, nor a Roman, nor a German, nor a *mélange* of Teuton and Latin, still less a semi-Muslim: he was a Hohenstaufen and a Hauteville"[85]. The chronichler Matthew Paris famously described him as "stupor quoque mundi et immutator mirabilis", or 'wonder of the world and its astonishing transformer'. It befell him, as *immutator mundi*, to sever the roots of Sicilian Islam and reclaim the legacy of its Norman conquerors.

Sicily's total 'Christianization' would almost seem, from the vantage point of historical hindsight, a foregone conclusion. Nevertheless, cautioned by the evidence, one realizes that its character need not have been so all-embracing, its conclusion so rapid, its legacy of irreversible change so everlasting, but for the extraordinary conjuncture of events which trapped the islanders of the *populus trilinguis* in the vortex of historical change. Across the island, individual and collective identities were shaped and reshaped, its social fabric undone and redone. That its Christianization proved to be so final also testifies to the strength of its Latinization. It was an achievement at the expense of competing cultural identities, and its price was high. By paying it, a new Latin Christian people could claim the home, if not the inheritance, of the vanquished society to which it traced its troubled ancestry.

Notes

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[18] Norwich, *The Normans in Sicily* cit.; Loud, *The Age of Robert Guiscard* cit.

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[69] *Ibid.*, pp. 289-292.

[70] *Ibid.*, p. 250.

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