THE

Ferraris Chronicle

Popes, Emperors, and Deeds in Apulia

1096 - 1228

Translation and Notes by

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PROLOGUE

On a clear night in May of 1061, the Normans' sleek galleys, vessels reminiscent of the long ships of their Norse forebears, began transporting men, horses and arms to a place six miles south of Messina, disembarking along Sicily's Ionian coast. Each ship arrived silently, landing in Sicily and then going back across the strait to Calabria to bring more knights and foot men to the island.

Sicily's Arabs expected an attack sooner or later, though from a more northern point directly across the strait at its narrowest, hence their concentration of ships patrolling Tyrrhenian waters on the other side of Cape Faro.

In the event, the undermanned garrison guarding Messina's seaside fortress was taken unawares, being unprepared for a ground assault from the south. By dawn, the Messinians, most of whom were Greek speakers, awoke to find their city, a springboard for trade as an important port, in Norman hands. Indeed, the fighting itself was brief and decisive. Most of the defenders were killed and few attackers injured.

Although the invading force of knights, esquires, foot soldiers and archers consisted of thousands, the fortifications

were taken by an initial wave of a few hundred under the command of Roger Hauteville, who advanced and attacked without waiting for additional men to arrive from Calabria with his elder brother, the equally audacious Robert.

The battle was followed by the typical pillaging, along with the occasional rape. At least one Muslim decided to kill his own sister rather than risk her falling into the invaders' hands.

The victory gave the Hauteville brothers a foothold in Sicily and absolute control over ships traversing the Strait of Messina and most of the Ionian Sea. As it happened, the response from the emirs of the other Sicilian cities was unimpressive. Those jealous rulers were too busy nurturing their petty grudges against each other to respond in a serious way to the threat posed by the Normans. Yet their failure to send a large army to take back Messina did not mean they would give up their local emirates without a fight.

It would take the Normans another decade to reach Palermo, the largest, wealthiest city in Italy. By then, chroniclers were writing their story.

PREFACE

Forgotten facts are sometimes the most important facts of all. They enlighten us.

Discovered during the nineteenth century, the *Chronica Romanorum Pontificum et Imperatorum ac de Rebus in Apulia Gestis,* sometimes called the *Chronica Ferrariensis* or, here in Italy, the *Cronaca di Santa Maria della Ferraria,* was written by an unidentified monk of the Cistercian monastery of Santa Maria della Ferraria outside Vairano Patenora, northeast of Teano, near the Volturno River, in the shadow of the Matese Mountains.

Dominated by an impressive medieval castle of grayish stone, the town of Vairano is not without its charm. Little of the squarish fortress remains except the curtain walls and four round towers, but virtually nothing is left of the Cistercian abbey nearby, located along a road to the river, where the cleric composed his minor chronicle during the first three decades of the thirteenth century.

The monastery, in what is now the province of Caserta near Naples, was founded in 1179 as a dependency of Fossanova Abbey, near Priverno, by John of Ferraris, hence its name. It boasted one of the few Gothic churches in southern Italy.

We know the chronicler only through his work. The term "Apulia" in the title refers, rather generically, not only to Puglia, which in medieval times stretched from the heel of the Italian boot northward almost to the march of Ancona, but to regions such as Basilicata, Abruzzi and even parts of Calabria.

Although it recounts public events beginning in 781, those that are most detailed begin in 1096, the year of the First Crusade, just as the Hautevilles were consolidating their power in southern Italy, reaching into the apex of the reign of the Hohenstaufens epitomized by Emperor Frederick II as he arrived in the Holy Land during the Sixth Crusade in 1228.

The chronicler probably met Frederick five years earlier.

Whilst there exist contemporary chronicles of far greater importance, the *Ferraris Chronicle* merits its own niche. The format of its first two chapters is thought to reflect an effort to continue the *Chronica Maiora* of England's Venerable Bede, a prolific, versatile writer who died in the Kingdom of Northumbria in 735, and whose best-known *opus* is the *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* or *Ecclesiastical History of the English People.* If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, our Cistercian monk was sincere indeed.

Like Bede, the Italian monk drew his inspiration, and information, from several sources. This is not to suggest that everything told here is merely redundant or even accurate. Each chronicle is unique, and this one occasionally brings us a perspective slightly different from those of others.

There were, no doubt, other minor prose chronicles like this one, some being compendia of earlier works, and there is little doubt that many of them are lost to time.

Chronicles are a very special part of medieval heritage. This one, with its focus on what, in 1130, became the Kingdom of Sicily, speaks to us with the echo of a time and place often overlooked in the study of Italian medieval history, with its emphasis on the likes of Petrarch, Dante and Boccaccio. The

chronicle's existence is itself a resounding message.

The manuscript is retained by a library in Bologna, where it reposes in undisturbed dignity. The *editio princeps* was published in Naples in 1888.

The words you are reading are part of a trend that began around a hundred years later as an effort on the part of anglophone scholars to translate the chronicles of the Norman-Swabian Kingdom of Sicily for an increasingly international readership. Today's readers include armchair historians as well as university students, the latter being less familiar with Latin than their predecessors of yore.

To that end, most of the more important chronicles of Italy's Norman and Swabian eras have been translated in recent times. It was time to bring you this one.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Our path to discovery should be a determined trek across the unknown, not a graceless gait down a familiar street.

What is presented in these pages is a precious gift from history. The chronicles of Italy's Norman-Swabian era breathe life into the kings and queens entombed for the last seven centuries in the magnificent cathedrals of Palermo and Monreale: Roger II, William I, Margaret, William II, Henry VI, Constance, Frederick II. King Tancred once rested in the Magione, a splendid church built for the Cistercians near Palermo's Khalesa quarter, but it seems that Henry and Constance had his remains removed when they gave the abbey to the Teutonic Knights.

These kings and queens are a chief focus of the *Ferraris Chronicle.* Translating this record of events was a personal experience, indeed an honour, for somebody having deep roots in the Kingdom of Sicily, somebody who lives in what was once the royal park, the Genoard, between the two magnificent cathedrals that house the pantheons of these monarchs. In these pages is a glimpse of the rulers who shaped a medieval golden age.

Their influence reached far beyond the jagged shores of the Kingdom of Sicily, a realm that consisted of its eponymous island and most of the Italian peninsula south of Rome. The Holy Roman Empire to the north and the Byzantine Empire to the east brushed against the affairs of the Kingdom of Sicily. Zirid Tunisia was an ephemeral, quasi-colonial "Kingdom of Africa" ruled from Palermo, and there was a special relationship with England, whose sovereign, Henry II, betrothed a daughter, Joanna, to William II.

The early reign of Emperor Frederick II, who died in 1250, informs the only "live" part of the chronicle, referring to events that occurred during the monk's lifetime. (This is obvious by the beginning of Chapter 10.)

The *Ferraris Chronicle* was the most recent chronicle of the Norman-Swabian era of the Kingdom of Sicily to be discovered and published, and it was the only one written during the reign of Frederick II that, until now, was not available in English translation. Here it may be noted that the chronicles of "Jamsilla," Saba Malaspina, and Bartholomew of Nicastro were written *after* Frederick's death.

We need not digress into a more generalized discussion except to note that, just as there was no unitary "Italy," despite earnest Lombard efforts to create one, there was no unified "national" Italian chronicle comparable to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle,* which complements Bede's work, or the *Primary Chronicle of Kiev.* Perhaps none was needed, as the complex society that was medieval Italy offers us a number of narratives which, if fitted together the right way, form a cohesive chessboard complete with kings, queens, castles, and black and white knights.

Although chronicles are many, there cannot be said to be a surfeit of them for the Kingdom of Sicily before 1250; we find Gervase of Tilbury in Palermo at the court of William II writing very little about his time there.

Authorship

Much as we may like to affirm that any literary work should stand on its own, those written in past centuries usually require at least some explanation as to history and context. In general, the earlier the work, the more explanation is needed. Works from antiquity typically need the most commentary, and modern books the least. Those written in what we call the "Middle Ages" fall, appropriately enough, in the middle of this range.

Who was the chronicle's author? Whoever the monk was that wrote the *Ferraris Chronicle,* he was familiar with the great people and great events of his times and those of the preceding generation. He was a true student of history.

Astronomical events like eclipses are mentioned (and some are confirmed by modern scientific records), and so are calamities like earthquakes and floods. Important meetings like that between King Roger II and Pope Lucius II at Ceprano are not overlooked.

One of the monk's sources was likely a complete version, now lost, of the *Chronicon Beneventanum* written by the chronicler Falco of Benevento, which in its extant form covers the time from 1103 to 1140. The part of Falco's chronicle that is missing in surviving codices of his work is thought to be preserved in the *Ferraris Chronicle,* specifically for the years from 1099 to 1103 and from 1141 to 1146. The text of the earlier period is more succinct not only for the brevity of the time it covers but for the scant detail it offers.

The *Ferraris Chronicle,* like Falco's *Chronicon Beneventanum,* fails to mention the assizes, or constitutions, believed to have been promulgated at Ariano and traditionally dated to 1140.

Even where they are not ignored, certain events, such as the murder of Thomas Becket (see note 301), appear in unexpected places in the text. Others, like the chancellorship of Stephen of Perche, are described only partially and inaccu-

rately.

Though hardly myopic, the chronicler tends to view the world from his own geographical vantage point. This place was, however, convenient to the valleys and roads that led to Apulia, and many travelers passed through the area on their way to Brindisi, Taranto or Bari.

Indeed, Santa Maria della Ferraria was located just a few miles from the road along the Volturno that linked important communities like Capua and Benevento (some segments of the ancient Via Appia were also in use), and not very far from other major monasteries, namely Cassino, Cava and Saint Vincent. (See the first map.)

Thaddeus, the abbot, cultivated a friendship with Frederick II, who visited in 1223, when the chronicler probably met the monarch. (Frederick returned six years later.) Indeed, a charter confirming privileges for the monastery was issued to Thaddeus in Frederick's name in 1205.[1]

Though reflecting a certain respect for Frederick, the *Ferraris Chronicle* is no encomium. It so happens that some of the monarch's greatest achievements were yet to come, after the chronicle ends. He accomplished much during the last part of his reign.

Clearly, the monk is no sycophant of the Normans, but neither does he seem so antipathetic to the Hautevilles as Falco of Benevento, from whose chronicle some of *Ferraris* seems to derive.[2] Nor is the monk so infamously cynical as Hugh Falcandus, who chronicled the intrigues of the Hautevilles' royal court at Palermo.

Whilst writing the chronicle, was the monk himself old enough to remember the Norman reign very well? We do not know.

We may find the views of chroniclers like Hugh Falcandus forceful, but even his partisanship pales in comparison to more adamant perspectives spawned by later political movements

like the conflict between Guelphs and Ghibellines during the thirteenth century. Saba Malaspina and Bartholomew of Nicastro were notoriously opinionated.

The *Ferraris Chronicle* does not seem overwhelmingly influenced by any specific movement or sentiment, even if its author is generally sympathetic to Frederick II and unabashedly supportive of the Roman Church against Greek Christians, heretical Cathars, Muslims, and Jews.

Some European monastic chroniclers outside the Greek and Slavic spheres, at first glance, are mistaken for blatantly Papal apologists. That characterization, based on their obvious interest in maintaining Rome's ecclesiastical hierarchy, fails to do clerics justice. The majority of chroniclers, indeed the greater number of learned people, were either churchmen or secular men-of-letters such as court notaries.

An influential knight or courtier, perhaps even a herald, might well have taken notes on events that eventually found their way into a chronicle or annal, but the chroniclers themselves were part of an elite class. It was a class from which women, for the most part, were excluded.

The *Ferraris* chronicler himself would probably tell us that the events are more important than the man writing about them, and yet the two are inextricably linked, reaching out to touch the reader. Yes, chronicles, as they have come down to us, traverse time itself.

At all events, modern scholars' retrospective "psychoanalysis" of medieval chroniclers is seldom a necessary or productive exercise. While points of view certainly color what has been written, chronicles are not gospel, and this one is transparent enough. Most of the time, it is more useful to let the word speak for itself than to attempt to ascertain what is "really" intended.

There is nothing in the text to suggest that the chronicler was born outside the Kingdom of Sicily. His mother tongue

was most likely Neapolitan, spoken around Naples and Salerno, or even Sicilian, spoken not only in Sicily but in much of southern Apulia and Calabria. Neapolitan is nearer the Tuscan and Umbrian tongues that emerged in their fullness during the thirteenth century. Middle Sicilian, which flourished at the court of Frederick II when the *Ferraris Chronicle* was being written, brings us such passages as this:

Et incontinentj mandaru per la miragla, lu quali era misser Rujeri di Lauria. Et cumandau lu re di Aragona a mmisser Rujeri chi incontinenti fachissi acconzarj l'armata et andassi a mMissina, et prindissi et ardissi tucti li navili di Re Carlu.[3]

Yes, that is how it was written, with inconsistent orthography and a plethora of double consonants.[4]

A detailed consideration of the significance of Neapolitan and Sicilian in the development of an Italian vernacular lies beyond the purview of this study. It is noteworthy, however, that *Lu Rebellamentu di Sichilia Contra Re Carlu* (quoted above), a source for studying the War of the Vespers of 1282, is the longest narrative text known to us that was composed in an Italian language before 1300, thus predating the earliest Tuscan prose works.

The *Ferraris Chronicle* was written in an age that saw the Sicilian School of poetry emerge as one of Italy's most important literary movements. Had Manfred, the son of Frederick II, not been defeated in 1266 at the Battle of Benevento, the influence of Neapolitan and Sicilian might have come to dominate Italy. Modern "Italian" might well be based on one of these languages rather than Tuscan.

Whatever tongue the chronicler and his contemporaries spoke among themselves, Latin was the written language of most chronicles written in Italy during the Norman and Swabian eras, and indeed for a long time thereafter. The sur-

EPILOGUE

By September of 1228 Frederick II was in Acre. At Jerusalem in February of the following year he concluded a ten-year peace with Kamil that would keep the city, if not the entire crusader kingdom, in Christian hands for a while.

The Templars and Hospitallers were irritated by this but the Teutonic Knights supported Frederick. In the end, the Sixth Crusade was a pacific one.

In March, Frederick was acclaimed King of Jerusalem. This ceremony was boycotted by Gerald of Lausanne, the city's Catholic patriarch, but the act itself was recognized by most of the people.[412] Frederick's wife, Yolanda, through whom he claimed Jerusalem, had died shortly after giving birth to a son, Conrad, in 1228. By any reasoning, this boy was the heir to the crown Frederick now claimed.[413]

In June 1229, Frederick returned to Italy to find his father-in-law, John of Brienne, ravaging his lands in southern Italy with the approval of Pope Gregory. It didn't take long for Frederick's army to restore order, and the next year he made a tenuous peace with Gregory.

In 1231, Frederick issued his Constitutions of Melfi, a remarkable legal code for the Kingdom of Sicily.[414] A few laws

stand out.

Like England's Magna Carta, the Constitutions of Melfi made a speedy judgment the right of civil litigants and even criminal defendants. Juridical procedures are clearly established, while practices such as trial by combat (knights duelling to win a legal dispute) are essentially abolished. The idea that justiciars (district judges) could not hear cases in lands where they held feudal estates was a prescient idea, similar to modern statutes proscribing conflicts of interest which might require a judge's recusal from a case. Jews, but not Christians, could practice usury, though Judaic law formally discourages this. A man of the kingdom could divorce his wife if adultery were proven; the same practice among Muslims presumably already existed and may have been an influence here. The law on divorce, though clearly weighted in favor of the husband, was innovative for its era. In fact, divorce had existed, in one form or another, among Christians since the faith's earliest days. The sale of toxic foods and potions was outlawed, and the burning or disposal of certain toxic substances was prohibited; flax and hemp couldn't be soaked in water near towns and yew (which can emit toxins) could not be disposed of in rivers.

Theft, trade and even the comportment of physicians are considered at length. So is cattle rustling, coin shaving and the forgery of documents, for which the punishment is severe.

Extensive legislation is devoted to women's rights, and to those of children. The statute defining penalties for mothers who prostitute their daughters implies that this occurred, but there are equally severe penalties for rape, and violence against prostitutes.

In a precedent which paralleled developments elsewhere, daughters were allowed to succeed to feudal property and titles of nobility in the absence of male heirs, a practice which survived into the nineteenth century as the "Sicilian Succession."

A few laws seem less enlightened. Adultery itself is a crime, but a husband might not be punished if he kills his adulterous

wife and her lover immediately upon catching them in the sexual act *in flagrante delicto.* A peasant who strikes a knight or noble might have the offending hand chopped off unless he can prove that he acted in self defense.

A curious section – to the modern mind – is the proscription on the use of paper for legal documents, with requirement of the use of parchment or vellum for this purpose. Parchment was, of course, more durable, less susceptible than paper to damage from moisture, folding or even ink. Frederick's kingdom was ahead of most of Europe in the use of paper, a Chinese invention introduced in the Aghlabids' Sicilian emirate during the ninth century.

Many challenges (and further excommunication) confronted Frederick during the next two decades. Endless trials and tribulations awaited him, especially in Germany and northern Italy. In the Italian communes raged a chronic conflict between the *Ghibellines* who supported the Holy Roman Emperor and the *Guelphs* who championed the cause of the Pope.

Fortune spared Frederick the defense of the Holy Roman Empire against a formidable Mongol-Tatar army, the emergent "Golden Horde," that made its way westward in 1241 after having sacked Kiev. In response to the invader's letter demanding homage, Frederick said that he might consider such a proposition, but only if he could be Batu Khan's falconer. Frederick's lengthy treatise on falconry and the care of birds was a scientific landmark and the lengthiest intellectual tome authored by a medieval European monarch.

A patron of the arts and sciences, Frederick encouraged the use of a vernacular language at court, fostering development of the Sicilian School of poetry expressed eloquently by Ciullo of Alcamo and others. He established a university at Naples.

At his death in Apulia of natural causes in 1250, Frederick was accorded the singular epithet *Stupor Mundi,* "Wonder of the World."[415]