THE NORMAN KINGDOM OF SICILY AND THE CRUSADES

There was much in the geography, resources, and traditions of the Norman kingdom of Sicily in the twelfth century to recommend it as a valuable bulwark of the crusades. Armies bound for Constantinople could use its Adriatic ports for the passage to Durazzo (Dyrrachium) or Avlona, whence they could take the Via Egnatia to

On the sources for the history of the Normans in Italy, see F. Chalandon, Histoire de la domination normande en Italie et en Sicile (2 vols., Paris, 1907), I, introduction. A more recent survey may be found in P. Kehr, Italia Pontificia, VIII (Berlin, 1939), 1–5. The following are the most important general accounts of southern Italy in the Norman period: Falco di Benevento, Chronicon de rebus actae su gestis (ed. G. Del Re, Cronisti e scrittori, I [Naples, 1845], 161–252; for other editions, see Chalandon, Domination normande, I, xii–xiv); on Falco, the only native historian with an outright hostility to the Norman dynasty, see E. Gervasio, "Falcone Beneventano e la sua cronaca," Bollettino dell' Istituto Storico Italiano, LIV [1939], 1–128; Alexander of Telese, De rebus gestis Rogerii Siciliei regis (ed. G. Del Re, Cronisti e scrittori, I, 85–146); Hugo Falcandus, Liber de regno Sicilieae (ed. G. B. Siragusa, FSI, XXII [Rome, 1897]) on Falco di Benevento, Alexander of Telese, and Hugo Falcandus, see A. Pagano, Studi di letteratura latina medioevo [Nicotera, 1917]; and on the possibility that Hugo was the admiral Eugenius, see E. Jamison, Admiral Eugenius of Sicily ... and the Authorship of ... "Historia Hugonis Falcandi Siculi" [London, 1937], pp. 233–277; but compare review by Lynn White, Jr, in AHR, LXIII [1957–1958], 645–647; Romuald Guarina di Salerno, Chronicon (ed. C. A. Garuš, RISS, VII, 1914–1939); and Peter of Eboli, De rebus Siculis carmen (ed. E. Rota, RISS, XXXI, 1904). Of the annalistic works written in southern Italy, the most important are: Annales Cavenses and Annales Beneventani (MGH, SS., III); Lupus Protospatarius Baresinensis, Rerum gestarum brevem chronicon (MGH, SS., V); Pietro Disoni chronica monasterii Casmensis (MGH, SS., VII); Annales Casinenses and Annales Ceccanenses (MGH, SS., XIX). Other sources will be cited below. The Arabic sources relating to Sicily are collected and translated by M. Amari, Biblioteca arabo-sicula (2 vols., Turin and Rome, 1880–1881), hereafter referred to as BAS.

Thessalonica and Constantinople. From the ports of the east coast of Sicily, crusaders could reach Syria and Palestine by the shortest route. And since the northern tip of Tunisia was less than a hundred miles distant from its southwestern corner, the kingdom might even take up the fight against Islam in Africa. Furthermore, Sicily was rich in resources: the soil was fruitful, and the proceeds of commerce and industry large. Its kings, should they care to do so, could


Among works on king Roger II, founder of the dynasty, the only one of independent scholarly value is E. Caspar, Roger II. (1101–1154) und die Gründung der normannisch-sizilianischen Monarchie (Innsbruck, 1904). While Caspar’s mastery of the sources is unsurpassed, his interpretation suffers from an overemphasis on political power, typical of the German scholars of his generation. An appendix of Regesta is added to the work (pp. 481–580), which has been supplemented by P. Colluri, “Appendice al regesto dei diplomi di re Ruggero compilato da E. Caspar,” Atti del Convegno di studi ruggeriani, II, 545–626. E. Curtis, Roger of Sicily and the Normans in Lesser Italy (New York, 1912) is richly documented but not always reliable. See also E. Pontieri, “I Normanni e la fondazione del regno di Sicilia,” and P. S. Leicht, “Lo Stato normanno” (both in Il Regno normanno, pp. 1–52); Pontieri’s study has been republished in his Tra i Normanni nell’Italia meridionale (Naples, 1948). C. A. Garufi, “Ruggero II e la fondazione della monarchia di Sicilia,” Archivio storico siculo, XII (1932), 1–33, is valuable mainly because of its bibliography. See also W. Holtzmann, “Il Regno di Ruggero II e gli inizi di un sistema di stati europei,” Atti del Convegno di studi ruggeriani, I, 29–45. For the reign of William I, see G. B. Siragusa, Il Regno di Guglielmo I in Sicilia (Palermo, 1929). The only existing monograph on William II, by I. La Lumia, Storia della Sicilia sotto Guglielmo il Buono (Florence, 1867), needs revision.

On the Mediterranean policy of the Norman kings, see F. Cerone, L’opera politica e militare di Ruggero II in Africa ed in Oriente (Catania, 1913); A. Cartellieri, Der Vorrang des Papsttums zur Zeit der ersten Kreuzzüge (Munich, 1941); and the works of G. M. Monti, Il Mesogiorno d’Italia nel medioevo (Bari, 1930), L’Italia e le crociate in Terra Santa (Naples, 1940), and La Espanzione mediterranea del mesozigorno d’Italia e della Sicilia (Bologna, 1945).

Of these, the last is the most important. Monti’s views are stimulating but his references to sources are not always accurate. See also R. Cessi, “Il Problema adriatico al tempo di Ruggero II,” Atti del Convegno di studi ruggeriani, I, 53–72; O. Vehse, “Die Normannen im Mittelmeer,” Die Welt als Geschichte, V (1939), 25–58, 233–276; and H. Hochholzer, “Sizilien als Beispiel der mittelmeerischen Kulturgeschichte,” Hist. Zeitschr., CLV (1937), 1–27.

On the Sicilian navy, see C. Manfroni, Storia della marina italiana dalle invasioni barbariche al trattato di Ninfò (Leghorn, 1899), and W. Cohn, Die Geschichte der mittelmeischrittischen Flotte unter der Regierung Rogers I. und Rogers II. (Breslau, 1910).

place at the disposal of crusaders a large navy and merchant marine, and could provide markets, equip expeditions with money and grain, and keep the armies and colonies in the east supplied with materials and men. The cosmopolitan population of Sicily, with its Greek and oriental elements, had much to contribute to the knowledge and understanding of the religions, languages, and customs of the east, and in general could serve as a bridge between east and west. And yet, the promise inherent in all this was only partly fulfilled. The Second Crusade would come and go without Roger II, the first king of Sicily, and the contributions of his grandson William II to the Third Crusade would be canceled out by his death in 1189.

Not that Sicily lacked a strong crusading heritage. Six members of the house of Hauteville had gone on the First Crusade. Two of them, Bohemond, son of Robert Guiscard, and his nephew Tancred, had written brilliant pages in its history and in that of “Outremer”. For a time, Bohemond’s leadership in the First Crusade was unrivaled. When he returned to Europe in 1104 to seek help for the principality of Antioch, he was hailed in Italy and France as the hero of the Crusade, and great contingents of Christian knights enlisted in the expedition which he planned to lead through Greece to assault Constantinople. Roger II, then in his early teens and still under the regency of his mother Adelaide, watched this new “crusade” get under way. Admittedly, Bohemond’s saga came to an abrupt end with his surrender to emperor Alexius I Comnenus. Yet he may well have impressed his young cousin as a model of shrewdness and bravery.

Bohemond’s actions directed the eyes of the Norman princes of Sicily toward the conquest of the Byzantine empire. Within a quarter-century, in the campaigns of Robert Guiscard and Bohemond’s attack in 1107–1108, the Normans twice had bid for Constantinople, and twice had failed. The Byzantine emperors, of course, had never even recognized Norman rule over Apulia, much less tolerated any Norman expansion into the eastern Mediterranean. They suspected Norman aims, and plotted against them in Italy and Antioch alike. Thus the ambition to seize Constantinople itself, inherited from Guiscard and Bohemond, involved great danger, despite the fact that the project of a “crusade” against the Byzantines appealed to many western Europeans and sometimes received the approval of the pope.2

2 On Bohemond’s last war with the Byzantine empire, see volume I of this work, chapter XII, pp. 390–391 (bibliography in note 30); also Monti, La Espansione mediterranea, pp. 58–60.
On the other hand, the political tradition that Roger II inherited from his father, count Roger I of Sicily, was quite different from that of the Apulian and Antiochene members of his house. To be sure, contemporaries looked on Roger I as a true crusader. Pope Urban II may have invited him to participate in the First Crusade in 1089 at Troina. But the count could not afford to strain the loyalty of his Saracen subjects by sharing in such a great Christian enterprise against Islam. Besides, he had more immediate and pressing cares. He was primarily concerned to heal the scars of war in Sicily, to repopulate the island and revive its economy. In at least one case we know of, he even persuaded some pilgrims, passing through Sicily on their way to Palestine, to stay and settle on land that he granted them. When the First Crusade was getting under way, count Roger was busy helping his nephew duke Roger Borsa, who had succeeded his father Robert Guiscard, to quell the rebellions of his Apulian vassals and cities. It was during one of these joint actions, at the siege of Amalfi in 1096, that the Norman princes, Bohemond among them, first encountered crusaders. Bohemond and many another young man in their armies took the cross. Deserted by the majority of their knights, the two Rogers "sadly" lifted the siege and returned to their respective lands. There was no doubt about their unwillingness to participate in any common enterprise against the "infidels". Indeed, count Roger of Sicily did not even believe in the religious ideal of the crusades.5

5 K. Erdmann, Die Entstehung des Kreuzzugsgedankens (Stuttgart, 1933), pp. 296 ff. Erdmann believes that at the meeting of Troina Urban proposed that Roger accompany him to Constantinople and participate in the war against the Turks. On Urban's negotiations with Constantinople, see volume I of the present work, chapter VII, p. 226.

The document is printed in K. A. Kehr, Die Urkunden der normannisch-sicilischen Könige, no. 2 (1085?), p. 410. See Caspar, Roger II, p. 13. It is believed that Roger I started the policy of settling "Lombards" (Italians) on the island. It was continued throughout the twelfth and part of the thirteenth centuries. See Chalandon, Domination normande, I, 349, and Amari, Storia dei musulmani di Sicilia, III, 223–231.

6 For the scene at Amalfi, see G. Malaterra, De rebus gestis Rogerii Calabriae et Siciliae comitis et Roberti Guiscardi ducis, IV, 24 (ed. E. Pontieri, RISS, V, 1927), p. 102; also Anonymi gesta Francorum, IV (ed. Hagenmeyer), p. 152: "Coepit tunc ad eum [Bohemundum] vehe- menter concurrere maxima pars militum, qui erant in obsidione illa adeo ut Rogerius comes pene solus remanserit reversusque Sicilianum dolobat et maerebat quandoque gentem amittere suam." In this version, Roger Borsa is not mentioned; see Caspar, Roger II, p. 14, and E. Pontieri, "I Normanni dell'Italia meridionale e la prima crociata," Archivio storico italiano, CXIV (1956), 1 ff. Ibn-al-Athir tells us that count Roger rejected a crusading proposal on the grounds that this would ruin his trade with the Moslems of Africa: Al-kanîî fi-ta't-târîkh . . . [Perfection in History . . . ] (Amari, BIS, 1), pp. 450–452; cf Amari, Storia dei musulmani, III, 192–193. Giunta (Medioevo mediterraneo, p. 88) points out that the crusade had no part in Sicilian tradition; much later, when Henry VI planned his crusade, it was purely a German venture, looked upon by the Sicilians only as a means of their being exploited. Compare Cerone, L'opera . . . di Ruggiero II in Africa ed in Oriente, p. 10.
If the old count's attitude had prevailed after his death in 1101, his widow Adelaide would not have fallen into the trap when in 1113 wily politicians invited her to marry king Baldwin I of Jerusalem. No one seems to have warned her that the whole purpose of the project was to acquire her immense dowry, and eventually the wealth of her son, in order to put the poverty-stricken kingdom on a sounder financial footing. Three years later, when Adelaide's dowry was exhausted and the marriage had proved barren, she was repudiated on the pretext that Baldwin's previous divorce, and therefore his marriage with Adelaide, had been illegal. Baldwin's vassals did not wish Jerusalem to become a dependency of the county of Sicily or to be ruled by an absentee prince. The queen returned to Sicily humiliated, and died shortly thereafter. Her son Roger II, who according to the marriage contract should have inherited Jerusalem, naturally conceived an "eternal hatred" of the kingdom and its people.

The failure to acquire Jerusalem was more than compensated for elsewhere: in Africa eventually, but more immediately on the Italian mainland. In August 1127 duke William of Apulia, son of Roger Borsa and last male successor of Robert Guiscard in the direct line, died, whereupon Roger II crossed the strait of Messina with an army and marched on Apulia to claim it as his "heritage". In one victorious battle after another he forced pope Honorius II and the barons and cities of Apulia and Calabria to submit and to recognize him. Soon the contested papal election of 1130 gave Roger a splendid opportunity. One of the two competing popes, the schismatic Pierleone, Anacletus II, turned to Roger for assistance against his rival, Innocent II, who was supported by Bernard of Clairvaux and, through Bernard's influence, by the kings and most of the princes and churches of the west. In return for a pledge of support, Anacletus granted Roger in hereditary right the title and dignity of king of Sicily and of Calabria and Apulia (often summed up as "Italy"). On Christmas day 1130, in the presence of the magnates of his lands and with the pomp befitting a ruler of Sicily, Roger was crowned by a representative of Anacletus in the cathedral of Palermo, the city "which in the days of old had been

---

the seat of kings." 7 Although the title was later changed to emphasize the original divisions of Norman Italy, and the papal right to the investiture of each of them (regnum Siciliae, ducatus Apuliae, et principatus Capuae), Christmas day of 1130 foreshadows the later kingdom of the Two Sicilies.

In the decade following, Roger had to fight against all the powers that saw themselves threatened by the rise of a great new territorial state in the heart of the Mediterranean: the pope, the German and Byzantine emperors, and the three maritime republics of northern Italy—Venice, Genoa, and Pisa. Fortunately for Roger, cooperation among his enemies was seriously hampered by con-

---

7 For Anacletus'sbull of September 27, 1130, see Jaffé-Löwenfeld, Regesta pontificum Romanorum, no. 8411; Caspar, Roger II, Regesten, no. 64. The full grant includes the honor of Naples and military help from the population of Benevento. On Roger's obligations, see Jaffé-Löwenfeld, no. 8413. On the coronation, see Caspar, Roger II, pp. 96 ff., and Chalandon, Domination normande, II, 7 ff. The fact that the house of Hauteville owed the royal title originally to a deal with the popacy, and with a schismatic pope at that, was glossed over by later south Italian historians. Only Falco of Benevento mentions the negotiations with Anacletus: see his Chronicon, ad ann. 1129 (Cronisti e scrittori, I, 201). Another difficulty was the Moslem tradition implicit in the choice of Palermo as capital. Compare the somewhat obscure statement by Alexander of Tellese, De rebus gestis Rogerii, I, 101-102 about Palermo “quae olim sub priscis temporibus, super hanc ipsum provinciam Reges nonnullos habuisse tradidit quae postea, pluribus evolutis annis, occulta Dei disponente judicio nunc usque sine Regibus mansit.” To make the title appear more legitimate, stories about a second coronation were invented, among them that of Roger's coronation by Louis VII of France upon his return from the Second Crusade, which is accepted by Virginia Berry (volume I of the present work, chapter XV, p. 511). It is found in one of the many interpolations in Romuald Guarna of Salerno's Chronicon (RISS, VII), p. 218.

8 The main sources for Roger's foreign policy before and during the Second Crusade are: Otto of Freising, Chronicus (ed. A. Hofmeister, Hanover, 1912); Gestera Friderici I (ed. G. Waite, Hanover, 1912); John of Salisbury, Historia pontificum (ed. R. L. Poole, Oxford, 1927); Anathista Saxo and Sigeberti continuatio Praemonstratensis (MGH, SS., VI); Canonici Wigandensis continuatio Cosae cronicae Bohemorum (MGH, SS., IX); Annales Magdeburgenses, Annales Herbipolenses, and Annales Paladienses (MGH, SS., XVI); Annales Erfurthenses (ed. O. Holder-Egger, Hanover, 1899); Historia Welforum Weingartenensis (ed. E. König in Schwäbische Chroniken der Staufferzeit, I [1937]; and MGH, SS., XXI); Sancti Bernardi epistolae (PL, CLXXXII); Petri abbatis Cluniacensis epistolae (PL, CLXXXIII); William of Tyre, Historia (RHC, Occ., I); Odo of Deuil, De prefectione Ludovici VII in orientem (ed. and trans. V. G. Berry, New York, 1948); Romuald Guarna of Salerno, Chronicus (RISS, VII); Historia ducum Veneticorum (MGH, SS., XIV); Andrea Dandolo, Chronicum (ed. E. Pastorello, RISS, XII, 1938 ff.); G. L. Tafel and G. M. Thomas, Urkunden zur älteren Handels- und Staatsgeschichte der Republik Venedig (Fontes rerum Austriacarum, Vienna, 1856-1857); and Annales Cavenses (MGH, SS., III). Greek sources include John Cinnamus, Epitome rerum ab Ioanne et Alexio Comnenis gestarum (CSHB, Bonn, 1836), and Nicetas Choniates, Historia (CSHB, Bonn, 1835).

flicting German, papal, and Byzantine claims to Apulia, and by the latent antagonism between Genoa and Pisa. It is more than likely that the failure of the Byzantines to support either the invading armies of the German emperor Lothair II or the simultaneous rebellion of the Apulian barons in 1137 saved the kingdom of Sicily from destruction. By July 1139 Roger had not only recovered all his Italian possessions lost in the course of the war, but had also defeated a papal army and extracted recognition of his kingdom and kingship from pope Innocent II by the peace of Mignano.9 Bernard of Clairvaux, who had been the architect of the anti-Sicilian coalition, also made his peace with Roger. It was to be along lines laid down by Bernard, however, that the Byzantines and the refugee Apulian barons would plan a new political encirclement of the Sicilian king in the years 1140–1146, the period immediately preceding the Second Crusade.

In spite of his struggle to hold the Italian mainland, Roger had not allowed his Mediterranean objectives to slip from sight. At Merseburg in 1135, when the great coalition against Sicily was born, Venetian and Byzantine ambassadors complained to Lothair that the “count of Sicily” had attacked the coast of Greece, that Sicilian ships were preying on Venetian merchants, and had despoiled them of goods worth 40,000 talents, and that Roger “was conquering ... Africa, which is known to be the third part of the world.”10 Even more alarming, Roger had been trying to secure for himself the principality of Antioch, which had lost its ruler in


9 Innocent II invested Roger and his two sons, as respectively, king of Sicily, duke of Apulia, and prince of Capua, the titles corresponding to the original divisions of Norman Italy. Roger received suzerainty as rex over all areas, but the pope reserved the right to invest separately the lord of each of the three portions. See Jaffé-Löwenfeld, Regesta pontificum Romanorum, nos. 8042–8043; Caspar, Roger II, pp. 229–230, and Regesten, no. 124; K. A. Kehr, Urkunden, pp. 253–254; and Chalandon, Domination normande, II, 91.

1130 when Bohemond II was killed in battle against the Turks, and to which the Byzantines had never relinquished their claim.

If female succession was invalid, then Roger’s right to the throne of Antioch as the cousin of Bohemond’s father and thus the nearest male relative was presumably incontestable. But in 1135 king Fulk of Jerusalem, at the request of the Latin barons of Antioch, had chosen Raymond of Poitiers as Bohemond’s successor and as husband for the heiress Constance. Although Fulk took care to shroud in secrecy the voyage of his messengers to England, where Raymond was living at the time, Roger, who had friends among the English barons, heard the news, and ordered a watch kept for Raymond in all the Adriatic embarkation ports. But Raymond, traveling in disguise, escaped Roger’s spies and arrived safely at St. Simeon, the port nearest Antioch. In 1138 Roger tried to exploit a conflict between Raymond and Ralph, the Latin patriarch of Antioch. After a sojourn in Italy, where he was twice exposed to Roger’s arguments and bribes, and twice succumbed, the patriarch was deposed, and Raymond, who rightly suspected him of being privy to a Norman conspiracy, threw him into prison, where he died in 1139.11

But the Byzantine emperor, John II Comnenus, now had sufficient proof of Roger’s dangerous aspirations. John himself hoped to secure Antioch for his youngest son Manuel, and to convert it into a center of armed resistance to the Turks. A new offensive in the east could succeed, however, only if his Sicilian neighbor was kept in check. Therefore, he decided to build a new coalition starting with the German king Conrad III, whose rival, Welf of Bavaria, was receiving subsidies from Roger. It was under favorable conditions that John’s ambassadors arrived in Germany in 1140 and began negotiations with the king “to renew the ties of an alliance between the two empires of the west and the east because of the arrogance of Roger of Sicily.” Conrad agreed to cement the alliance by a marriage between his sister-in-law, Bertha of Sulzbach, and John’s son Manuel.12 Conrad also asked the doge of Venice, Peter of Pola, to mediate questions at issue between himself and the basileus, and received a Venetian pledge of naval assistance in the coming war. The coalition was taking shape when suddenly, on

11 William of Tyre, XIV, XV (RHC, Occ., I), pp. 618, 619, 635, 678, 679. On the background, see Grousset, Histoire des croisades, II, chap. viii; Runciman, Crusades, II, chap. III; Cahen, Syrie du nord, pp. 357, 488–489, 502–503; Chalandon, Domination normande, II, 124–125; and volume I of the present work, chapter XIII, pp. 434–446. Roger also claimed he was entitled to Antioch because he had conquered Bohemond’s Italian fiefs ceded to duke William. See Caspar, Roger II, pp. 65, 70, 79, 166.

April 12, 1143, the emperor John died. Manuel, designated as his father’s successor, had to fight a rival for the throne, and the negotiations for his marriage came to a temporary standstill.

Roger skillfully exploited this opportunity, by trying to win over the Byzantines. He too had a marriage to propose, between duke Roger, his eldest son, and a Byzantine princess. For a moment it seemed that the curious project might succeed. Angered by alleged associations between his rival to the Byzantine throne and the Norman refugees at Conrad’s court, Manuel sent one of his courtiers, Basil Xeros, to Sicily to negotiate a pact with Roger. According to the historian Cinnamus, Basil accepted Sicilian money to write into the pact provisions detrimental to the interests of the Byzantine emperor — conceivably recognition of Roger’s claim to Antioch, or some other territory claimed by Byzantium. At any rate, upon seeing the text Manuel threw into prison the Norman ambassadors who had come to Constantinople for ratification (Basil had died on the return trip) and broke off relations with Sicily, insults which Roger never forgave.

Manuel then resumed negotiations with Conrad, and in January 1146 he married Bertha of Sulzbach at Constantinople in the presence of Conrad’s ambassadors. She became the empress Irene. At the same time, the political alliance against “the invader of two empires” was ratified. As a further step, Conrad sent his half-brother Otto, bishop of Freising, to Rome to notify pope Eugenius III of the new alliance and to announce Conrad’s own early arrival in Italy. Suddenly, however, fortune began to favor the kingdom of Sicily. At Viterbo in November 1145 pope Eugenius received the news of Zengi’s capture of Edessa. He decided to preach a new crusade.

No sooner was the new crusading movement announced than an anti-Byzantine faction raised its head in France and looked to Roger of Sicily for leadership. As early as 1140, in the face of the German-Byzantine threat, Roger had turned a hopeful eye toward France. Many ties of family relationships, tradition, and natural affinity bound the Italian Hautevilles to their country of origin and its royal house. As later events were to show, Roger had gained friends among those French leaders who believed that the great stumbling block to the success of the Franks in the east was the Byzantine empire.18 Although it is doubtful that this idea had

---

18 On the Sicilian-French rapprochements see Caspar, Roger II, pp. 365–370, and Chalandon, Domination normande, II, 106–107. Roger won the friendship of Bernard of Clairvaux by allowing Cistercian monks to settle in Sicily. See Bernardi epistolae, nos. 207, 208, 209, 447 (PL, CLXXXII). The letters must be dated after the peace of Mignano, 1139, when Bernard
much influence on the king of France, Louis VII certainly believed that Roger would be a useful ally in the crusade. After the assembly of Vézelay on March 31, 1146, Louis began negotiations with the rulers of the countries through which his armies might pass on their way to Asia Minor or to Syria. Among others, he approached Roger. The king of Sicily, seizing the occasion, sent to France ambassadors who “pledged the full support of his kingdom as to food supplies and transportation by water and every other need, and also promised that he or his son would go along on the journey.”

Whether Louis accepted the offer or not, the crusade was a god-send for Roger. If Conrad were to invade southern Italy, as pope Eugenius expected him to do, he could not rely on Manuel, who would need his forces to keep the Latin crusaders in check once they had entered imperial territory. If Louis should accept, prospects would be brighter still. Roger could then move onto the stage of European politics as ally and comrade-in-arms of the king of France, and could use his influence to prevent the French from becoming the allies of the Byzantines. Finally, if Roger, or one of his sons, should join the crusade, he would be entitled to a share of the spoils. Most historians believe he had his eye on Antioch; but the crusade, it must be remembered, was launched to bring aid to Raymond of Antioch, who was the uncle of Louis’s queen, Eleanor of Aquitaine. To avoid a conflict with the French royal family, Roger may well have dropped for the time his claim to Antioch, or may have thought of trading this claim for the kingdom of Jerusalem or even for a free hand against Constantinople.

Since Roger’s ambassadors had received orders to stay in France until final decisions should be reached by an assembly being held at Étampes at the beginning of 1147, they had ample time to establish contact with the anti-Byzantine party, especially with its leader, Godfrey, bishop of Langres, and to use Sicilian money to gain more partisans. But with the enlistment in the crusade of Conrad of Germany, Roger’s enemy and Manuel’s friend and relative, and the subsequent decision of the assembly of Étampes to take the overland route to Constantinople, Roger withdrew from

found it expedient, for the benefit of the Cistercian order, to make his peace with the man whom he had castigated as the “tyrant of Sicily.” See Vacandard, Vie de Saint Bernard, II, 60 ff. On the Cistercians in Sicily, see White, Latin Monasticism in Norman Sicily, pp. 163–165, and E. D. Thesiger, “Su gli inizi dello stanziamento cisterciense nel regno di Sicilia,” Studi medievali in onore di A. de Stefano, pp. 207–209. Peter of Cluny, on the other hand, claimed to have always been on Roger’s side. See Petri Venerabilis epistolae libri sex, III, 3 (PL, CLXXXIX), cols. 280–281; Caspar, Roger II, Regesten, no. 125.
the crusade completely, and showed no further interest in the well-being of its members.\textsuperscript{14}

Nevertheless, the assumed French-Sicilian friendship seriously hampered cooperation between the Byzantines and the French, once the crusaders had entered Greek territory, a matter of some advantage to Roger of Sicily. The emperor’s preoccupation with the reception of the crusaders left the Greek islands and the coasts of the Adriatic unprotected and open to Sicilian attack,\textsuperscript{15} and Roger was not slow to seize his opportunity. A plan to assault Constantinople may well have underlain his desire to route the Second Crusade through his kingdom, but without the support of the crusaders this plan, if it existed, was abandoned for more limited objectives. The fleet he dispatched in the fall of 1147 was very powerful, consisting of many biremes and triremes manned and equipped in Apulia, Calabria, and Sicily, carrying a sizeable land force, and commanded by energetic and experienced leaders. This force took Corfu, Cephalonia, and other islands in the Ionian Sea, almost without having to fight. Then, skirting the west and south coasts of the Morea (Peloponnesus), the fleet entered the Gulf of Laconia, passed Cape Malea, and proceeded north to the great fortress of Monemvasia, which was besieged in the face of stout resistance from the inhabitants.

Suddenly, however, the siege was lifted, and the fleet returned by the same course. The ships entered the Gulf of Corinth and landed near Salona (the ancient Amphissa), whence soldiers and sailors, organized as a land force, penetrated into Acarnania, Boeotia, and even the island of Euboea (Negroponte), systematically ravaging and looting these flourishing regions and cities “famous for their ancient nobility”. The city of Thebes was captured, and the inhabitants were forced to make detailed declarations of their estates so that everything movable could be carried away. Among the prisoners were “women skilled in weaving fine silk cloth”. These silk workers from Thebes, along with others captured in Corinth and apparently Athens too, were settled at Palermo to teach their craft to the Sicilians.\textsuperscript{16} Athens seems to have been sacked as well as Corinth, which Nicetas describes as “the rich city on the

\textsuperscript{14} Odo of Deuil, \textit{De profectione}, I (ed. Berry), pp. 6–14. For details, see Mrs. Berry’s account in volume I of the present work, pp. 469–470.


isthmus famous for its two very convenient ports that handled the export and trans-shipment of goods from Asia and Italy." Both the city and Acrocorinth were taken. From all these places the Normans carried off such enormous booty of gold and silver and silk textiles that on its way home the fleet gave the impression of a "flotilla of freighters rather than of men-of-war". On the return trip, the Normans heavily fortified Corfu and other islands, for Roger was determined to hold on to his new Adriatic conquests.

In addition to material damage, the Byzantine empire suffered a serious loss of prestige. One of its basic weaknesses, the apathy of the civilian population and their lack of fighting spirit, was disclosed to the world. The emperor felt obliged to avenge this disgrace, reconquer Corfu and the other Adriatic islands, and carry the war to the "dragon of the west, the New Amalech". In March 1148 Manuel concluded a treaty with the Venetians, who saw their trade in the Adriatic seriously threatened by the new occupants of Corfu. For various reasons the great counter-offensive had to be postponed, and it was only in the late fall that the siege of Corfu was finally begun. In the early summer of 1149 Roger again dispatched a fleet, comprising sixty ships under George of Antioch, to raid the coasts of Greece. No doubt he hoped Manuel would lift the siege of Corfu to come to the rescue of his European provinces. Manuel only sent one of his commanders, however, with a naval detachment which twice inflicted heavy losses on George's fleet. Roger's ships carried out a dashing raid on Constantinople itself, in the course of which George's men shot burning arrows into the palace of Blachernae and ravaged the imperial orchards.17 Moreover a stroke of

Rogerius in Palermo Siciliae metropoli collocans, artem illam texendi suas edociere preceps..." The Annales Cevennes (ad ann. 1147) speak of many Jews' being deported from Thebes, Corinth, and the Ionian islands to Sicily. As many of the goldsmiths and manufacturers of silk and purple garments in the Byzantine empire were Jews, this notice would seem to add to our knowledge of Roger's religious as well as his economic policy. See R. S. Lopez, "Silk Industry in the Byzantine Empire," Speculum, XX (1945), 24. Although only western sources (such as Otto of Freising) mention the Norman pillage of Athens, which has led some historians to omit Athens from the list of places captured by Roger's forces, the American excavations in the Athenian Agora have recently revealed some evidence that seems to confirm the western tradition that Athens was captured along with Thebes and Corinth, on which see K. M. Setton, "The Archaeology of Medieval Athens," Essays in Medieval Life and Thought, Presented in Honor of Austin Patterson Evans (New York, 1955), p. 251.

fortune, or perhaps their own watchfulness, enabled the Normans
to rescue from the Byzantines king Louis and queen Eleanor of
France, now returning from Palestine, and to send them safely to a
Calabrian port.\textsuperscript{18} Shortly afterwards, however, the Byzantines
reconquered the Ionian islands earlier seized by the Normans, but
two Byzantine attempts on Apulia itself in the late fall of 1149 were
thwarted by heavy storms. A war with the Serbs, perhaps instigated
by Roger himself, put a stop to further Byzantine attacks.

The Sicilian-Byzantine war outlasted the Second Crusade.
Manuel and Roger continued to build coalitions designed to destroy
each other. Both turned to advantage the tragic circumstances that
marked the return of Louis VII and Conrad III from the scenes of
their defeats. Facing embarrassing criticism and accusations,
Louis and Conrad hoped to retrieve their honor and to acquire
fame in new enterprises. Thus, upon his arrival at the imperial
court — in a Byzantine ship in order to escape Roger’s spies —
Conrad agreed to conclude a treaty of alliance with Manuel on
terms which included, among others, the renunciation of German
claims to Apulia. In the event that the allies won Apulia, Conrad
would grant it as a dowry to his sister-in-law Bertha, empress under
the name of Irene.\textsuperscript{19}

Meanwhile, at Potenza late in August 1149, Louis met Roger,
who was only too eager to establish a close relationship with him.\textsuperscript{20}
Just what the two kings said to each other we do not know, but
there can be no doubt that they were concerned with forming an
offensive and defensive alliance against Manuel. After the interview,
Sicilian barons escorted Louis and Eleanor to Rome, where Louis
was expected to strengthen earlier agreements made between
Roger and the pope. Eugenius had adopted the views of many
returning crusaders, who blamed their failure on Manuel and the
“heretic Greeks”. For the moment at least, the pope was willing to
endorse any plan that would distract the attention of western
Christendom from what even the king of France admitted to be

\textsuperscript{18} The Greek and Latin sources give a confused and contradictory picture of the circum-
stances surrounding the capture and release of the king and queen; however, see Kugler,
392–393.

\textsuperscript{19} On the treaty and its importance for the anti-Byzantine policy of Frederick Barbarossa,
see P. Rassow, _Honor imperii_ (Munich and Berlin, 1940), pp. 26–44, and Lamma, _Commenti e
Staufer_, I, 89–93.

\textsuperscript{20} See Louis’s letter to Suger, in which he mentions the “devoted and reverent reception”
Roger gave him and Eleanor, _Epistolae Sugerii_, LXXXII (RHGF, XV), p. 514; John of
Salisbury, _Historia pontificalis_, 28. The importance that Roger attached to this meeting with
Louis gave rise to the legend that Louis crowned Roger king. See Caspar, _Roger II_, p. 405,
and above, note 7.
“the faults and sins” of the Latins. Louis returned to France, assured of the pope’s consent to any action which might help western Christendom retrieve its honor and avenge itself upon the Greeks.\footnote{Constable, “The Second Crusade,” Traditio, IX, 272–273, stresses that, in contrast to France, public opinion in Germany was not unfavorable to the Byzantine emperor, and that discussions of the failure of the Second Crusade contain no mention of Greek “treachery”. For the aftermath of the Second Crusade, the letters of the principals are the most important sources: Epistolae Ludovici VII, Eugenii III papae, Bernardi, Sugerii, Petri abbatis Cluniaciensis (PL, CLXXXIX; RHGF, XV); A. Duchesne, Historiae Francorum scriptores, IV (Paris, 1641). Suger’s letters, together with the important Guilelmi vita Sugerii, may be consulted in A. Lecoy de la Marche (ed.), Oeuvres complètes de Suger (Paris, 1867). Letters of King Conrad and some prominent Germans are found in Wibaldi epistolae (ed. P. Jaffé, Bibliotheca rerum Germanicorum, 6 vols., Berlin, 1864–1871). I. See also Sigerberti continuatio Praemonstratenensis, ed ann. 1150 (MGH, SS., VI), p. 455. In addition to works cited elsewhere in this chapter, the following studies are of importance: A. Luchaire, Louis VII, Philippe-Auguste, Louis VIII (Paris, 1901); A. Cartellieri, Abb Suger von Saint-Denis, 1081–1151 (Berlin, 1898); R. Hirsch, Studien zur Geschichte König Ludwigs VII. von Frankreich (Leipzig, 1892); and Lamma, Communi et Stauffer, 99–115.}

But the new “crusade” was still-born. The French assembly which met at Laon in March 1150 found the barons, and the king himself, reluctant to embark on any new adventure. Feeling that the authority and prestige of the church were at stake if, as seemed almost certain, the crusade should result in a new catastrophe, pope Eugenius began to withdraw his support. So did Louis VII, who despaired of seeing Conrad and Roger reconciled, and could not risk a venture which invited German reprisal. The dreams of Roger of Sicily dissolved. As at the start of the Second Crusade, so again he found himself abandoned by the French and threatened by a new coalition of all his enemies.

Meanwhile, however, Roger could stand before an admiring Europe as a conqueror in Moslem Africa. Peter of Cluny praised his impressive victories as “the increase of the church of God by land which had belonged to the enemies of God, that is the Saracens.”\footnote{Petri Venerabilis epistolarius libri sex, VI, 16 (PL, CLXXXIX), col. 424.}

Contemporaries looked on Roger’s colonial outposts in Africa, along with the Christian advances in Spain and Portugal, as the only territorial gains made during the time of the Second Crusade, and as in some measure a compensation for its failure. Yet in Roger’s African venture, crusading zeal and motives, although not wholly absent, played a lesser role than did Sicilian political traditions, economic needs, and military interests.

The region of Africa which came into the Norman orbit was the old Roman province of Africa proconsularis, together with a part of Roman Numidia, roughly covering the northern and central
parts of modern Tunisia, and known to Arab geographers as Ifriqiya (Arabic corruption of Latin "Africa"). The conquest of Berber North Africa by the Arabs in the seventh century had aroused a desperate resistance, and the spread of Islam, which came to the mass of the rural population in the form of Khārijite sectarianism based on the principle of religious equality, only widened the gap between them and their new rulers, the Sunnite nobility (jund). Yet under the 'Abbāsids at Baghdad, Tunisia, soon separated from western Barbary, flourished as it never had since the great days of the Roman empire. The Aghlabids, who ruled it in the name of the caliphs, eventually conquered Sicily and Malta and made their state a prominent Mediterranean sea power. Throughout the ninth century Tunisia enjoyed unprecedented economic prosperity, and its capital Kairawan, with its famous mosque, became one of the most important religious and cultural centers of Islam.

The rise of the Shi'ite caliphate of the Fāṭimids put an end to the rule of the Aghlabids of Kairawan in 909. The new masters imposed on Barbary their Shi'ite religion along with an utterly oppressive system of financial exploitation. When the fourth Fāṭimid caliph, al-Mu'izz, moved to Cairo in 972, he entrusted Tunisia and part of Algeria to the house of the Berber chieftain Zirī, who soon lost the Algerian province to their Hammādīd cousins, but continued ruling Tunisia in the name of the caliphs at Cairo. The Zirids found it increasingly difficult to reconcile their loyalty toward their overlords with the sentiments of their people, who hated the Shi'ites. When, therefore, the power of the caliphs in Cairo began to weaken, the Zirid emir al-Mu'izz followed the example of the Hammādīds and in 1048 publicly declared the 'Abbāsids caliph at Baghdad his suzerain. This fateful step was

23 In addition to the works of Amari, Chalandon, Caspar, W. Cohn, Monti, Ceroni, and Cartellieri, already cited, the following may be referred to for the background and history of the conquest of Tunisia: C. Brockelmann, Geschichte der islamischen Völker und Staaten (Munich and Berlin, 1943); P. K. Hitti, History of the Arabs, 6th ed. (London, 1956); G. Marçais, La Berbérie musulmane et l'orient au moyen-âge (Paris, 1946); J. Mesnage, Le Christianisme en Afrique: Décîn et extinction (Algiers and Paris, 1913); H. W. Hazard, The Numismatic History of Late Medieval North Africa (New York, 1952); and articles by Marçais, Yver, and others on Berbera, Zirids, Hilâl, Aghlabides, Ifriqiya, al-Mahdiya, Tunis, Tripoli, Sfax, etc. in The Encyclopædia of Islam. See also the chapter on North Africa in volume III of the present work (in preparation).

tantamount to open denunciation of Fatimid suzerainty over Tunisia. The mosque of Kairawan was restored to Sunnite Islam and the name of the ‘Abbāsid caliph al-Qā‘im replaced that of the Fatimid in the Friday prayer.

To punish this disloyalty, the Fatimid caliph al-Mustanṣir persuaded the wild beduin tribes of the Banū-Ḥilāl, Banū-Sulaim, and others to invade Tunisia in 1052. The whole of this rich and prosperous land between Kairawan and Cape Bon was overrun and laid waste. Along with the fields, orchards, and hamlets, all the unfortified cities fell to the new wave of Arabs. Kairawan, one of the holy cities of Islam, survived because it was fortified at the last moment. But life became increasingly difficult and, after a few years, the Zirids moved their capital to the sea-fortress of Mahdia. The caravan trade, once the glory of Tunisia, was completely ruined. One after another the cities broke away from the Zirids and set up their own dynasties, Arab or Berber. Mahdia alone was all that survived of the once strong state.

The Zirids tried to retrieve their fortunes by turning to the sea. Utilizing Mahdia as a great naval base and arsenal, they sent out expeditions to Sicily and attacked Italian shipping. In response to this piracy, the Italian maritime cities assaulted and ravaged Mahdia in 1087. But even before this, count Roger I of Sicily had taken the first step toward Norman interference in Tunisia. The Zirid Tamīm (1062–1108), son of al-Mu‘izz, had promised to cease molesting Sicily, and in return count Roger had promised the shipment of grain to Mahdia. This treaty, concluded about 1075, while restricting manifestations of Norman hostility for the time being, had given Sicily protection against Zirid attack and secured permanent markets for Sicilian grain, of lasting benefit to the Sicilian economy and Roger’s treasury.24

Under cover of this agreement, which his mother Adelaide and he continued with Tamīm’s son and successor Yaḥyā (1108–1116), count Roger II pursued a more aggressive policy. For one thing, he wanted to make good his failure to acquire the kingdom of Jerusalem.25

---


25 On the struggle between Roger II and the Zirid emirs of Mahdia hardly any other than Arabic sources are available. Since Roger’s early attempts on North Africa were failures, Sicilian chronicles make no mention of them. The later conquests are only summarily listed in some Italian and French chronicles (see below, note 32). The Arabic sources, though all of a later date, derive their information from good contemporary reports, and in part from official documents. See Amari, Storia dei musulmani, III, 387, note 2, and pasim, and Chalandon, Domination normande, I, introduction. The most important of these Arab works are:
Roger II was young, ambitious, and eager to make a name for himself. He had inherited a territory better organized than any other in contemporary western Europe, a well stocked treasury, and the loyalty of his subjects including Moslems and Greeks. He felt a genuine affinity for the Moslem way of life and of thought, all the more so after the residence of the counts was moved to Palermo, a cosmopolitan city of predominantly eastern character. He was also influenced by George of Antioch, a Syrian Christian who had held high office in Mahdia under Tamīm, but had fled from Yaḥyā and obtained asylum in Sicily. First tax-collector (strategos) in a provincial district, then diplomat on a mission to Egypt, George rose to the important post of naval commander and assistant to the “admiral” of the Sicilian navy. His experience in African affairs, his knowledge of the land and people, and his command of Arabic recommended him to Roger II as an ideal commander in a war with the Zirids.

If Roger had listened to the “elder statesmen”, who favored the moderate policies of his father, rather than to George, perhaps he would have concluded that war in Africa entailed too great economic risks. By 1117 he was already employing several agents in Mahdia entrusted with the handling of large amounts of money, probably payment for Sicilian grain. Export duties paid by the merchants, Sicilian and other, to the Sicilian exchequer would be lost, together with the profitable African market. Roger decided to accept the risk. Early in his reign he seems to have made an alliance with the Hammādids of Bougie in eastern Algeria, the traditional enemies of


A “Admiral” is derived from the Arabic amr (emir) through the Greek genitive ἀμηρῶδος; hence the Latin ammiratus, admiratus, or ammiralus. The office, as it is first referred to under the regency of Adelaide (1110), was originally derived from that of the (Fātimid) emir of Palermo who, after the city fell to the Normans, was replaced by a Christian “emir”, whose main function became the supervision of the Saracen communities in Palermo and other places. Since the navy was built up with the help of Saracen contributions of ships, materials, and money, and was, in part, manned by Saracen sailors and marines, the Norman “emir” was put in charge of the navy. The importance of the navy under the second count of Sicily is emphasized by the fact that the admiral was now entrusted with the functions of a first minister in the civil government of Sicily. See the brilliant reconstruction of this development by Amari, Storia dei musulmani, III, 357 ff. On George of Antioch, see ibid.; Caspar, Roger II, pp. 41 ff., and 300 ff.; and W. Cohn, Die Geschichte der normannisch-sicilischen Flotte unter der Regierung Rogers I. und Rogers II., pp. 14 ff.
the Zirids, and while he renewed the earlier agreement with Yahyā’s son and successor ‘Ali (1116–1121), he seems to have supported the efforts of Rāfi’, the governor of Gabes and a chieftain of the Banū-Hilāl, to break with the emir. In 1117–1118 an occasion for direct interference arose when the energetic ‘Ali forbade Rāfi’ to launch a merchant ship from the port of Gabes on the ground that “no inhabitant of Iṣrīqiyyah was permitted to compete with him in dispatching merchant ships.” Roger may well have felt inclined to challenge so sweeping a claim. Rāfi’ turned to him for help, and he sent twenty-four galleys to Gabes, but the captain of this force had the good sense to retire to Sicily when the Zirid fleet put out from Mahdia to meet him. Relations soon reached the breaking-point. The emir confiscated Roger’s money deposited in Mahdia and threw his agents into prison. On Roger’s angry complaints he later released both, but he did not respond to Roger’s request for “renewal of the treaties and for confirmation of the alliance”. When Roger insisted, in letters “full of arrogant words and threats and written in a form that ran counter to decent usages”, ‘Ali dismissed the Norman ambassadors without answer and prepared for war.

The conditions under which the war broke out tend to obscure somewhat the true reasons and initial accidents that had led to it. For one thing, the Zirid ‘Ali — and after his death the government of his young son al-Ḥasan (1121–1148) — felt too weak to face the Sicilian antagonist alone, and called in the help of the Murābit (Almoravid) sultan of Morocco, ‘Ali ibn-Ṣūfī. ‘Ali promptly sent his governor of the Baleares, the fiery and capable sea-captain Muḥammad ibn-Maimūn, to raid the coast of Calabria. Ibn-Maimūn’s men plundered Nicotera and perpetrated on the civilian population there all the horrors habitually accompanying this type of warfare. Roger, who was count of Calabria as well as of Sicily, seems to have worked on the indignation of his Christian subjects to arouse enthusiasm for an expedition against the Zirids, whom he represented as responsible for these misdeeds. The emir in turn proclaimed a holy war against Roger, hoping thus to submerge the latent antagonism between Berbers and Arabs in a common struggle against the Christians. In this he was not disappointed.

In June 1123, a year after the raid on Nicotera, a Sicilian fleet of about three hundred vessels (galleys and transports conveying 30,000

---

27 The fact is known from an incident which caused Roger II to threaten the Hāmādīd emir al-‘Azīz with the withdrawal of his “friendship”. See Petri Diaconum chronicon, IV, 50 (MGH, SS., VII), p. 786; Caspar, Roger II, p. 41.
men and 1,000 horses), under the command of the admiral Christodoulus and his assistant George of Antioch, landed on the small island of Ahasi off the coast of Mahdia. They found unorganized but formidable and enthusiastic forces ready to repel them. The unity and determination of Berber and Arab led to the defeat of the Normans after they had occupied the little island and the mainland fortress of Dimas for only four days. True, the Norman navy was not yet fully integrated; sea and land forces did not work well together; the marines especially failed to carry out landing operations under enemy attack. Roger’s force seems to have lacked enthusiasm and fighting spirit, while the enemy, on the defensive against Christian invaders, “knew what they were fighting for”, and of course represented their victory as a triumph of Islam over Christianity. Christian chroniclers do not even mention the expedition of 1123, and their silence is eloquent evidence of the dismay that prevailed at the court of Palermo.28

The war dragged on for several years, the initiative now with the Moslems. But in July 1127 Roger reconquered the Mediterranean islands of Malta, Gozo, and Pantelleria, lost by the Normans soon after his father’s death, a success that proved its importance at a later stage in his African exploits. On the other hand, he could neither prevent nor avenge the terrible raids carried out in the same month against Patti and Syracuse. Most Christian sources attribute these raids to the Balearic corsair captain Ibn-Maimūn, but William of Tyre, usually well informed about events in southern Italy, says that the raids against Patti and “the noble and ancient city of Syracuse” had been launched from the African coast and had been touched off by the sudden appearance of Sicilian raiders there.29

Whatever the truth of the matter, Roger was unable to cope with the situation. In 1128 he responded, however, to the request of count Raymond Berengar III of Barcelona for help against the Moors of Spain, promising to send in the summer of that year fifty galleys and an army “in servitium Dei”.30 The plan never materialized, probably because of the war against the pope and the Apulian barons. But he prepared for his future role as lord of the African sea by concluding a treaty with Savona, a client city of Genoa, containing

28 Al-Hasan’s official report is included in at-Tijani, Rihlah (Amari, BAS, II), pp. 71 ff. All the Arab authors drew from it. A passage from a poem by Ibn-Hashim in praise of al-Hasan’s victories may be found in Amari, BAS, II, 400. See Caspar, Roger II, p. 49.
30 Caspar, Roger II, Regesten, no. 53. On the content of the documents containing the treaties, see ibid., pp. 50–51, 70–78; also Amari, Storia dei musulmani, III, 396–398, and Cohn, Geschichte der . . . Flotte, pp. 23 ff.
guarantees against Savonese piracy and the promise of one Savonese
galley to help police the sea from Savona to Sicily and from
"Nubia" (Numidia) to Tripoli. 31

Until the peace of Mignano in 1139, when his hold on the
Italian mainland was finally made secure, Roger could interfere in
Mahdia actively only in 1134–1135 during a short lull in Europe.
Meanwhile, however, he spun the net of intrigue in which he
eventually trapped his victim. He used "peaceful" infiltration,
political and economic blackmail, and intimidation, as well as force.
In 1134 Roger heeded the call of al-Hasan for help against Yahya,
the emir of Bougie, who was besieging Mahdia. Roger's navy
helped to relieve Mahdia. Although al-Hasan would not allow the
Sicilians to destroy his rival, he was keenly aware of his need for
Roger's friendship, and accepted his hard terms for a defensive and
offensive alliance.

In 1135 Roger sent a strong force that included Frankish
knights and Moslems from Sicily to the Gulf of Gabes in order to
take the island of Jerba. It was his first conquest in this region, and
proved an excellent base for future operations. The conquerors mis-
treated the population, described as consisting of criminals and
freebooters who "had never before obeyed the rule of a sultan".
Those who survived the first onslaught were reduced to servitude,
and the island was subjected to the rule of an official (Arabic,
'amil) appointed by Roger. The intervention at Mahdia and the
conquest of Jerba, though not followed by new military aggressions
for several years to come, caused considerable stir among Roger's
enemies. Arab observers predicted the doom of the "province
of Mahdia" and, as we saw above, Roger's successes gave the
Byzantine and Venetian ambassadors at Merseburg grounds for
apprehension.

In 1141–1142, with famine and plague harassing the people of
Tunisia, Roger demanded that his agents be paid what the emir
owed them. When al-Hasan declared his insolvency, Roger sent
twenty-five ships under the command of George of Antioch, who
confiscated Egyptian ships anchored in the harbor of Mahdia and a
ship belonging to al-Hasan, about to sail for Cairo with gifts for
the caliph al-Hafiz. Next, Roger forced new agreements upon
al-Hasan, attaching so many conditions that, as one Arab author
puts it, al-Hasan was in the position of Roger's 'amil. Roger

31 Caspar, Roger II, Regesten, no. 54. The treaty is printed in G. Filippi, "Patto di pace
tra Ruggiero II normanno e la città di Savona," Archivio storico napoletano, XIV (1889),
755–757. On its content, see Caspar, Roger II, pp. 77–78, and Cohn, Geschichte der...
Flotte, pp. 23 ff. The printed text has Nubia, but this must be an error for Numidia.
probably demanded as guarantee the proceeds from customs duties collected in the ports of Mahdia and Susa. He also secured the right to conquer any places that might revolt against the Zirids.

From 1143 on, no year went by without a Norman attack on the African coast. In June 1143 a Sicilian fleet attempted to take the city of Tripoli, which was ruled by the Arab house of the Banū-Maṭrūḥ. The attack failed because the Arab tribes of the neighborhood made common cause with the inhabitants and forced the “Franks” to sail for home. In the main, however, the attacks hit points along the coasts from Bougie to Mahdia, being launched each summer during the years 1143–1146 and probably with some regularity each year thereafter, and do not fit into any strategic pattern. They seem to have been intended to frighten the inhabitants or to reconnoiter and test the strength of possible naval resistance. The Normans must soon have found that the Zirid navy, once formidable, had dwindled away. The Zirid state was povertystricken and unable to maintain ships or to employ the services of corsairs on any large scale. Whatever barges were left were used in the grain traffic with Egypt and Sicily. Clearly the control of the sea had passed to Sicily. But Roger needed African bases, and in the summer of 1146 a Sicilian fleet of two hundred ships under the command of George of Antioch again appeared before Tripoli. A few days before their arrival, the government of the Banū-Maṭrūḥ had been overthrown by a Murābīṭ chieftain returning to Morocco after a pilgrimage to Mecca. The turmoil that followed weakened resistance, and the city fell to the Normans within three days. After several days of plundering, George declared an amnesty and immediately began to fortify and reorganize the place.

The capture of Tripoli by the Sicilians made a great impression on Christians and Moslems alike. For the time being, Roger did not follow up his great victory with an attack on Mahdia as might have been expected. The Second Crusade, and his efforts in connection with it, may have had something to do with the delay. But in 1147 famine in North Africa had reached a stage beyond endurance. Some Arab historians report cases of cannibalism committed in desperation. There was an exodus from Tunisia to Sicily of nobles and wealthy citizens, some of whom urged Roger to take over Tunisia entirely. Many who did not emigrate were ready to surrender the cities to him. They pointed to the tempting example of Tripoli: after its occupation by the Normans it had made a remarkable recovery. Naturally, Roger and George of Antioch welcomed this mood. Ibn-‘Idhārī emphasizes George’s role:
"This accursed one," he writes, "knew the weak points in the situation of Mahdia."

Among the African chiefs who saw in Roger of Sicily the future master of Tunisia was a certain Yusuf, a former slave who governed the city of Gabes in the name of Muhammad, the youngest son of the late Rafi', the same who had called upon Roger to interfere in African affairs some thirty years previously. Yusuf offered Gabes to Roger, and received from him the diploma and insignia of a governor, to rule Gabes thenceforth as a Sicilian protectorate. But al-Hasan, as suzerain of Gabes and protector of the eldest son and rightful heir of Rafi', occupied Gabes with the help of the local inhabitants, who executed Yusuf in an obscene lynching. Since at the time, in the late fall of 1147, the bulk of Roger's navy was engaged in large-scale operations in Greek waters, Roger could send only a few ships, which were unable to take Gabes. This setback hastened his decision to end the diplomatic game and to destroy the Zirids with an all-out military attack. Probably the relatives of Yusuf, who took refuge at his court, urged him to punish al-Hasan, and gave information valuable for an invasion. As soon as the Sicilian navy had completed its assignment on the Greek coast, by strengthening and fortifying Corfu, and Roger had made sure that the Byzantines were engaged in a war in the north of Greece, he began to prepare this expedition to Mahdia for the early summer of 1148.

Tunisia was by now so exhausted and impoverished that strong resistance was no longer to be expected. Nevertheless, Roger lulled al-Hasan into thinking that he was still honoring the two-year treaty concluded in 1146. Even after the incident of Gabes he received al-Hasan's ambassador in Palermo. When all was ready, George of Antioch assembled at Pantelleria the fleet of 250 ships which were to carry a strong army and siege machines, and then sent a fake message by carrier pigeon to al-Hasan to deceive him into the belief that the fleet was headed for Constantinople. In the early morning of June 22, the inhabitants of Mahdia saw a dark cloud of Sicilian ships coming over the horizon, their oarsmen making for the harbor against adverse winds. The emir realized that their arrival meant the end of his dynasty. Before the Sicilian fleet could land, al-Hasan, accompanied by his family and court and followed by many citizens, left the royal palace which had served the Zirids as a residence for nearly a hundred years. In the late afternoon of June 22, George of Antioch and his army entered the fortress without the loss of a single man.

Once order had been restored in the capital, George sent de-
tachments to conquer other cities along the North African coast. By the end of July, within a month after the landing in Mahdia, all the cities and minor castles along the littoral had been taken, among them the great ports and trade centers of Gabes, Susa, and, despite considerable resistance, Sfax. An attack on Kelibia, probably with Tunis the ultimate objective, was stopped by the determined resistance of the Arabs. It is probable that Tunis, ruled by members of the Arab house of the Banū-Khurasān, voluntarily submitted to the overlordship of the Sicilian king. Ibn-al-Athīr describes the territory in Africa now ruled by Roger II as extending from Tripoli to Cape Bon and from the desert to Kairawan. Apparently Roger had not planned to extend his conquests farther west into the territory of the Hammadids, whose position was stronger than that of the Zirids. He could not spare additional men for further conquest or for garrison service. The emperor Manuel was preparing feverishly for the reconquest of Corfu and for an invasion of the Italian mainland. Had it not been for the war between “the prince of Sicily and the king of the Romans in Constantinople,” says Ibn-al-Athīr, Roger would have conquered “all Africa.”

Christians in the age of the crusades could not but hail Roger’s African conquests as a great Christian victory in the Mediterranean. In a short obituary for Roger a French chronicler praised them as outstanding triumphs over the Saracens, and along with another annalist places Roger’s campaign with the crusading events in the east. On the other hand, the two court historians of the Norman dynasty of Sicily, archbishop Romuald Guarna of Salerno and Hugo Falcandus, do not impute religious motives to Roger. Both speak of Roger’s desire for territorial aggrandizement, and Romuald emphasizes the king’s ambition (cor magnificum) and his lust for power (dominandi animus) which was not satisfied with the rule of Sicily and Apulia.32 Nor do Arab historians interpret as an expression of religious zeal Roger’s “cruelty” in exploiting the calamities

32 Roger’s obituary is in Sigeberti continuatio Praemonstratensis, ad ann. 1154 (MGH, SS., VI), p. 455; “Princeps utilis et strenuus et actibus clarus Rogerius rex Siciliae post insignes de Saracenis victorias et terras eorum occupatas obit. . . .” His African campaign is associated, in the context, with the Second Crusade in the same chronicle (p. 454) and in Robert of Torigny’s Chronicon (ibid., p. 503). See also Annales Casinenses (MGH, SS., XIX), p. 310; Andrea Dandolo, Chronicon, ad ann. 1147–1148 (RISS, XII), p. 243; Romuald Guarna of Salerno, Chronicon (RISS, VII), p. 227; and Hugo Falcandus, Liber de regno Sicilieae (FSI, XXII), pp. 5–6. All Latin sources except Robert of Torigny mention the capture of Mahdia, which they call Africa (Afrīca or Africam), but only Romuald Guarna mentions all the important cities: “Afrīca” (Mahdia), Susa, Bona, Gabes, Sfax, and Tripoli. Robert of Torigny speaks of the capture of “Tonita” (Tunis), for which there is otherwise only indirect evidence. See Cerone, L’Opera . . . di Ruggiero II in Africa ed in Oriente, pp. 63 ff., and Constable, “Second Crusade,” Traditio, IX, 235–237.
of Tunisia. They knew well enough that Roger’s African policy, from the very beginning, was dictated by the financial and commercial interests of his kingdom, and it is to their understanding of the underlying economic factors that we owe our knowledge of Roger’s methods.

Exciting opportunities now existed for the expansion of Sicilian trade into the southern and eastern Mediterranean. Their realization depended, however, upon the degree to which the king could integrate his new “colonies” into his kingdom and revive their economy. The organization of the African outposts was entrusted to George of Antioch, who acted as Roger’s viceroy, and whom the Arabs called his vizir (wazir). George refrained from extending the conquest to the African hinterland. Instead, he devoted himself to restoring order, according to a plan probably worked out with the king prior to the conquest of Tripoli in 1146, and tested in this city after its occupation. In each occupied city the Sicilians garrisoned the citadel under a captain who was responsible for defense and internal security. Civil administration, on the other hand, was entrusted to an ‘amil chosen by the Sicilian government from among the native nobility. To assure this official’s loyalty the Sicilians took a hostage, usually a close relative, off to Palermo. Under the ‘amils, local magistrates (Arabic singular, qādī) served as judges; they were appointed by the Sicilian government with a view to pleasing the people. The population had to pay a special head tax, the jizyah, but no other services or tributes. As regards the collection of the customary taxes, such as the land tax and excise taxes formerly paid to the emir and the local shaikhs, Roger’s representatives “employed persuasion rather than force”. Ibn-abi-Dinār mentions this as one, but not the only, example of treatment which he calls just and humane, and which reconciled Roger’s new Moslem subjects to his government. In accord with the traditional policy toward the Saracens in Sicily, George of Antioch granted, and Roger later solemnly confirmed, complete religious toleration.

With their religion and their customs unchanged, and with co-nationalists as their immediate governors, the Berbers of Tunisia found conditions little altered, except that their economic life was improving and even showing signs of a new prosperity. Shortly after the conquest George of Antioch restored Mahdia and its commercial suburb Zawila. He lent money to merchants and supported the poor. As in Tripoli two years earlier, Italian and Sicilian merchants and wares began to pour into the new colonies. Roger actively encouraged emigration from his kingdom to “the
land of Tripoli”, and it is said that Sicilians and Italians repopulated Tripoli, which began to prosper. It is likely that Roger applied the same policy of colonization to his conquests of 1148. By proclamation he made it known throughout Tunisia that he would give special favors to those who would voluntarily submit to his rule. In response to this appeal caravans arriving under their chiefs in Sfax shortly after the conquest of the city swore allegiance to him. To revive the trade with Egypt, Roger concluded a treaty with al-Hāfiz, the Fāṭimid caliph in “Babylon” (Cairo).32 We do not know the contents of this treaty, but it is safe to assume that it guaranteed to Sicilian merchants the same rights and privileges formerly enjoyed by those of the emir of Mahdia.

As in Sicily, the new rex Africæ, as Roger liked to style himself, tried to curry favor with his new subjects by occasionally using the Arabic language and thus showing that he was the protector of Moslems as well as the protected of God.33 He chose the inscriptions on his coins to make it known that he would rule Tunisia in the fashion of a Moslem emir.34 This squares with his apparent reluctance to pay more than superficial attention to the problems of the Christian faith and church in Tunisia. When, however, bishop Cosmas of Mahdia stopped at Palermo on his return from Rome, where he had been confirmed in his see by pope Eugenius III, Roger allowed him to go back to Mahdia “as a freeman”.35 But if

34 Like the ‘Abbāzids and Fāṭimid caliphs, the Norman kings used devices with pious invocations, for instance in Sicilian documents where they might replace the personal signature of the kings. They also appear on Sicilian coins. As regards the language, Arabic was used in Sicily in conjunction with either Greek or Latin, while from the two coins known to have been struck in an African mint (Mahdia) for Roger II and William I respectively, it would appear that the African mints used Arabic alone. See Amari, Storia dei musulmani, III, 456–459, 493; La Mantia, “La Sicilia ed il suo dominio nell’Africa,” Archivio storico siciliano, n.s., XLIV, 167 (with bibliography); and H. H. Abdul Wahab, “Deux dinars normands de Mahdia,” Revue tunisienne, n.s., I (1930), 215–219.
35 There were only five or six sees that had survived the Arabization of Tunisia. Two bishops of Mahdia, between 1087 and 1148, died in Palermo, which suggests that Christians were not well treated by the Zirid emirs. In addition to the cathedral churches that served the religious needs of the “Africîn” (African Christians), several other churches are mentioned in the sources, some of which might have belonged to merchant colonies of Pisans, Genoese, or Amalfitans in their “extraterritorial” quarters. Besides Mahdia, there were Christian communities in Bougie, Kairawan, Bona (Hippo), Carthage, and Gabes. On the controversial question of the survival of Christianity in North Africa, see J. Mennage, Le Christianisme en Afrique: Déclin et extinction, pp. 219–225, and Amari, Storia dei musulmani, III, 376, 424.
Roger had made any significant contribution to the cause of Christianity in North Africa, no doubt historians would have noted the fact. Very likely he did not desire to change the overwhelmingly Moslem character of his new province. When, after the capture of Tripoli in 1146, he encouraged emigration thither from Sicily, it would seem that his appeal was addressed primarily to Sicilian Moslems, whose situation on the island had deteriorated, owing to the influx of Italians. The royal policy of toleration was not acceptable to the Christian hierarchy of the kingdom, and Roger must have welcomed the occasion to ease the tension in Sicily by encouraging the emigration of Sicilian Saracens. This policy can be regarded as the first step in the direction of building the cosmopolitan state of Roger’s dreams, with a high degree of material welfare and a comprehensive civilization.

Roger’s farsighted plans were not given time to mature. In the last years of his life he himself saw the chances for a permanent integration of the African outposts into the kingdom of Sicily diminishing rapidly. The most serious threat to the new Sicilian holdings came from the rise, in the mountains of Morocco, of the great new religious movement of the Muwaḥḥids (Almohads). ‘Abd-al-Mu’min, first successor to the religious founder of the sect, organized the growing number of sectarians into an army which he led first against the Murābiṭūt of Spain and then against Morocco. After sweeping victories that gave these western strongholds of Islam into his hands, he turned eastward and, in 1152, entered Algeria in force, conquering the entire state of the Ḥammāḍīs of Bougie with the exception of Bona. The last scions of the house sought refuge at Palermo. Roger, who once before had attempted to gain a foothold in Algeria, and whose corsairs, year after year, had attacked the islands off the Algerian coasts, now decided to make common cause with the Ḥammāḍīs and with a number of local Arab shaikhs. In exchange for hostages, Roger promised to send 5,000 horsemen to help them fight off the half-savage hordes of Berbers from the west. But then, as before and after, the Arabs refused to fight fellow-Moslems side by side with “infidels”. Trusting in their great numbers, the Arabs went into the decisive battle as into a holy war, with an enthusiasm that was intensified by the presence of their wives and children whom they had taken along to witness their triumph. ‘Abd-al-Mu’min crushed them at Setif on April 28, 1153.

Tunisia now lay open to the invader. In a desperate attempt to stem the tide, Roger sent a fleet against Bona under the command of
Philip of Mahdia, who had succeeded the recently deceased George of Antioch as admiral. With the help of Arab auxiliaries, Philip laid siege to the strong coastal fortress, which he conquered in the fall of 1153. This victory was the last feat of arms accomplished in the reign of Roger II.

William I, Roger's youngest and only surviving son, succeeded him as second king of Sicily (1154–1166). But he did not inherit his father's industry or interest in the details of government. In June 1154 he appointed Maio of Bari, a commoner who had worked his way up to the highest position in the royal chancery under Roger II, "admiral of the admirals". From the beginning of the new regime the feudal barons, who had chafed under Roger's iron grip and waited only for his death to do away with royal absolutism, were determined to overthrow the commoner who monopolized royal favor and power. They were ready to join hands with any foreign enemy of the kingdom who would engage the king in war, and they had not long to wait for the occasion. As if overnight, all the hostile forces that had threatened the kingdom under Roger, but had been checked by his diplomacy and good luck, were loosed upon his son. What saved the kingdom was the fact that the dreaded coalition between the Byzantine and the German emperors, who at first planned to ally against "the usurper of two empires", never came off. Yet to its very end the Norman kingdom of Sicily never came closer to complete collapse than in the fall and winter of 1155–1156. The Byzantines held the Adriatic coast from Vieste to Brindisi. A papal army was advancing on Benevento. Apulia was aflame with revolts of the cities and barons, which spread to Sicily where rebellion had never before gained a foothold. But the emergency shook William out of his usual lethargy, and showed his remarkable talents. The Byzantines were soon driven out, never to wage war on Italian soil again, and the royal power was restored. In the spring of 1157 the king was able to take the offensive, to launch a great naval expedition against the Greek island of Euboea, and even to plan a raid on Constantinople itself.

The king's victories were matched by Maio's diplomatic successes. He concluded the peace of Benevento with pope Hadrian IV in June 1156, and in the spring of 1158 extended it to include the Byzantine emperor. Yet, despite the final triumph of Sicilian arms and diplomacy, the great crisis of 1155–1157 had dismal consequences. It cost the kingdom its leading position in the Mediterranean and its colonies in Africa.
In April 1154 war had broken out with the Fatimids of Egypt, who had violated their old agreement with Roger by entering into commercial relations with the republic of Pisa. William sent a fleet of sixty vessels to the Egyptian coast for a surprise attack on Tinnis, Damietta, Rosetta, and Alexandria. The enterprise as such was successful. An enormous haul of gold and silver and other treasure was carried home, and the fleet showed its worth by inflicting heavy losses on a numerically superior Byzantine force which tried to block its way. But the Egyptians soon retaliated at the same time that the Muwaḥḥids, from their newly conquered ports in Algeria, were sending out corsairs to raid the Italian and Sicilian coasts. Again, in a clash with one of these corsair flotillas returning from a looting raid on Pozzuoli, the Sicilian fleet was victorious.

But ‘Abd-al-Mu’min was not discouraged. He spread the rumor that he was preparing an “invasion of Sicily, Apulia, and Rome”, meanwhile getting ready to conquer Tunisia. The moment was well chosen. Weakened by revolts and at war with the Byzantines, the government at Palermo was able neither to send needed reinforcements to Africa nor to keep the military governors in the African cities under close control. Ibn-Khaldūn reports that the Norman commanders began to exploit and ill-treat the natives. The ‘amils, who had been picked by king Roger from among the local shaikhs and whose loyalty had — it was hoped — been guaranteed by hostages taken to Palermo, were well informed about the troubles facing king William and Maio. They felt that the time had come to shake off the yoke of the “infidel” and to rally round the Muwaḥḥid ruler, whose political and religious cause had been so visibly blessed by God. Their fight for political independence was to become part of the holy war for the rightful imām and for his new religion. The Muwaḥḥid ruler, for his part, exploited to the full the unrest in the cities, weaving intrigues and winning partisans who agitated for his cause.

By the spring of 1159 all Roger’s conquests from Tunis to Tripoli had shaken off Sicilian rule except for the great capital and naval base of Mahdia. After their successful revolt, the governor and

people of Sfax had hoped to take Mahdia by surprise. They only succeeded, however, in penetrating into the commercial suburb of Zawila, because there the number of Christian residents was small. Their attempt to take the fortress itself was thwarted. The Sicilian government, it would appear, made great efforts to hold this important maritime center against heavy odds. Having just driven the Byzantines from Apulia, king William and Maio sent twenty galleys with men, arms, and supplies to Mahdia. With the help of the Norman garrison took the offensive, reconquered Zawila, and even extended Norman rule as far as Cape Bon. William organized Zawila as a center for fugitive Christians, those who had fled from Algeria after its conquest by ‘Abd-al-Mu’min and those ousted from the rebellious cities of Tunisia. According to Robert of Torigny, he even established an archbishop there, but if so, this arrangement was of short duration. Early in 1159 the Muwahhid caliph ‘Abd-al-Mu’min led a well trained and well equipped army of 100,000 into Tunisia, and received the surrender of Sfax, Tripoli, and other cities from Roger’s former ‘amils, whom he confirmed in their offices. Then, seeing that he could not take Mahdia by assault, he drew a tight blockade around the town with his army and navy. About six months later, in January or February 1160, he forced the Sicilian garrison to surrender. Tunisia was restored to the Moslems.\(^{38}\)

Contemporaries were quick to accuse Maio of deliberately abandoning the garrison of Mahdia to its fate and of betraying the cause of Christendom. They charged him, among much else, with advising the king to give up Mahdia and the other African outposts in order to free the treasury from a “useless and costly burden”. This and other practical considerations may indeed have played a part. The relief of Mahdia would not inevitably have led to the reconquest of the African coast. There were too many hazards involved in an all-out war with ‘Abd-al-Mu’min, especially at a time when Sicily was threatened by an invasion from the north led

\(^{38}\) On the loss of the African cities, see the sources listed above, notes 25 and 32. Of the Latin writers, Hugo Falcandus is the most important, but his account of the fall of Mahdia and the revolution in the kingdom that followed is distorted by his bias against Maio. On Maio’s responsibility for the loss of Mahdia see also Chronica Ferrarentsi (ed. A. Gaudenzi, Monumenta historica ed. della Societa napoletana di storia patria, ser. I, Naples, 1888), p. 29. On the events, compare Chalandon, Domination normande, II, 236-244, and Amari, Storia dei musulmani, III, 474-502. For the reconquest of Zawila (“Sibilla”) and the alleged establishment of an archbishop there, see Robert of Torigny (MGH, SS., VI), p. 506; note also Amari, Storia dei musulmani, III, 483-484. After the fall of Mahdia, bishop Cosmas of Mahdia took refuge in Palermo. He was buried in the cathedral, where an inventory of his treasures and books is still preserved. See La Mantia, “La Sicilia ed il suo dominio nell’ Africa,” Archivio storico siciliano, n.s., XLIV, 168, note 1.
by Frederick Barbarossa. But such political realism could only be misunderstood by "honor"-conscious Norman knights and zealous priests. It is certain that the fall of Mahdia added to Maio’s unpopularity and helped to rekindle the flames of rebellion against the king, who was now believed to be the helpless victim of his minister. Nevertheless, the immediate antecedents of the rebellion that broke out in March 1161, a little more than a year after the fall of Mahdia, are obscure. We know only that during the summer of 1160 Maio had the Moslems of Palermo disarmed, perhaps in the hope of silencing his critics. The rebels, however, assassinated him, imprisoned the king in his palace, and then turned on the Moslems of Palermo, the court eunuchs, the officials, the tax-collectors, and the merchants, slaughtering a considerable number. When later, after a successful counter-revolution, Moslem officials and courtiers made their comeback, they took a terrible revenge upon the Christians who had participated in the rebellion.

With the exception of occasional raids, neither William I nor his son William II (1166–1189) resumed Roger’s policy of conquest and occupation in North Africa. The Berber revolts which had led to the loss of the cities in the 1150’s were sufficient warning of the risks involved. In William II’s time the Muwaḥḥid ruler himself, Yūsuf ibn-‘Abd-al-Mu’min, had to struggle against revolts staged by the tribes and princes of the same Berbers of Tunisia who had once hailed the coming of the new caliph with so much enthusiasm. William II was inclined to open negotiations with the Muwaḥḥid. Sicilian interests urgently required an end of the hostilities that exposed the Italian coasts to African corsairs and closed the African markets to Sicilian grain. Plagued by anarchy and famine, Tunisia also needed peace. Therefore, when William’s ambassadors arrived in Mahdia in 1180, the African ruler was ready to make concessions. We have contradictory reports about the terms of the peace ratified in Palermo the same year, but it is certain that they dealt primarily with economic questions. Yūsuf agreed to pay a yearly sum to the Sicilian treasury. This did not involve any political dependence, but was the price of protection for Moslem merchants buying wheat and other commodities in Sicily for the suffering people of their homeland. The Sicilians also probably received the privilege of establishing warehouses in African cities. Both sides kept the agreements even beyond the stipulated ten years. Even William’s frequent interference in the political affairs of the Balearic islands, where he occasionally sup-
ported the anti-Muwaḥḥid, pro-Mūrābīt faction, did not disturb the commercial agreements, including the financial obligations that they entailed for the rex Marroc et Africæ, later for the "king" of Tunisia. They became a part of the Sicilian political heritage and an important source of income for the Sicilian treasury under the dynasties succeeding the Norman house. As late as the fifteenth century the Aragonese ruler of the "Two Sicilies" would base a claim upon them.39

Outside North Africa, however, William II reversed his father's policy of caution and revived his grandfather's policy of aggressive expansion in the eastern Mediterranean. Like Roger, he was ready to profit from a new crusading movement; but unlike Roger, who never aspired to the reputation of a crusader in the strict sense of the word, William tried to achieve his goal by assuming the protection of the Christians in the east and proclaiming an uncompromising attitude of hostility toward the enemies of his faith. He was allowed to do so by the general conditions of his kingdom at the time he took over the reins of government from his mother in 1171.

Relations with the papacy were good, and the treaty of Venice in 1177 brought a fifteen-year truce with Barbarossa. Internally, the kingdom was at peace, and the authority of the crown unquestioned. At the congress of Venice William's "orators" boasted that he had never waged war against Christian princes; that he was the only one who had directed all his efforts toward the defense of the Holy Sepulcher; that, without sparing his treasury, year by year he had dispatched his ships and knights to fight the infidel and make the sea safe for Christian pilgrims going to the Holy Land.40 Meanwhile this champion of Christendom and the crusade lived like an oriental despot, complete with harem, eunuchs, and slaves, most of them ostensibly Christian converts, but in fact Moslems allowed to

39 Mas Latrie, Traité de paix, pp. 51, 162–163; Amari, Storia dei musulmani, III, 524–527, 645; and Giunta, Medioevo mediterraneo, pp. 142 ff. The first evidence for the prolongation of the treaty beyond ten years is found in the Chronica regia Coloniensis, ad ann. 1195 (ed. G. Waite, Hanover, 1880). "Rex Africæ ... imperatori [Henrico VI] mittit." For the older literature on the question of the nature of the treaty, see La Mantia, "La Sicilia e il suo dominio nell' Africa," Archivio storico siciliano, n.s., XLIV, 168, note 2.

practice their religion under the king’s very eyes. Indeed, under William’s regime the Moslems of Sicily enjoyed the blessings of an official policy of toleration. Like his predecessors William employed Sicilian Saracens in his army and navy and did not hesitate to lead them against Christian princes. Also the world must have wondered why this fervent advocate of the crusade never went in person on any of his many expeditions. In fact, he was the only scion of the house of Hauteville who all his life avoided the dangers and strains of war. Yet the world was impressed by his readiness to send knights and marines overseas to die in Egypt and Syria. William’s decisions, though essentially the results of an untutored ambition, were taken as signs of Christian devotion and a true crusading spirit. He wasted his resources and manpower with little benefit to his kingdom, but he earned the reputation of being a “protector and defender of the Christians of Outremer”.

An occasion for serious intervention in the Levant was not long in coming. The news of the defeat of the Byzantine and Frankish forces at Damietta in 1169 seems to have made a great impression on William. It appears that he began to prepare for an expedition against Egypt shortly after 1171. The situation in Egypt would not have seemed beyond repair; the Byzantine-Frankish alliance stood the test of common defeat; king Amalric of Jerusalem held the friendship of the Assassins; and most important, Saladin’s position was growing increasingly difficult. His relations with Nur-ad-Din were strained to the breaking-point, and, after he declared the Sunnite religion of the caliphs at Baghdad to be the orthodox creed for all Egypt, his Shi’ite opponents were seeking to encompass his overthrow. In 1173 some of the Shi’ite nobles began negotiations with the kings of Jerusalem and Sicily for common action against Saladin. An embassy which Amalric sent to the west

41 There may have been a Sicilian expedition to Egypt as early as 1169, when Amalric sent an appeal for help in the reconquest of Damietta. It is generally assumed by historians that there was no response, but Ibn-al-Athir says that “the Franks of Sicily, of Spain, and other countries sent money, men, and arms” to their harassed brethren in the east. On the Sicilian expeditions (alleged or real) to Damietta and Alexandria in 1169 and 1174 and the corsair war with Egypt in 1175–1178, see Abū-Shāmah, Kitāb ar-rauḍatāin [Book of the Two Gardens] (Amari, BAS, I), pp. 536–541; Ibn-al-Athir, Al-kamil (Amari, BAS, I), pp. 491–499 (also in RHC, Or., I, 599–602, 611–614); and al-Maqrizi, Al-muwā’id (Amari, BAS, II), pp. 591–593. For other Arabic sources, see Amari, Storia dei musulmani, III, 515, note 1, 516, note 2. Latin sources include William of Tyre, XXI, 3 (RHC, Occ., I), pp. 1007–1008; Annales Pisan, ad ann. 1175, and Annales Casinensi, ad ann. 1174 (MGH, SS., XIX), pp. 366, 312. Compare Chalandon, Domination normande, II, 394–398; Amari, Storia dei musulmani, III, 515–524 (with a chronology of the expedition to Alexandria); and Grousset, Histoire des croisades, II, 594–596, 617–619. Al-Maqrizi speaks of a major naval force sent to Damietta, which is contradicted by Saladin’s own official report on William’s expedition to Alexandria, described as the first that the king launched. See Chalandon, Domination normande, II, 394–395.
to renew his urgent appeals for help probably met William at Palermo and discussed with him a plan for common action. After the landing of a Christian force near the Delta, and in the event Saladin should march his army to the coast to fight them off, the Shi'ite nobility would arouse the populace of Cairo and Fustat and restore the Fatimids to the throne. Should Saladin remain in the city with only minor forces, the Fatimid partisans would arrest him, and the Sicilian fleet would lay siege to Alexandria while an army under Amalric closed in on the city by land.

William now feverishly prepared his navy and army for the early summer of 1174, when the expedition was to get under way. But while these preparations were going on, and while the secrecy surrounding them kept William's potential enemies in suspense, everything went wrong in the east. Saladin learned of the Shi'ite conspiracy, and in April 1174 arrested the ring-leaders and executed them. Neither William of Sicily nor Amalric of Jerusalem learned of this, and therefore could not know that their attack would receive no assistance from a Shi'ite revolt. Then Amalric died on July 11, 1174, just about the time when the Sicilian fleet was to sail for Alexandria. When the expedition reached Alexandria on July 28, the commanders were probably still unaware that, as a result, they would get no assistance from a Frankish army. Consequently the Sicilians were at a considerable disadvantage. Despite the size of their force — even the most conservative sources assert that it consisted of two hundred galleys carrying 30,000 men, including a thousand knights and five hundred Saracen cavalry (the so-called Turcopoles), and more than eighty freighters for horses, equipment, supplies, and war machines — it did not suffice to make the siege of a city as large as Alexandria effective. Another serious setback came right at the outset when the Alexandrians, though taken by surprise, managed to block the entrance to the harbor by sinking all the ships anchored there.

The Sicilian attempt to take the city was thwarted even before Saladin could get there with a relieving force. Saracen reinforcements from the countryside kept pouring into the city, and on July 31 the inhabitants made a sortie during which they succeeded in burning the formidable siege engines placed against their walls. On the night of August 1 they surprised the besiegers' camp, looted and slaughtered, and terrified the Normans, who fled for the ships with their attackers in hot pursuit. The commanders decided to avoid the major disaster which threatened should they clash with Saladin himself, and sailed for home the next morning with the
sad remnants of what, only three days before, had been the proud army of the king of Sicily. Only a small force of three hundred knights, entrenched on a hill near the city, continued the fight, until the very last of them was either killed or taken.

William was not discouraged. He sent two expeditions in 1175–1176 to attack the commercial center of Tinnis near the Nile delta. These were mere raids for plunder, however, with hardly forty ships involved in either action. William also launched three expeditions against the Balearic islands between 1180 and 1186, aimed at eliminating the constant threat to Sicilian and Italian commerce from corsairs through the conquest of Majorca (Mallorca), the largest of the islands. None of these expeditions achieved its goal, and the forces engaged in the third cannot have been very substantial, for by this time Sicily was caught up in a major war with the Byzantines.

The troubles that followed the death of the emperor Manuel in 1180 provided William with an opportunity to intervene in Byzantine affairs. The usurpation of the Byzantine throne by Andronicus Comnenus precipitated rebellions in many parts of the empire. Several of the nobles whose power Andronicus was trying to curb fled to Italy to seek help from William and others. Among them was one of the pretenders to the Byzantine throne, Alexius Comnenus, nephew of the late emperor Manuel. Alexius urged William to conquer the Byzantine empire on his behalf. Because of the final failure of the great plan, historians have reproached William with wanton waste of manpower and material, and with lack of political foresight. But Chalandon convincingly points out that the enterprise was not only politically sound but also promising of success, and that, in fact, William came very close to “consummating triumphantly the heroic epic of his house which the sons of Tancred of Hauteville had started in Italy.”

The land phase of the war with the Byzantines began in June 1185 with the taking of Durazzo, reached its climax in August with a spectacular success, the sack of Thessalonica, and ended in September with the no less spectacular defeat of the Sicilian army at the Strymon river. The Sicilian navy, on the other hand, under the

---

42 On the historical background, see the article on the Balearic Islands in The Encyclopaedia of Islam. On William’s expeditions to the Balears, see Chalandon, Domination normande, II, 398, and Amari, Storia dei musulmani, III, 527–530. The sources are contradictory and vague.

43 The most important source for the expedition against Constantinople that led to the sack of Thessalonica is Eustathius of Thessalonica, De capta Thessalonica librum (CSHB, Bonn, 1842). See also Nicetas Choniates, Historia, De Andronico Commeno, I (CSHB), pp. 386–401. For the
command of Tancred, count of Lecce and future king of Sicily, was never defeated. It cruised in the neighborhood of Constantinople for seventeen days waiting for the army to arrive to lay siege to the city. Afterwards it withdrew in good order to Sicily, ravaging islands and the Greek coast on the way. The war continued relentlessly. To avenge the defeat on the Strymon, William sent a fleet under the command of the sea-captain Margarit of Brindisi to Cyprus to assist the governor of the island, Isaac Comnenus, who had now proclaimed himself emperor. This episode began the career of Margarit, later admiral and count of Malta, nicknamed king, or even god (Neptunus), of the sea. When a Byzantine fleet put into Cyprus, where it discharged an army, Margarit destroyed a large part of it while Isaac Comnenus defeated the army and turned the captured Byzantine generals over to Margarit for confinement in Sicily. Shortly thereafter, Margarit inflicted another defeat on a Byzantine fleet en route to Palestine to support Saladin.

The Norman attack on the Byzantine empire had no little influence on the situation in the east. For one thing, it strengthened Saladin’s position on the eve of his conquest of Jerusalem. Up to this moment the alliance between the Latins of Jerusalem and the Byzantines had proved one of the bulwarks of the Christian position in the east, withstanding even the test of the common defeat at Damietta in 1169. But, in fear of a Sicilian (or even a combined German-Sicilian) attack, Andronicus had accepted Saladin’s overtures and concluded a treaty which was later confirmed by Isaac II Angelus. The Kurdish leader maintained good relations with both Isaac Angelus in Constantinople and Isaac Comnenus in Cyprus. On the other hand, while the attack on the Greek empire had brought the Sicilian king no gain, and probably a serious loss of prestige, it considerably weakened the empire on the Bosporus and showed the way to the conquest of 1203–1204.

The Sicilian assault had clearly revealed the military weakness of Byzantium. Not since Guiscard’s time had the Normans come nearer their goal, and if they had followed up their victory at Thessalonica by marching immediately on the capital, instead of

history of the siege, Nicetas copied Eustathius. Other sources include Ibn-Jubair, Riflah (Amandi, Bas, I); Annales Ccceanenses (MGH, SS., XIX), p. 287; and Estoire d’Eracles, XXIV, 5, 6 (RHC, Occ., II), pp. 112–113. Compare G. Spata, I Siciliani a Salonica (Palermo, 1892), which includes an Italian translation of Eustathius, and Chalandon, Domination normande, II, 400–415. On Byzantium under the Comneni, see below, chapter IV, pp. 123–146.

allowing their forces to disperse and loot, and if complete cooperation between navy and army could have been achieved, they might well have conquered Constantinople. It remained for the Venetians, however, watchful neutrals during the Sicilian-Byzantine war, to draw the appropriate conclusions, and only nineteen years later to put them into effect.

In 1187, when Jerusalem fell to Saladin, an urgent appeal went out for help to hold Tyre, Tripoli, and Antioch. The archbishop of Tyre, Joscius, told William at Palermo of the courageous stand made by the Christians in Tyre under the energetic leadership of Conrad of Montferrat. He probably reproached the king for his un-Christian attitude in imposing an embargo on ships in Sicilian ports early in 1185 which, he claimed, had kept pilgrims from getting to Palestine in time to fight. He also chided William for having pressed pilgrims into his army to fight Christians in the Byzantine empire. William admitted his sins, and in a great display of repentance and mourning he donned a hair-shirt and secluded himself for four days. Then he promised the archbishop that he would appease God by helping the Christians in the east. After all, here was a new occasion to assert himself as the protector of Outremer and to blot out the disgrace of the defeat of 1174. He hastily made his peace with Isaac Angelus and called Margarit home from the eastern theater of war.

Without waiting for the organization of a new crusade, William sent Margarit with some fifty or sixty vessels and two hundred knights to Tyre, where Conrad of Montferrat assigned him the task of defending Tripoli and other places of northern Syria against Saladin who, at the time (the early summer of 1188), was moving his army from Damascus for the conquest of the Syrian cities still held by the Franks.\(^{45}\) Margarit succeeded in reorganizing and strengthening the defenses of Tripoli so efficiently as to discourage Saladin from besieging it. But the admiral was unable to prevent

Saladin’s victorious march northward along the coast and his conquest of Tortosa, Maraclea, and Jabala. Arabic historians report that after all his attempts had been frustrated, Margarit approached Saladin with the proposal of an alliance, on condition that Saladin leave the Christian cities alone and guarantee them their land and safety; in return he would receive their help in the conquest of neighboring territories held by Nūr-ad-Dīn’s heirs, the atabegs of northern Syria. Should Saladin reject the pact, Margarit threatened an invasion of the east by such forces of western Christendom as to make Saladin’s resistance hopeless. As a matter of course, Saladin refused. Apparently the Christians knew that Saladin hoped to dominate the north of Syria, were aware of his rivalry with the heirs of Nūr-ad-Dīn, and tried to exploit this situation. At any rate, it seems that it was through this interview that Saladin was first informed about a new crusade being prepared in the west.\footnote{See Imād-ad-Dīn, Al-fath al-qust (Amari, BAS, I), pp. 343–344; Abū-Shāmah, Arraudatāin (Amari, BAS, I), pp. 543–544, and Ibn-al-Athir, Al-kāmil (Amari, BAS, I), pp. 499–502. The west was informed of Saladin’s ambition to subjugate the atabegs of northern Syria. An alliance with the new sultan of Egypt seemed within the range of political possibilities. Saladin himself made a similar offer; see Gesta regis Henrici II (Rolls Series, XLIX), II, 175–176, 180. Amari (Storia dei musulmani, III, 539, note 1) believes that Saladin made this offer after a defeat suffered at the hands of Margarit (before 1190).}

During the following summer Margarit received reinforcements from Sicily. He must have realized that he could not attack Saladin’s coastal cities and castles directly. Instead, he turned to harassing and chasing the enemy like the corsair he may have been in his early days. Operating back and forth between Tyre and Tripoli and also along the coast near Antioch, he dealt telling blows at the Saracen freebooters and warships, keeping the lifeline for Christian ships carrying supplies, arms, and later an ever growing number of crusaders to the harassed Christians in their Syrian strongholds. It is to these activities that an English writer refers when gratefully crediting Margarit with having supported Antioch, defended Tripoli, and saved Tyre.\footnote{Richard of London, Itinerarium (Rolls Series, XXXVIII), I, 27: “... quis dubitat quod Antiochia retenta, quod Tripolis defensa, quod Tyrus servata...” On the reaction of the Arab historians who refer to Margarit’s tactics as purposeless blundering, see Amari, Storia dei musulmani, III, 534. On Margarit’s activities at Acre, see Gesta regis Henrici II (Rolls Series, XLIX), II, 54, and Robert of Axyerre (MGH, SS., XXVI), p. 253. Compare Amari, Storia dei musulmani, III, 539–540. Margarit’s adventures were glorified as “fes per mer” by the troubadour Raymond Vidal, cited by Chalandon, Domination normande, II, 417, note 4. On Margarit’s identity and career, see C. A. Garufi, “Margarito di Brindisi, conte di Malta e ammiraglio di Sicilia,” Miscellanea... Salinas (Palermo, 1907), pp. 273–282.} The admiral’s activities in Syria came to an end late in the fall of 1189. On November 18 king William of Sicily died, and Margarit was probably recalled by Tancred, William’s temporary successor, who badly needed armed support.
in his struggle for the throne. Fortunately for the Christians in the east, more and more crusaders, mostly from northern Europe, kept arriving at Acre and filled the gap left by the departure of the Sicilian ships.

King William must have been greatly satisfied with the news of Margarit’s successes, which reflected credit on himself. He intended that these should be only the harbinger of greater things to come. Knowing that archbishop Joscius of Tyre intended to win the kings of France and England for a new crusade, William approached them himself and laid before them a plan for common action, according to which Sicily would be the meeting-place of the crusading armies from the west. The king offered the use of his harbors, his navy, and other facilities and resources of his kingdom. Jointly with the English and French, the Sicilians would cross the seas and wage war against Saladin. The plan was the same as that suggested by Roger II to Louis VII of France on the eve of the Second Crusade and rejected by the assembly at Étampes in February 1147. This time it must have been accepted by the western princes immediately, for in his interview with Saladin in July or August of 1188 Margarit was already threatening a joint crusade of the kings of Christendom. Whether William would have participated in person had he lived must remain uncertain. More likely he would have named Margarit or count Tancred of Lecce as his representative.

When William felt his death near, he bequeathed a handsome legacy to Henry II of England, his father-in-law. Part of it consisted of a large amount of grain, wine, and money, and of a hundred armed galleys with equipment and supplies to last for two years. Obviously the legacy was intended to fulfill William’s crusading

48 It is certain that Margarit was in Messina in October 1190, for he participated in the negotiations between Tancred’s representatives and the kings of England and France. His siding with Tancred aroused the suspicion of the English, and he had to leave Messina. Richard confiscated his property in the city along with that of other suspect magnates. See Gesta regis Henrici II (Rolls Series, XLIX), II, 128, 138; compare Chalandon, Domination normande, II, 438–439.

49 See Estoire d’Eracles, XXIV, 7 (RHC, Occ., II), pp. 114–115. Among the authors who mention William’s contributions to the struggle against Saladin only Francesco Pipino, who wrote much later, assumes as a matter of course that William, had he lived, would have gone on the crusade. Some of the more recent Sicilian historians credit the story of William’s participation in Margarit’s expedition to Tripoli and Tyre in 1188, but they do not quote any contemporary evidence. See La Lumia, Storia della Sicilia, pp. 624–635.

50 And in addition, many precious objects such as a gold table mounted on two gold tripods, a silk tent in which two hundred knights could dine together, and silver cups and dishes. It is doubtful that this legacy to Henry II, as described in the Gesta regis Henrici II (Rolls Series, XLIX), II, 132–133, formed part of a general testament. According to the Annales Capitani, ad ann. 1189 (MOH, SS., XIX), p. 314, William died “sine liberis et testamento”.
obligations even after his death. It probably reflects his proposed contributions had he lived to see the crusade launched.

Whether full participation of Sicilians in the Third Crusade would have changed the military and political situation in the Near East in favor of the Latin Christians of Outremer nobody can tell. It might well have brought the kingdom of Sicily economic and political advantages, and a position that could have served as a springboard for the conquest of Constantinople. From this point of view William’s death was a tragic misfortune for the kingdom. When conditions which two kings of Sicily had long tried to bring about were finally present, there was no one who could benefit from them.

Tancred of Lecce had been elected and crowned king by a national party headed by Matthew of Salerno, but he was hardly able to establish his authority against those who saw in the new German emperor Henry VI, husband of Roger II’s daughter Constance, the legitimate heir endorsed by the late king. Therefore, when the kings of France and England successively landed in Sicily in September 1190, Tancred, who feared an invasion of Apulia by Henry’s armies and new rebellions by his vassals, could think neither of participating in the crusade nor even of making a substantial contribution to it. The very legacy bequeathed by William to Henry II added to Tancred’s embarrassment. It was this legacy, and the dowry for his sister Joan, king William’s queen, that gave Richard the Lionhearted a pretext for entering Sicily as an enemy and occupying Messina. These incidents gave rise to rumors of an English plan to conquer the whole island. It all ended with an agreement in the negotiation of which king Philip Augustus of France played a somewhat ambiguous role. Tancred paid off the obligations both to the dowager queen and to the greedy English king. Fifteen galleys and four transports, which Richard received as a gift from king Tancred shortly before he embarked for Acre, were all that was left of the great project nurtured by the last legitimate Norman king of Sicily.

When in 1194, after the death of Tancred and the defeat of his partisans, Henry VI ascended the throne of the Hautevilles in Palermo, the Norman tradition was once more revived. Henry’s somewhat vague imperial dream “to subjugate all lands” now took on the concrete and distinctive traits of the Norman-Sicilian

51 Often erroneously termed “of Ajello” (Aiello), apparently because his son Richard became count of Ajello. See Jamison, Admiral Eugenius of Sicily, p. 94, n. 1.
52 See below, chapter II, pp. 58–61.
program of Mediterranean expansion in three directions, towards North Africa, Constantinople, and the Near East. As regards North Africa, Henry fell heir to the agreement between William II and the “king of Africa” (emir of Tunis), received the tribute, and continued in good commercial relations with him. To settle his account, both inherited and personal, with the emperor in Constantinople, Henry wrested from the weak Alexius III Angelus the concession of a high annual tribute. Finally, for his ambitious plans in the Near East he proclaimed, prepared, and launched a crusade, the first German expedition to start from Italian bases.\(^{53}\) The crusade began under good auspices, for even before it got under way, king Leon II of Cilician Armenia and king Aimery of Cyprus (the later titular king of Jerusalem) asked to receive their crowns and lands at the hands of Henry or his representative. But death cut short all these hopes, and it was Henry’s son Frederick II who was destined to be the first king of Sicily to wear the crown of Jerusalem, although by then not much more than prestige would be attached to it.\(^{54}\) The traditional Norman-Sicilian policy would inspire and direct later kings of Sicily, the Hohenstaufen Manfred and the Angevin Charles. But the great days of Sicilian prominence in the politics and commerce of the Mediterranean had come to an end with the death of William II.

\(^{53}\) See below, chapter III, pp. 116–122.

\(^{54}\) See below, chapter XII, pp. 442–462.
2. Western Europe and the Mediterranean (Map by the University of Wisconsin Cartographic Laboratory)