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**The *Book of Roger* and the Creation of the Norman State**

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A thesis submitted to fulfil requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy

*This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work.  
This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.*

*I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all  
the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.*

*Katherine Adelaide Jacka*

To Kuba and baby Wanda for bringing light into my life.

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the description of Sicily found in the large-scale twelfth-century Arabic geographical work, the *Book of Roger*, and enquires into the role this description played in the

construction of the new Norman state under King Roger II (r. 1130-1154 CE). While Roger's decision to commission the *Book of Roger* has traditionally been attributed to his intellectual curiosity and wish to appear as a philosopher king, this thesis will argue that the decision to commission the *Book of Roger* was part of a deliberate strategic and political program undertaken by Roger and his advisors to create a Norman state in the Mediterranean, drawing heavily on the multicultural traditions of twelfth-century Sicily. Although the *Book of Roger* is a geography of the entire *oikumene* (known world), Sicily is given a central position and is represented as an abundant paradise, both secure and prosperous. The description provides an unprecedented level of strategic and economic detail on the island regarding toponymy, settlement and agricultural and commercial output. The description is not without its limitations and is largely 'people-less'; there is a dearth of information on population, religion and culture despite the multicultural nature of twelfth-century Sicily. I will argue that rather than oversights, these omissions were entirely deliberate, designed to present the centre of Roger's kingdom as a homogeneous territory, a fact which was belied by circumstances on the ground. Despite the limitations of the text, this thesis will argue that the *Book of Roger* provides the most comprehensive geographical text on Sicily produced up to the twelfth century and well beyond. With this in mind, based on the modern critical edition of the book, I have completed an English translation of the description in the hopes this detailed text will be more greatly utilised by scholars working on Sicily in the Middle Ages. My English translation appears in Appendix I and there are excerpts taken from the translation throughout the body of the thesis.

Finally, although Idrīsi's original maps are beautifully drawn, they present a greatly simplified version of what is found in the text of the *Book of Roger* and therefore do not do justice to the work undertaken by the author. Using Geographic Information System (GIS) software, this thesis will for the first time provide a series of maps which reflect the rich data in Idrīsi's description of Sicily in the twelfth century. It is my hope that these maps will prove

useful to scholars working on the history and archeology of Sicily in both the Muslim and Norman periods.

### Transliteration Scheme

Arabic Letter	Transliteration
ا	ā
ب	b
ت	t
ث	th
ج	j

ح	ḥ
خ	kh
د	d
ذ	dh
ر	r
ز	z
س	s
ش	sh
ص	ṣ
ض	ḍ
ط	t
ظ	th
ع	‘a/a‘
غ	gh
ف	f
ق	q
ك	k
ل	l
م	m
ن	n
ه	h
و	ū/w
ي	ī/ y
آ	ā
أ	a‘
ة	a
ى	ā
َ	a
ِ	i
ُ	u

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### **List of Abbreviations**

**BAS:** *Biblioteca arabo-sicula: Raccolta di testi arabi che toccano la geografia, la storia, la biografia e la bibliografia della Sicilia*, Michele Amari

**EI2:** *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*

## Introduction

The year 1139 was a turning point for Roger II of Sicily. After years of bitter hostility with the Papacy and the barons of South Italy, his troops convincingly defeated the Papal armies at Galluccio and he was recognised as King of Sicily.<sup>1</sup> At this time, there was a shift in Roger's fortunes and he began to assert his authority as an autonomous Mediterranean monarch, pushing forward his vision for the kingdom. This included an ambitious building program, comprehensive reform of the state administration, as well as an attempt to extend Norman territory with attacks on North Africa and the Byzantine territories of the eastern Mediterranean. It was also at this propitious time that Roger commissioned the Muslim polymath, Muḥammad Ibn al-Idrīsi (hereafter Idrīsi) to start work on the *Book of Roger*.<sup>2</sup>

While the political, administrative and artistic history of the early Norman kingdom has received substantial attention from researchers, the original scholarly output at Roger's court – best exemplified in the *Book of Roger* – has been largely overlooked. This thesis will redress this research gap and show how the *Book of Roger* played an important role in the program of state-building undertaken by Roger post-1139. Through an in-depth analysis of the comprehensive description of Sicily found in the book, this thesis will show how Roger utilised intellectual scholarship no less than military power to ensure the future of the Norman kingdom.

As the seat of Roger's government, Sicily played a strategic role in the creation of the Norman state; it was imperative that Roger and his advisors have an accurate understanding of

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<sup>1</sup> For an account of this conflict, see Falco of Benevento, 'The Chronicle of Falco of Benevento' trans. by Graham A. Loud in *Roger II and the Creation of the Kingdom of Sicily* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2012), pp. 235-247.

<sup>2</sup> The Arabic title of the book is *Kitāb nuzhat al-mushtāq fī ikhtirāq al-āfāq* (The Book of Pleasure for those who Desire to Visit Far Away Places). *Kitāb Rujār* (the *Book of Roger*) was first cited in the work of the Andalusian geographer Ibn Sa'īd al-Maghribi (b. 1213) and it is by this name that book has become most commonly known.

the island and its context in relation to surrounding, and often hostile, territories. Relative to its geographical size, Idrīsi's description of Sicily is the longest single section in the *Book of Roger*;<sup>3</sup> the island is described settlement by settlement, spanning the entire coast and the interior. Idrīsi provides an unprecedented level of detail on toponymy (in many cases Idrīsi is the only extant source of these Arabic toponyms), distances, fortifications, agriculture, commerce, natural resources and topography. A wide variety of superlative adjectives are used which serve to present Sicily as an abundant, verdant and prosperous place while other adjectives appear designed to demonstrate the easily-defensible and impregnable state of the island's various settlements.

Despite the strengths of this account, Idrīsi's description is not without its limitations. These limitations, I argue, are regarding the people and culture of the island, factors Idrīsi largely ignores. While in other parts of the *Book of Roger*, particularly in sections on Sub-Saharan Africa and the Far East, Idrīsi goes into great detail regarding people and customs, occasionally offering tales of a fantastical nature (known in Arabic as *'ajā'ib*), the Sicily description provides no such information. Cultural features such as religion or ceremony are mentioned on only a few occasions and the descriptions of religious sites are brief, of the one hundred and fifty settlements mentioned, mosques are mentioned on less than five occasions and churches even less. There is no sense that Sicily is a place of cultural diversity made up of Normans, Lombards, Greeks, Arabs, Berbers and Jews.

There is one exception to this – the Normans themselves, and in particular Roger II. Idrīsi devotes the first portion of his account to the accomplishments of the Normans, associating them closely with the fate of the island. This is in stark contrast with his description

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<sup>3</sup> The Sicily description is approximately 8500 words, while *all* mainland Italy and North and West Africa total 3000 words.

of other Norman territories, such as Calabria, Apulia and Malta where the Normans, and Roger II, do not feature at all. Rather than seeing these choices as oversights, I argue that these omissions were in fact deliberate, designed to present Sicily as a homogeneous and peaceful land while at the same time promoting the greatness of the Normans in the Mediterranean with their base in Sicily.

The homogeneity of Sicilian culture presented in the *Book of Roger* belied the situation on the ground. The land that Roger's father, Roger I, conquered in the second half of the eleventh century was majority Muslim and Arabic-speaking along with a sizeable Greek community.<sup>4</sup> Both Roger and his father fostered Latin immigration to the island and what emerged during Roger II's rule was an island made up of three distinct cultural groups: Arab, Greek and Latin.

### **Theoretical Framework: Empire**

This thesis takes the theme of 'empire' as a historical concept that is 'good to think with'.<sup>5</sup> While I do not maintain that Roger II was attempting to create an empire *per se*, I do argue that his actions throughout the 1140s emulated many of the features of the empires that surrounded him. Roger's rivals were amongst the most powerful empires of the Middle Ages: the Western Roman Empire, with the Papal States directly to the north, the Roman empire in the east - Byzantium - based at Constantinople and the Fatimids with their base at Cairo. In order to combat these challengers, the king looked to diverse cultural traditions, in particular Islamic

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<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of the demographic mix of Sicily at the Norman conquest, see Alex Metcalfe, *Muslims and Christians in Norman Sicily. Arabic Speakers and the End of Islam* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 1-29.

<sup>5</sup> This phrase was first coined by the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss to distinguish between the subject of a description and that which provides the basis for thinking and theorising, see Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism*, trans. by Rodney Needham (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), p. 89.

and Graeco-Byzantine, as his model of government. This thesis will argue that King Roger's decision to commission the Arabic-language *Book of Roger* was a potent reflection of this process.

Throughout human history, empires have been the most durable form of social and political organisation, and one that can be identified globally, from China to Rome, as such empires are 'good to think with' allowing room for comparison and connection across time and space. As Patrick Manning has argued, the political narrative is easily the most prominent narrative in world history, with scholars focussed on '...the formation of early states, the development of empires, the periodic rise and fall of imperial systems in different areas of the world, and the succession of dominant powers up to the present'.<sup>6</sup>

Unlike the creation of nation-states, empires are not a purely western phenomenon;<sup>7</sup> empires have emerged and re-emerged over thousands of years globally. The longest-lasting empire is the Empire of Japan (1700 plus years) with other non-Western empires such as the Zhou Empire (1046–256 BCE) and the Ethiopian Empire (1270-1936 CE) enduring more than six hundred years. The Mediterranean region has hosted amongst the longest-lasting empires, including the Byzantine Empire (c.330-1453 CE) and the Western Roman Empire (800/962-1806 CE) both of which were rivals of Roger.

It is important to state clearly that I am in no way arguing that Empire is a positive phenomenon, indeed imperial systems have been criticised, deservedly so, for their emphasis

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<sup>6</sup> Patrick Manning, *Navigating World History, Historians Create a Global Past* (New York & Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 184.

<sup>7</sup> Although the idea of the nation has been present over a long period and across cultures, here I am referring to the modern idea of a sovereign political and social body based around a uniform national identity first articulated in Europe by the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) see Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 1987) & Derek Croxton, 'The Treaty of Westphalia and the Origins of Sovereignty', *The International History Review*, Vol. 21 (1999), pp. 569-852.

on the domination of one group over another and for the use of hard power in maintaining domination. However, where the study of empire was seen as unfashionable a generation ago, it has now returned to the centre of the political agenda, and as a form of government has received some retrospective legitimacy.<sup>8</sup> The reason for this is that, as opposed to the model of the nation-state, where cultural diversity tends to be de-emphasised, empires provide examples of durable multi-ethnic societies, where difference and diversity were seen as assets. Writing of the Spanish empire, Henry Kamen has demonstrated that rather than being ‘Spanish’, this empire was established and maintained by diverse peoples, including Portuguese, Catalans, Jews and Africans.<sup>9</sup> Challenging the traditional World Systems theory of the domination of ‘centre’ over ‘periphery’, more recent studies on the dynamics of empires emphasise interdependency and cultural transfer within individual empires, and between empires (so-called ‘entangled histories’).<sup>10</sup> In a globalised world, where the nation-state model has brought about bitter conflict (in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda for example), a deeper understanding of the mechanics of durable large-scale multicultural political units has become more critical.

It is true that empires are structures of power where hierarchy is acutely felt. They are ‘large-scale political units, expansionist in character...polities that maintain distinction and hierarchy as they incorporate new people’.<sup>11</sup> However, empires also demonstrate tolerance and adaptability in the face of diversity; they are acutely aware of difference and even thrive on it.

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<sup>8</sup> Dominic Lieven, ‘Empire, History and the Contemporary Global Order’, in *Proceedings of the British Academy*, Vol. 131, 2004 Lectures (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> See Henry Kamen, *Empire: How Spain Became a World Power, 1492-1763* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> For more on ‘entangled histories’ see Michel Espagne and Michael Werner (eds.), *Les Relations Interculturelles Dans L'espace Franco-Allemand (XVIII Et XIX SièCle)* (Paris: Éd. Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1988); Patrick Manning, *Navigating World History*; C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2004).

<sup>11</sup> Jane Burbank & Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), p. 9.

By nature multi-cultural polities, throughout history empires have taken on ‘a variety of heterogeneous political and administrative arrangements...with complex patterns established for negotiating diversity among its population’.<sup>12</sup>

### *Empire and Culture*

While the military and economic aspects of empire have been well-researched, the cultural and social aspects of empires have received less attention. One significant exception is Edward Said’s 1993 book, *Culture and Imperialism*. In the book Said argues that empires have been responsible for bringing diverse peoples together: ‘partly because of empire, all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated and unmonolithic’.<sup>13</sup> This process leads to unexpected and not altogether negative results, as, according to Said, it is through inter-cultural interactions and interconnections that unique cultural forms evolve. For example, despite the violence of the Mongol expansion from the early thirteenth century, Mongol rulers such as Genghis Khan were highly adaptive, leading to what has been described as the *Pax Mongolica*, which saw the widespread transmission of knowledge, goods and statecraft across Asia.<sup>14</sup> Empires can be seen as ‘instruments of cohesion’, an institutional device for internalising cultural transfer.<sup>15</sup> On the surface these interactions may appear negative, built on sharp divisions of power;

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<sup>12</sup> Mrinalini Sinha, ‘Projecting Power. Empires, Colonies, and World History’, in *A Companion to World History*, ed. by Douglas Northrop (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), p. 259.

<sup>13</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. xxv. For more recent studies on empire and culture see Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York & London: Routledge, 1995), Kathleen Wilson (ed.), *A New Imperial History, Culture, Identity and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), Bernd Hamm & Russell Charles Smandych (eds.), *Cultural Imperialism: Essays on the Political Economy of Cultural Domination* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

<sup>14</sup> Burbank & Cooper, *Empires in World History*, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Charles S. Maier, ‘Empires Past...Empires Future’, *South Central Review*, Vol. 26, 3 (2009), p. 2.

however, in the ensuing interaction, these lines become softer, cultural transfer becomes a negotiation, leading to what post-colonial theorists term ‘hybridity’.<sup>16</sup>

The development of cultural frameworks to promote imperial success has been a feature across empires, from the Han dynasty to the Ottomans, and there is no doubt there is a pernicious self-interest in the development of these structures. By ‘cultural frameworks’ I mean the traditions, value systems, myths and symbols that are common to a particular society.<sup>17</sup> These social customs are usually linked with the past, they are ‘...a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past...’.<sup>18</sup> According to the late, great British historian Eric Hobsbawm, these ‘invented traditions’ are ‘largely factitious’, not innate or naturally occurring, but rather constructed by the state as a unifying force.<sup>19</sup>

Due to the heterogeneous nature of empires discussed above, cultural frameworks are often constructed out of diverse cultural elements. Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper cite the example of the Ottoman Empire (c. 1299–1922/1923 CE) as particularly indicative of this phenomenon; one of the most culturally diverse empires, the Ottomans used this diversity to great political and social advantage, blending ‘...Turkic, Byzantine, Arab, Mongol and Persian traditions into durable, flexible, and transforming power’.<sup>20</sup>

Empires look to predecessors for their cultural inspiration. This was true in the case of Rome where Greece provided the inspiration with the Hellenic notion of ‘universal empire’, or

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<sup>16</sup> The concept of ‘hybridity’ is most associated with the post-colonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha see Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>17</sup> Jack A. Goldstone, ‘Revolutions’ in *The SAGE Handbook of Comparative Politics*, ed. by Todd Landman & Neil Robinson (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2009), p. 329.

<sup>18</sup> See Eric Hobsbawm & Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Burbank & Cooper, *Empires in World History*, p. 18.

the union of all civilised peoples.<sup>21</sup> The Romans promoted themselves as the successors to Greece; it was their solemn responsibility to undertake a ‘civilising mission’ of barbarians. Byzantium also drew on Greek antecedents as a demonstration of its prestigious past, and, in the eight century CE there was a revival of Greek letters with intellectuals flocking to Constantinople.<sup>22</sup>

This thesis argues that Roger was no different from these empires in his co-optation of diverse cultural forms to create a uniquely Sicilian cultural identity as well as his nod to a distant and prestigious past in validating this identity. Using the theme of ‘empire’ broadly, and the co-optation of diverse cultures within empires more specifically, this thesis poses the question: How did the *Book of Roger*, and the description of Sicily in particular, play a role in the program of state-building undertaken by Roger II and his advisors post-1139?

### **Research on Roger and the Book**

Ten manuscripts of the *Book of Roger* exist, scattered over a wide array of European and Middle Eastern libraries, from Oxford to Cairo. All ten are copies made at least a century after the book was completed; these ten vary greatly in quality and are often missing sections of text or some (or all) of the work’s maps.

There is a rich corpus of secondary scholarship dealing with the Norman kingdom under Roger II exploring aspects such as art and architecture, administration, society and demography.<sup>23</sup> Rather less has been written about the *Book of Roger* itself, although some

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Folz, *The Concept of Empire in Western Europe from the Fifth to the Fourteenth Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), pp. 4-5.

<sup>22</sup> Cyril Mango, ‘The Revival of Learning’, in *The Oxford History of Byzantium*, ed. by Cyril Mango, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 214.

<sup>23</sup> Significant authors include William Tronzo and Jeremy Johns (Art and Architecture), Hiroshi Takayama (Administration), David Abulafia, Donald Matthew, Henri Bresc and Annliese Nef (Trade, Politics and Society) and Alex Metcalfe (Demography).

important scholarly articles and book chapters have appeared over the years.<sup>24</sup> The voluminous and still much referred to *Storia dei musulmani di Sicilia* by the preeminent scholar of Muslim Sicily, Michele Amari (1806-1889) deals briefly with the *Book of Roger* and Amari is the first scholar to present what has become the standard explanation regarding Roger's 'decision' to commission the book.<sup>25</sup> This view is in agreement with what Idrīsi himself writes in the Preface to the book, namely that Roger was intellectually curious, dispassionately seeking knowledge for its own sake.<sup>26</sup>

Hubert Houben in his aptly titled *Roger II of Sicily: A Ruler between East and West* reiterates this point of view, drawing on twelfth-century Latin sources, such as Romuald of Salerno (d. 1<sup>st</sup> April 1181) and Hugo Falcandus (wrote second half of the twelfth century) who both maintain that Roger was an intellectual, committed to the acquisition of knowledge.<sup>27</sup> While this is a compelling argument, drawn from the primary sources, the extent to which Roger and his advisors used knowledge as a political tool has not been explored to any great extent.

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<sup>24</sup> These include, among many others, work by the Italian Arabist Roberto Rubinacci on the exact date of the book and the Polish scholar Tadeusz Lewicki on the genesis of the project, see Roberto Rubinacci, 'La data della Geografia di al-Idrīsī', in *Actas IV congresso de estudos árabes e islâmicos* 1968 (1971), pp. 531-535 and Tadeusz Lewicki, 'A propos de la genese du "Nuzhat al-muStaq fi htiraq al-afaq" d'al- Idrīsī', *Studi Magrebini*, Vol. 1 (1966), pp. 41-55. The only monograph devoted to the *Book of Roger* and its author Idrīsī is Ahmad Sousa's rich and detailed *Arab Geography of Al Sharif Al Idrīsī* (Baghdad: Iraqi Engineer's Association, 1974) which has sadly never been translated from its original Arabic.

<sup>25</sup> Amari effusively wrote: 'il concetto, l'impulso, l'ordinamento e perchè no? un'assidua cooperazione, si deve a Ruggiero, nella cui mente le tradizioni musulmane si univano alle bizantine ed alle latine, al genio cosmopolita dei Normanni ed alla curiosità statistica del principe e del capitano', see Michele Amari, *Storia dei musulmani di Sicilia*, III, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Catania: R. Prampolini, 1933-39), pp. 466-467.

<sup>26</sup> Idrīsī wrote that Roger had a 'profundity of mind' (Ar. *ghūr al-'aqal*) in Idrīsī, *Opus Geographicum*, Sive "Liber Ad eorum Delectationem Qui Terras Peragrarare Studeant", ed. by E. Cerulli et al. (Naples: E. J. Brill, 1970-1982), fasc. 1, p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> Hubert Houben, *Roger II of Sicily: A Ruler Between East and West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

There has generally been a reluctance by historians to draw on the *Book of Roger* as a source for twelfth-century Sicily, as David Abulafia has observed: ‘historians of the kingdom of Sicily, myself included, have been strangely reluctant to make use of the information...contained within the Book of King Roger’.<sup>28</sup> Abulafia goes on to state that this is largely due to the ‘poor reputation of existing editions and translations’.<sup>29</sup> Here the author is referring to the French translation of the book, completed between 1836 and 1840 by the French Arabist Pierre Amédée Jaubert (1779 – 1847), based largely on an incomplete manuscript, the Bibliothèque Nationale’s MS 2222.<sup>30</sup> Henri Bresc and Annliese Nef’s 1999 revised publication of Jaubert’s translation (dealing with Europe, the Mediterranean and North Africa) has not redressed this situation, as it was still based on Jaubert’s incomplete source material.<sup>31</sup>

Along with Jaubert’s translation there is Michele Amari’s *Biblioteca arabo-sicula* (hereafter *BAS*) which provides an Italian translation of the preface of the *Book of Roger* and the description of Sicily found in the book.<sup>32</sup> Amari’s translation is also based on the incomplete MS 2222. Amari and Celestino Schiaparelli also published an Italian translation of Idrīsi’s description of Italy found in the *Book of Roger* in 1883 entitled *L'Italia descritta nel "Libro del Re Ruggero" compilato da Edrisi* again based on MS 2222.<sup>33</sup>

It is on this point that Arabists can offer their assistance by drawing on the critical edition of the book published in nine fascicles between 1970 and 1982 under the auspices of

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<sup>28</sup> David Abulafia, ‘Local Trade Networks in Medieval Sicily: The Evidence of Idrīsi’, in *Shipping, Trade and Crusade in the Medieval Mediterranean: Studies in honour of John Pryor* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2012), p. 157.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>30</sup> Pierre Amédée Jaubert, *Géographie d'Édrisi* (Paris: Société de Géographie, 1836-1840).

<sup>31</sup> Idrīsi, *La première géographie de l'occident* trans. by Pierre Amédée Jaubert, rev. by Henri Bresc and Annliese Nef (Paris: Flammarion, 1999).

<sup>32</sup> Michele Amari, *Biblioteca arabo-sicula: Raccolta di testi arabi che toccano la geografia, la storia, la biografia e la bibliografia della Sicilia*, 3 vols, (Catania: Edizioni Dafni, 1982).

<sup>33</sup> This version was revised by the Italian Arabist Umberto Rizzitano, see Idrīsi, *Il libro di Ruggero*, trans. & annot. by Umberto Rizzitano, (Palermo: Flaccovio, 1966).

the *Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente* at Rome with an editorial committee based at the *Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli*. This critical edition was undertaken by prominent Italian Arabists including Roberto Rubinacci and Umberto Rizzitano and bears the Latin title: *Opus Geographicum, Sive 'Liber Ad Eorum Delectationem Qui Terras Peragrarere Studeant'*; it is this critical edition which serves as the basis for my own research and translation.

### *Sicily in the Book of Roger*

As opposed to monographs on the book, there has been a rather plentiful array of scholarly articles published on various aspects of the *Book of Roger* mostly in European languages.<sup>34</sup> These studies focus on various geographical regions depicted in the book, ranging over large distances from China to Scandinavia. Of particular interest to this present research are studies dealing with Idrīsi's treatment of European regions, including England, Spain, and the Mediterranean including France and Italy.

Idrīsi's treatment of the Mediterranean, and the island of Sicily, is singled-out as particularly original, containing data not found in the work of earlier Muslim geographers. The historian of Islamic Spain César E. Dubler in *Idrīsiana Hispanica I – Probables Itinerarios de Idrīsi por Al-Andalus* writes that in the *Book of Roger* the description of the Iberian Peninsula is the most varied in information provided by any Arabic source.<sup>35</sup> According to Dubler the *Book of Roger* remains 'sin lugar dudas una de las mayores y mas valiosas fuentes para el conocimiento de la Peninsula Iberica en el siglo XII' (without doubt, one of the largest and

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<sup>34</sup> Studies of the work in English are rare: of the approximately one hundred and sixty journal articles written on various aspects of the book over the last century, only about twenty are in English with the bulk being produced in French and Italian. Source: *Index Islamicus Online*, ed. by C. H. Bleaney et al. <http://bibliographies.brillonline.com/browse/index-islamicus> [accessed 16 August 2018]

<sup>35</sup> César E. Dubler, 'Idrīsiana Hispanica I – Probables Itinerarios de Idrīsi por Al Andalus', *Al-Andalus*, Vol. 30, 1 (1965), pp. 89-137.

most valuable sources for knowledge of the Iberian Peninsula in the twelfth century).<sup>36</sup> Dubler states that Idrīsi presented a large amount of new information of significant historical value, which appeared to be based on first-hand observation.

Similar praise is given regarding Idrīsi's description of Italy. Michele Amari maintains that 'nessun documento di geografia d'Italia di quel tempo ha da solo il valore del nostro' (no other geographical document of that period has in itself the value of ours [the *Book of Roger*]).<sup>37</sup> The *Book of Roger*, he claims, offers Italian historians an invaluable record of cities and villages 'fiorenti ed ora scomparsi' (flourishing and now abandoned).<sup>38</sup> He has particular praise for the Sicilian description, which is more detailed than any other part of Italy, including South Italy (comprising modern day Campania, Calabria and Apulia) which was also under Norman rule.

The prominent scholars of Islamic Sicily, Henri Bresc and Anliese Nef, are at odds with Amari's assessment of the description of mainland Italy found in the *Book of Roger*, stating that it is 'remarkably limited'.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, they argue, the Sicily section is highly original, highlighting the fact that Idrīsi was based at Palermo: 'l'ensemble de ces chapitres constitue ainsi l'essentiel de l'apport du savant arabe de Palerme au savoir géographique et à la connaissance du monde' (...all of these chapters constitute an essential contribution of an Arab intellectual from Palermo to geographic scholarship and knowledge of the world).<sup>40</sup> In addition, the *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (hereafter *EI2*), in its entry on Sicily states that: 'A special place should be reserved for the work of al-Idrīsī [*q.v.*], who excels over all the other writers in the systematic nature of his survey, the only example

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.

<sup>37</sup> Michele Amari & Celestino Schiaparelli, *L'Italia Descritta nel Libro del Re Ruggiero* (Rome: Coi Tipi del Salviucci, 1883), p. xiii.

<sup>38</sup> Michele Amari, *BAS*, I, p. xiv.

<sup>39</sup> Idrīsi, *La première géographie de l'occident*, p. 45.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

of a genuine description, accompanied by all the available detail, of *Sicily* in the mid-6th/12th century'.<sup>41</sup>

Despite this praise, there remains only one scholar who has undertaken an analysis of the Sicily description found in the *Book of Roger*. Leonard C. Chiarelli of the University of Utah completed a MA thesis entitled *Idrīsi's Description of Sicily* in 1977 and in 1980 published a scholarly article *Idrīsi's Description of Sicily: A Critical Survey*.<sup>42</sup> Chiarelli's thesis includes an English translation of Idrīsi's description of Sicily, a fact I became aware of only after completing my own translation. However, the critical edition of the *Book of Roger*, cited above, had not been completed by the time of Chiarelli's thesis submission in 1977 and as such there is a strong case for the utility of the translation found in my thesis, completed some forty years on and based solely on the critical edition of the *Book of Roger*.

Chiarelli's article emphasises the importance of the text as a historical source on Sicily not only for the Norman period but also for the Muslim period as, only fifty years after the Norman conquest: '...the island's economic, religio-ethnic, cultural and demographic transformation from a predominantly Muslim land to a Latin and Christian state was still under way'.<sup>43</sup> This is a significant point and one that has not always been recognised in scholarship on the *Book of Roger*, namely that, in numerous cases, Idrīsi is the only source we have for numerous Arabic toponyms and as such is an invaluable source for the poorly-documented Muslim period.

Where my own research diverges from Chiarelli's is on the point of the quality of the data provided by Idrīsi. Chiarelli's final conclusion of the Sicily text is not universally favourable, and the author concludes that Idrīsi's description is '...very ambiguous and lacks

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<sup>41</sup> 'Sikkilya' in *EI2*.

<sup>42</sup> Leonard C. Chiarelli, 'Idrīsi's description of Sicily: A Critical Survey', *Scripta Mediterranea* 1 (1980), pp. 29-43.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32

any hint of direct observation'.<sup>44</sup> On the contrary, this thesis will argue that Idrīsi's text displays a remarkable level of detail regarding aspects such as toponomy, distances, the categorisation of settlements and ports, information which would no doubt prove useful to a king who, in the last years of his life, was in the process of ascertaining the limits and opportunities of his kingdom.

Indeed, previous research on the *Book of Roger*, Chiarelli's included, has failed to draw any connection between Roger's desire to have an in-depth description of Sicily at his fingertips and the political processes under way at his court throughout the 1140s. In particular, this thesis will argue that the king's program of land reform administered through the royal *dīwān*, as well as the foreign expansion of the Norman navy into North Africa and the eastern Mediterranean, would have benefitted from the information on Sicily provided by the *Book of Roger*. King Roger's decision to commission the book in 1139 was no mere accident but part of a carefully constructed political program designed to ensure the future success of the Norman kingdom with its base in Sicily.

To aid in representing the richness of Idrīsi's data on the island, this thesis will utilise Geographic Information System (GIS) software to present Idrīsi's data on Sicily over a range of maps and for the first time, these maps will show the wealth of Idrīsi's data in visual form.<sup>45</sup> The cartography of Idrīsi is a subject which has been written on quite extensively and indeed it can be argued that it is the *Book of Roger's* maps for which Idrīsi is most well-known.<sup>46</sup> The

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>45</sup> Interestingly, there is a GIS application named after Idrīsi, the 'Idrīsi' application does not use any of Idrīsi's data, rather it analyses and displays spatial data. See Clark Laboratories: <https://clarklabs.org/terrset/Idrīsi-gis/> [accessed 16 August 2018]

<sup>46</sup> See Konrad Miller, *Weltkarte des Idrīsi vom Jahr 1154 n. Ch., Charta Rogeriana wiederhergestellt und herausgegeben* (Stuttgart: Konrad Miller, 1928); Sayyid Maqbul Ahmad, 'Cartography of al-Sharif Idrīsi', in *The History of Cartography*, Vol. 2, Book 1, ed. by J. B. Harley and David Woodward (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992); Fuat Sezgin, *Mathematical Geography and Cartography in Islam and Their Continuation in the Occident: Historical presentation, pt. 1-2*, Publications of the Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Science (Frankfurt am Main: Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, 2000- 07).

focus of this thesis is Idrīsi's text for this is where the most innovative qualities of his work come to the fore. Indeed the original map of Sicily included in the *Book of Roger* does not come close to depicting the great number of toponyms described in the text, a fact this thesis will redress. It is this author's intent that these maps will prove valuable to historians and archeologists working on Muslim and early Norman Sicily who have heretofore not accessed the wealth of data contained in Idrīsi's text.

### **Thesis Structure**

Chapter One "Three-tongued Sicily": Cultural Appropriation and State-Building under Roger II' will set the scene for the environment in Sicily the Normans moved into; Sicily had long been a multi-cultural island and this chapter will demonstrate how effectively the Normans adopted and adapted the existing cultural forms of the island – particularly Graeco-Byzantine and Islamic. This chapter will also deal with the period of state-building undertaken by Roger after his rapprochement with the Papacy in 1139. It will demonstrate how Roger and his advisor, George of Antioch, were engaged in a focussed and deliberate project to establish a robust Norman state with Sicily as its base; a key part of this program was reform of the state administration and foreign expansion into Byzantine territory and Muslim North Africa. Chapter Two, "Wisdom not less than Power": State-Building and the *Book of Roger*' will deal directly with the *Book of Roger* and show how the book played a part in the program of state-building described in Chapter One. This chapter will also discuss other original scholarly work commissioned by Roger and question its role in the greater political program undertaken by the king and his advisors. Chapter Three, 'Routes and Kingdoms: Geography, Power and the *Book of Roger*', will show that Roger's decision to commission the Book was political; tracing the history of Arabic geographical writing this chapter will draw connections between Roger's

needs and those of earlier rulers who used geographical scholarship to further their political ambitions. Chapter Four, ‘Descriptions of Sicily before the *Book of Roger*’, will survey the descriptions of Sicily prior to the *Book of Roger* showing their limited nature and how the *Book of Roger* was a significant development on from any of these. Chapter Five will begin analysis of the Sicily description; entitled ‘‘The True Nature of His Lands’, Part I: Strategic Information on Sicily in the *Book of Roger*’, this chapter will discuss the strategic aspects of Idrīsi’s description and show how these would prove useful to Roger in his program of state-building and territorial expansion. Chapter Six, ‘‘The True Nature of His Lands’, Part II: Economic Information on Sicily in the *Book of Roger*’, will show how Idrīsi’s descriptions of agriculture, water and trade would have benefitted Roger economically. Finally Chapter Seven, ‘A ‘People-less’ Island: Limitations of Idrīsi’s Description’, will analyse the scant amount of information Idrīsi provides on the people and culture of Sicily and question why this was so. This chapter will contrast this with the information Idrīsi provides on the areas of Roger’s rivals in the eastern Mediterranean and North Africa where Idrīsi is much more explicit about people and religion. This chapter will also examine Idrīsi’s descriptions of the ‘other’ Norman lands, namely South Italy and Malta.

Finally I will draw my conclusions and discuss the fate of the *Book of Roger* in the Middle East and Europe following Roger II’s death in 1154 CE.

My English translation of Idrīsi’s description of Sicily based on the critical edition of the *Book of Roger* appears in Appendix I.

## **Chapter One: ‘Three-tongued Sicily’: Cultural Appropriation and State-Building under Roger II**

This chapter will show the ways in which Roger appropriated diverse cultural traditions in order to forge a uniquely Sicilian royal identity and further his own political ambitions. In the face of significant opposition, Roger worked hard to gain legitimacy for both himself and his kingdom; this was achieved not only through military means, but also through the development of a uniquely Sicilian administration, one that combined Islamic, Graeco-Byzantine and Latin culture. Out of this marriage Roger developed into a prominent monarch, able to operate at the highest levels in the Mediterranean political sphere. I argue that it was Roger’s ability to *adopt* and *adapt* the various cultures of his kingdom that was his greatest strength and one linked to his decision to commission the *Book of Roger*.

Before beginning the discussion of Roger’s administration, I will provide background on the history of migration to Sicily from antiquity, showing how the social and cultural fabric of the island has long been affected by immigration. This section will show that reciprocal cultural transfer is nothing new in Sicilian history and that the Normans took up this uniquely Sicilian feature enthusiastically.

### **Before the Normans: Settlement in Sicily up to the 11<sup>th</sup> Century**

Sicilian history has been greatly shaped by the island’s geographical location in the centre of the Mediterranean Sea. From earliest times Sicily has been an arena where the great powers of the age have battled for domination of the Mediterranean seaway, including the Greeks, Phoenicians, Romans, Carthaginians and Arabs. The various groups that have settled on the island have left an indelible mark, bringing their own culture but also absorbing what was already present. A good example is the tradition of pottery making brought to Sicily by the

Athenian Greeks from the eighth century BCE and taken up with gusto by autochthonous Sicilians, who by the fourth century CE were creating their own red figure vases with distinctive, local motifs.<sup>47</sup>

The ancient name for Sicily was *Trinacria* which referred to the *Triskelion*, a symbol representing three interlocking spirals the origins of which are Greek (figure 1).<sup>48</sup> It is not clear if this symbol was chosen either to represent the three ancient tribes whom the Greeks would have come across when they reached Sicily (the Sicanians, the Elymians and the Sicels),<sup>49</sup> or perhaps the three valleys that Sicily is traditionally divided into, being the *Val di Mazara*, the *Val di Noto* and the *Val Demone* (figure 2). Whatever its origins, this idea of a Sicily made up of different people, particularly the idea of three differing groups has persisted. In the Roman era (241 BCE - 476 CE) these groups were Greek, Latin and Punic and in the time of the Normans Greek, Arab (including Arabic speaking Christians and Berbers) and Latin.

Various authors have reiterated the diversity of Sicily - Thucydides (c. 460 – c. 400 BCE) in *History of the Peloponnesian War*, maintained that ‘...although the Sicilian cities are populous, their inhabitants are a mixed multitude, and they readily give up old forms of government and receive new ones from without’.<sup>50</sup> In the Middle Ages, Peter of Eboli (c.1196 – 1220 CE) in his epic poem *Liber ad honorem Augusti sive de rebus Siculis Carmen* (Book in

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<sup>47</sup> A. D. Trendall, *Red Figure Vases of South Italy and Sicily: A Handbook* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1989), pp. 233-242.

<sup>48</sup> Moses Finley, *A History of Sicily, Ancient Sicily to the Arab Conquest* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1968), pp.9-10. See also Francesco Renda, *Storia della Sicilia dalle origini ai giorni nostri* (Palermo: Sellerio, 2003) and Jean Huré, *Storia della Sicilia* (Catania: Brancato Editore, 2005).

<sup>49</sup> A native Sicilian Greek source, Diodorus Siculus, in his *Bibliotheca Historica*, written between 60 and 30 BCE, provides an account of the indigenous inhabitants of the island, the Sicanians and Sicels (but not the Elymians), from the latter of whom, he states, Sicily derived its name, see Diodorus Siculus, *Diodorus Siculus, The Library of History* Book V, Chapter 2, trans. by C.H. Oldfather (Loeb, 1939).

<sup>50</sup> Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, Book VI, Chapter 17, trans. by Benjamin Jowett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900).

Honour of the Emperor, or on Sicilian affairs), referred to the Palermitans as ‘populo dotata trilingui’ (people endowed with three languages’).<sup>51</sup>



Figure 1: Current flag of Sicily with the *Trinacria* at centre  
Source: Wikicommons



Figure 2: Modern map showing the three valleys of Sicily  
Source: ReasearchGate

Sicily became an important part of *Magna Graecia* (Great Greece) from the eighth century BCE.<sup>52</sup> The Greeks established cities like Syracuse, Messina, Naxos and Megara Hyblaea; Syracuse in particular was to become a dominant city in terms of wealth and power

<sup>51</sup> Peter of Eboli, *Liber ad honorem Augusti sive De rebus Siculis Carmen*, 1.3, III (ALIM – Archivio della Latinità Italiana del Medioevo, Unione Accademia Nazionale) <http://it.alim.unisi.it/dl/resource/13391> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>52</sup> T. J. Dunbabin, *The Western Greeks: The History of Sicily and South Italy from the Foundation of the Greek Colonies to 480 B.C* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948).

and its theatre attracted personalities such as Aeschylus, who staged productions at the theatre.<sup>53</sup>

In the Roman period this Hellenistic way of life continued and Sicily remained primarily Greek speaking, although the ruling elites would have spoken Latin also; indeed most probably Latin-Greek bilingualism was necessary for social and political advancement in Roman Sicily.<sup>54</sup> From the mid-fifth to mid-sixth centuries CE Sicily passed in and out of the control of various barbarian kingdoms.<sup>55</sup> During the rocky period of Byzantine rule which followed, there was an increase in migration of Greek-speakers from other parts of the empire and this may have significantly modified the ethnic and linguistic base of the island, strengthening its Byzantine-Greek identity.<sup>56</sup>

The Muslim period in Sicily began in June 827 when the Aghlabid<sup>57</sup> Emir, Ziyādat-Allāh, who nominally ruled *Ifriqya* (modern-day eastern Algeria, Tunisia and western Libya) in the name of the Abbasid caliph in Baghdad, became embroiled in the internecine battles between the Byzantine naval commander in Sicily Euphemius and the *strategos* (military governor) of Sicily, Constantine Souda.<sup>58</sup> Although Muslim forces had been raiding the coast of Sicily since the seventh century,<sup>59</sup> they had never gained a foothold; the power struggle between Euphemius and the Constantine Souda created a power-vacuum that gave the Muslims their opportunity. The west and south-west of the island, the *Val di Mazara*, was the first area

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<sup>53</sup> Moses Finley, *A History of Sicily*, p. 55 & pp. 60-61.

<sup>54</sup> R. J. A. Wilson, *Sicily under the Roman Empire: The Archaeology of a Roman Province, 36 BC - AD 535* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1990), p. 312ff.

<sup>55</sup> Moses Finley, *A History of Sicily*, pp. 155-156 & pp. 179-181.

<sup>56</sup> Alex Metcalfe, *Muslims and Christians in Norman Sicily*, p. 8.

<sup>57</sup> The Aghlabids were a Muslim dynasty founded in 800 CE, their capital was at Kairouan in modern-day Tunisia, see 'Aghlabids or Banu 'l-Aghlab' in *EI2*.

<sup>58</sup> Other sources claim that Euphemius was being punished for an act of sexual aggression against a Greek Sicilian nun, see Sarah Davis-Secord, *Where Three Worlds Met: Sicily in the Early Medieval Mediterranean* (Cornell University Press, 2017), p. 94.

<sup>59</sup> Leonard C. Chiarelli, *A History of Muslim Sicily* (Venera: Midsea Books, 2011), p. 72.

to fall under Muslim control, though this took up to two decades to achieve.<sup>60</sup> Control of the mountain interior, the *Val di Noto* and the *Val Demone*, eventually followed, and by the 860s Aghlabid control had been largely consolidated throughout the island, though Syracuse did not fall until 878.<sup>61</sup> Throughout Muslim rule on the island the *Val di Mazara* remained predominately Muslim, the *Val di Noto* less so and in the *Val Demone* Christianity was the prevailing religion.<sup>62</sup>

With the rise of the Shia Fatimids in North Africa from 909 CE, Aghlabid power declined and Sicily came under Fatimid control in 910.<sup>63</sup> With their sights set on the conquest of Egypt, the Fatimids appointed Al-Hasan ibn Ali al-Kalbi from the prominent Shia Kalbid family as Emir of Sicily in 948 and the Kalbids were then *de facto* rulers of Sicily up until 1040.<sup>64</sup> The Kalbid period was the most prosperous in Sicily under Muslim rule; Sicilian agriculture was diversified and new agricultural techniques were implemented.<sup>65</sup> As a major supplier of grain in the Roman period, Sicily had become ostensibly a monocultural wheat-based economy, the Muslims diversified by introducing new crops to the island, including eggplants, lemons, oranges, rice, sugar cane, cotton, carob, date-palms and mulberries.<sup>66</sup> Irrigation and water conservation techniques were improved as well as soil fertilisation and due to these changes a greater area of land became cultivable and the countryside experienced more widespread settlement.<sup>67</sup> These systems were well-established by the time of the Norman invasion in the eleventh century and subsequently were integrated with existing Norman

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<sup>60</sup> Alex Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 13.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15.

<sup>62</sup> Michele Amari, *Storia dei musulmani di Sicilia*, II, pp. 506-512.

<sup>63</sup> Leonard C. Chiarelli, *A History of Muslim Sicily*, p. 72.

<sup>64</sup> The Kalbids were members of the South Arabian tribe, the *Banū Kalb*, who participated in the Muslim conquest of North Africa in the eighth century CE, they became ardent followers of the Fatimids, see '*Kalbids*' in *EI2*.

<sup>65</sup> Aziz Ahmad, *A History of Islamic Sicily* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1975), pp. 38-39.

<sup>66</sup> Leonard C. Chiarelli, *A History of Muslim Sicily*, p. 213.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 214-216.

trading relationships with the various Italian trading powers;<sup>68</sup> on the basis of these connections with the East and with Italy, Sicily enjoyed a period of prosperity which was to continue for decades to come.

The Muslims brought with them a tradition of learning and scholarship that worked in well with similar Greek traditions existing on the island.<sup>69</sup> The early Muslim settlers from *Ifriqya* had close connections to the intellectual centres of the Muslim East, such as Cairo, Damascus and Baghdad as well as those of North Africa, such as Kairouan. Due to its wealth Sicily enjoyed a period of immigration from these areas, with intellectuals making up an important part of these new arrivals.<sup>70</sup>

Kalbid rule was not all harmonious and was often characterised by Arab-Berber tension, Sunni-Shia tension as well as internecine conflicts of succession, all of which disrupted the governance of the island; added to this was the interference in Sicilian affairs by the burgeoning Zirid dynasty of the central Maghreb.<sup>71</sup> By the mid-eleventh century the last Kalbid emir was deposed and the island fractured into petty principalities with one Ibn Al Ḥawwas retaining control of Agrigento, Castrogiovanni and Castronuovo with their surrounding districts, and his arch rival Ibn al-Thumna with control of Syracuse.<sup>72</sup> It was into this unstable situation that the Normans appeared.

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<sup>68</sup> See 'Sikkilya' in *EI2*.

<sup>69</sup> Aziz Ahmad, *A History of Islamic Sicily*, p. 41.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>71</sup> Metcalfe, Alex, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy*, p. 71.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

## The Arrival of the Normans

From as early as 999 CE, knights from Normandy and other parts of France began arriving in South Italy,<sup>73</sup> part of a phenomenon sweeping Europe throughout the eleventh century and intensified by the First Crusade (1095-1099 CE), namely, an ‘aristocratic diaspora’ which saw land-hungry lesser nobles from former Carolingian territory venture out in a process of ‘acquisitive expansionism’.<sup>74</sup> This was an opportunity for the ‘landless’ to become ‘landed’.

At this point it is important to briefly discuss the term ‘Norman’, as the term has caused some debate amongst scholars in regards to the so-called ‘Norman’ conquests of both England and South Italy. The great historian of the Normans, Charles Homer Haskins (1870-1937), argued vigorously for the existence of a universal Norman identity, whether these Normans lived in England, France or South Italy.<sup>75</sup> In the 1970s, R.H.C. Davis challenged this long-accepted view, arguing that this image of ‘Norman-ness’ had been articulated in the writings of such authors as Orderic Vitalis (1075 – c. 1142) in order to create a Norman mythology, where none had existed previously.<sup>76</sup> According to Davis, this idea of an ‘inherent unity’ within the Norman people lacked credibility due to their peripatetic tendencies: they had come from Scandinavia, settled in Normandy, conquered England, South Italy and the Latin East, inevitably absorbing and adapting to the customs of new lands while and in turn exerting their own influence on these newly conquered territories.<sup>77</sup> In response to Davis, in the 1980s Graham A. Loud argued that in fact in the eleventh century the bulk of the Normans who arrived in South Italy were from Normandy and charters from the time attest to them calling

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<sup>73</sup> These early arrivals were hired as mercenaries by local leaders to repel a Muslim attack on Salerno, see Graham A. Loud, ‘How ‘Norman’ was the Norman conquest of Southern Italy?’, *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, Vol. 25 (1981), p. 15.

<sup>74</sup> Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization, and Cultural Change, 950-1350* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 24.

<sup>75</sup> Charles Homer Haskins, *The Normans in European History* (New York: Ungar, 1959), pp. 1-25.

<sup>76</sup> R. H. C. Davis, *The Normans and Their Myth* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1976), pp. 15-16

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

themselves as such.<sup>78</sup> It is true there were non-Normans who came as well, from places such as Burgundy and Provence, and the evidence suggests that as many as one in three of the invaders were not from Normandy.<sup>79</sup> We do know that Roger II's family, the Hauteville, was in fact from the La Manche area of Normandy, although the exact location of their village is difficult to ascertain.<sup>80</sup> Therefore referring to Roger's father, Roger I, as 'Norman' is entirely accurate although an argument can be made that Roger II identified much more strongly with South Italy, having been born and raised there.

The Hauteville brothers, including Roger's uncle Robert Guiscard, began arriving in South Italy from 1035, ostensibly travelling as pilgrims, *en route* to the Holy Land.<sup>81</sup> However, the Hautevilles soon became embroiled in the fractious local politics of Southern Italy, working as mercenaries for local Latin, Lombard and Byzantine rulers, including the Princes of Capua and Salerno, the Duke of Naples and the sons of the Lombard Melus.<sup>82</sup>

With great acuity, these Norman mercenaries turned from 'sword for hire' to conquest. In 1053, the Norman armies defeated the combined forces of the pope and the Byzantine Empire at the Battle of Civitate and took Pope Leo IX prisoner.<sup>83</sup> Robert Guiscard, who succeeded his brother Humphrey as leader of the Norman forces in 1057, ended Norman loyalty

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<sup>78</sup> Graham A. Loud, 'How 'Norman'', p. 20.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>80</sup> It may be the village of Hauteville-la-Guichard, see René Lepelley, *Dictionnaire étymologique des noms de communes de Normandie* (Condé-sur-Noireau: Corlet, 1996), p. 143.

<sup>81</sup> Two versions chronicling the arrival of the Normans in Italy are known as the 'Salerno tradition', from Amatus of Montecassino's (fl. 11<sup>th</sup> century) history and the 'Gargano tradition' from William of Apulia (w. 1090s); the latter has been more widely accepted, see Einar Joranson, 'The Inception of the Career of the Normans in Italy-Legend and History', *Speculum*, Vol. 23, 3 (1948), pp. 353-396.

<sup>82</sup> Graham A. Loud, 'How 'Norman'', p. 15.

<sup>83</sup> Gordon S. Brown, *The Norman Conquest of Southern Italy and Sicily* (Jefferson: McFarland & Co. Inc. Publishers, 2003), p. 9.

to the Byzantine Empire altogether and made himself a papal vassal in return for the title of Count of Apulia and Calabria at the Council of Melfi in 1059.<sup>84</sup>

Roger, the youngest of the Hauteville brothers, arrived in South Italy in 1057 and together with Robert began a campaign to consolidate Norman rule in Apulia and Calabria, something the two were able to achieve over a period of four years.<sup>85</sup> Once this ambition was achieved the brothers turned their attention to the island of Sicily. The Latin chronicler, Geoffrey Malaterra, in his *De Rebus Gestis Rogerii Calabriae et Siciliae Comitis et Roberti Guiscardi Ducis fratris eius* (The Deeds of Count Roger of Calabria & Sicily & of Duke Robert Guiscard his brother), states that it was Roger's idea to begin the conquest of Sicily as it was in the hands of the 'unbelievers'.<sup>86</sup> Although this was an acceptable motive for invasion, particularly in the eyes of the Papacy in Rome, no doubt Roger I had his eye on the considerable wealth that Sicily provided and to the chaotic state of Muslim rule there. From 1061 Roger and Robert began the conquest of the island, a drawn-out process lasting until 1090, and interrupted by the constant need for Robert to return to Apulia and Calabria at regular intervals due to various baronial insurrections.<sup>87</sup> The instability in South Italy was not resolved by either Roger I or Robert Guiscard before their deaths, Robert in 1085 and Roger in 1101. The intractable issue of baronial uprisings in South Italy was a problem that Roger II was to inherit.

The Latin chroniclers of the eleventh and twelfth centuries emphasise both the ambition and pragmatism of the Norman knights. Malaterra writes that the Normans '...are a most astute people, eager to avenge injuries, looking rather to enrich themselves from others than from

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<sup>84</sup> Graham A. Loud, *The Age of Robert Guiscard: Southern Italy and the Norman Conquest* (Harlow, UK: Longman, 2000), pp. 188-189.

<sup>85</sup> Edmund Curtis, *Roger of Sicily and the Normans in Lower Italy, 1016-1154* (New York & London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1912), p. 57.

<sup>86</sup> Geoffrey Malaterra, *The Deeds of Count Roger of Calabria and Sicily and of Duke Robert Guiscard his Brother*, trans. by Graham A. Loud (Unpublished, 2005).

[https://web.archive.org/web/20140201232320/http://www.medievalsicily.com/Docs/03\\_Norman\\_Conquest/Malaterra%20all%20text%20revised.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20140201232320/http://www.medievalsicily.com/Docs/03_Norman_Conquest/Malaterra%20all%20text%20revised.pdf), p. 19. [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>87</sup> Hubert Houben, *Roger II of Sicily*, p. 14.

their native fields. They are eager and [indeed] greedy for profit and power, hypocritical and deceitful about almost everything, but between generosity and avarice they take a middle course'.<sup>88</sup>

The Norman invaders, without a strong tradition of administrative and structural organisation, arrived in South Italy in the mid-eleventh century to find a chaotic political situation, with Byzantine and Muslim rule in disarray in South Italy and Sicily respectively, and surrounded by three of the most prominent political and social forces in the world, that of the Western Roman, Byzantine and Islamic empires. The north European Normans were, to paraphrase Exodus, 'strangers in a strange land' and it was imperative that they establish their authority quickly and efficiently. The Normans soon realised they would have to look to the cultural traditions of their enemies in order to consolidate their rule; I argue that this process was not realised under Roger I but rather left to his son, Roger II.

## **Roger II**

Charles Homer Haskins, in his seminal work, *The Normans in European History*, stated of Sicily under Roger II:

...nowhere else did Latin, Greek and Arabic civilisation live side by side in peace and toleration, and nowhere else was the spirit of the renaissance more clearly expressed in the policy of the rulers.<sup>89</sup>

As discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, this 'grand narrative' view has been *de rigueur* for scholarship on the Kingdom of Sicily under Roger II for some time. There has been a prevailing sense that Roger's kingdom was a kind of multicultural paradise; this view being

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<sup>88</sup> See Geoffrey Malaterra, p. 4 & Graham A. Loud, "How 'Norman'", pp. 13–34.

<sup>89</sup> Charles Homer Haskins, *The Normans in European History*, p. 235.

echoed in popular works such as Karol Szymanowski's 1926 opera 'Król Roger'<sup>90</sup> which sees Roger and Idrīsi sharing a close friendship and moments of intense intimacy, as well as Tariq Ali's 2005 novel *A Sultan in Palermo*, in which Roger and Idrīsi engage in a practice of 'wife-swapping'.<sup>91</sup> These anachronistic analyses of events occurring in twelfth-century Sicily may be entertaining but are in no way based on extant evidence. Rather than viewing Roger II as a fully evolved 'renaissance man', I argue that it is more useful to think of him as a uniquely Sicilian figure, imbued with the inherent diversity of the cultures of the island. While the Sicilian environment may have been alien to his father, Roger II had been born and raised in the multicultural milieu of South Italy. In terms of the demography of Sicily in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Alex Metcalfe's meticulous philological research on the land registers produced by the Norman chancery provide our best clue as to the cultural makeup of the island. According to Metcalfe, as early as the mid-ninth century areas of western Sicily (*Val di Mazara*) were 'heavily repopulated' with Muslims, and Christians living in these areas are likely to have adopted Arabic as their first language.<sup>92</sup> In the *Val di Mazara* and the *Val di Noto*, '...the majority of its population were most probably Arabic speaking and Muslim by the eleventh century and maybe much earlier'.<sup>93</sup> The *Val Demone* was primarily made up of Greek and Italo-Greek communities, though even these are likely to have been bilingual.<sup>94</sup> In short, during and after the Norman conquest, Sicily was likely a majority Muslim island with Arabic spoken as the *lingua franca* with Greek as the second most-spoken language.

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<sup>90</sup> This opera was performed at the Sydney Opera House in January 2017; see my article on the production, Katherine Jacka, 'What can the Medieval King Roger Teach us about Tolerance?', *The Conversation* (January 16, 2017) <https://theconversation.com/what-can-the-medieval-king-roger-teach-us-about-tolerance-70045> [accessed 16 August 2018]

<sup>91</sup> Tariq Ali, *A Sultan in Palermo* (London: Verso, 2005).

<sup>92</sup> Alex Metcalfe, *Muslims and Christians in Norman Sicily*, p. 22.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

There was also a significant Jewish population on the island, though the numbers of this community are difficult to ascertain. The two main extant sources for the history of Sicily's Jews are the Cairo Geniza documents, found in the Ben Ezra synagogue in Old Cairo in the mid-eighteenth century, which attest to frequent trade between Sicilian and Egyptian Jews<sup>95</sup> and the travel report of Benjamin of Tudela (1130-1173 CE) who describes the Jewish communities of Messina and Palermo, still very much apparent when he wrote in the latter half of the twelfth century.<sup>96</sup>

Biographical information on Roger II is fairly substantial and comes primarily from both friendly and hostile Latin sources.<sup>97</sup> Not much is known of Roger's childhood save that he was educated in Calabria by his mother's Prime Minister, the Sicilian Christodoulos and it can be surmised that Graeco-Byzantine culture informed his education through the influence of his tutor and his mother Adelaide, on whom this culture apparently 'exerted a great influence'.<sup>98</sup> There is speculation as to Roger's ability to speak Greek, Arabic or both. It appears that, in his youth, evidence for his exposure to these languages is 'while important, entirely circumstantial'.<sup>99</sup>

In 1112, Roger's mother Adelaide, who had been acting as regent until Roger came of age, established the seat of the Norman government in Palermo. According to Roger's chronicler, Alexander of Teleso, Roger had been advised by his uncle Count Henry that Palermo was the most fitting city for a king, as: '...in ancient times, [Palermo] was believed to

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<sup>95</sup> S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: An Abridgment in One Volume*, rev. and ed. by Jacob Lassner (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

<sup>96</sup> Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, 2 pt. in 1 vol. trans. by and Marcus Nathan Adler (London: H. Frowde, 1907).

<sup>97</sup> These include: Geoffrey Malaterra (fl. second half of the eleventh century), Falcone di Benevento (c. 1070-c.1144), Alexander of Teleso (fl. 1127-1143), Romuald of Salerno (d. 1<sup>st</sup> April 1181) and Hugo Falcandus (wrote second half of the twelfth century). There are two notable Arabic sources who wrote about Roger – Ibn Al-Athīr (1160-1232/3) & As-Şafadi (fl. 1296-1363).

<sup>98</sup> Hubert Houben, *Roger II of Sicily*, p. 26.

<sup>99</sup> Alex Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy*, p. 124.

have had kings [who ruled] over this province; but now, many years later, was by God's secret judgement without them'.<sup>100</sup> Here we see an early example of Roger's attempts at 'inventing tradition', a desire to link himself, however tenuously, with the perceived nobility of the Sicilian past. It is interesting to note the choice to establish the capital in the Islamicised west of the island, distancing Roger from the Italian regions and possibly offering a rapprochement with the Muslims of Sicily or, more cynically, a means of controlling them.

Under the rule of the previous Muslim dynasties, Palermo had been the capital of the island and had become a prominent and sophisticated centre.<sup>101</sup> The Muslim geographer Ibn Ḥawqal's tenth century account of the city under Kalbid rule most vividly represents this: he wrote that Palermo boasted numerous mosques and 'rivalled Cordova' which was considered the premier city of the Muslim West.<sup>102</sup> Roger turned sixteen in 1112 and became Count of Sicily and Calabria with the seat of his government based in the majority Arabic-speaking and Muslim city.<sup>103</sup>

Roger was ambitious and had higher aspirations than dukedom and he now made political moves to become king; however, this was to be no easy task. He managed to obtain Papal recognition from Pope Anacletus and was crowned King of Sicily at Palermo in a lavish ceremony on Christmas Day 1130. Again there was a connection to the past, as the day chosen was the very same as Charlemagne's coronation as Holy Roman Emperor at Aachen in 800 CE; this move may have been designed to emulate the prestige of the Western Roman Empire, though there is no hard evidence of this.

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<sup>100</sup> Alexander of Telese in Graham A. Loud, *Roger II and the Creation of the Kingdom of Sicily*, p. 78.

<sup>101</sup> Although from the fall of the last Kalbite emir, Ṣamṣām in 1053 the city had become less politically important and did not figure very largely as a stronghold against the Norman conquest of Sicily, see 'Balarm' in *EI2*.

<sup>102</sup> Ibn Ḥawqal, *Opus Geographicum* (Leiden: Brill, 1938), p. 120.

<sup>103</sup> Hubert Houben, *Roger II of Sicily*, pp. 29-30.

What we do know is that the coronation was ‘...celebrated with oriental magnificence’, it was a ‘striking spectacle’ which displayed the wealth and grandeur of the Sicilian crown and rivalled the coronations of the German and Byzantine emperors.<sup>104</sup> Alexander of Telese, wrote of the celebration:

Large amounts of the choicest food and drink were served to the diners at the royal table, and nothing was served except in dishes or cups of gold or silver. There was no servant there who did not wear a silk tunic - the very waiters were clad in silk clothes! What more is there to say? The glory and wealth of the royal abode was so spectacular that it caused great wonder and deep stupefaction - so great indeed that it instilled not a little fear in all those who had come from so far away.<sup>105</sup>

This last line is telling ‘those who had come from so far away’, referring presumably to the Latinised South Italian barons and others with whom Roger had a complicated relationship. The magnificence of Roger’s coronation appears to have been designed to inspire awe and perhaps obedience in those attending, the deliberate exoticness of the proceedings may also have helped to create a distance between Roger and the Latin nobility.

A striking example of this exoticism is Roger’s mantle, now housed in the *Kunsthistorisches* Museum in Vienna (figure 3).<sup>106</sup> The mantle is made of silk and encrusted with enamels, pearls and gems and depicts the double figure of a lion overcoming a camel, surrounded by palm trees; there is an inscription in Arabic along its borders which speaks of the ‘...happiness, honor, good fortune, perfection...’ of Roger’s kingdom.<sup>107</sup> The mantle represents a combination of styles, materials and techniques: its semi-circular shape derives

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<sup>104</sup> Hubert Houben, *Roger II of Sicily*, p. 55.

<sup>105</sup> Alexander of Telese in Graham A. Loud, *Roger II and the Creation of the Kingdom of Sicily*, p. 79.

<sup>106</sup> Curiously the mantle was made in 1133/4 CE, some three years after Roger’s coronation see William Tronzo, ‘The Mantle of Roger II of Sicily’ in *Robes and Honour. The Medieval World of Investiture*, ed. by S. Gordon (New York & London: Palgrave, 2001), p. 241.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 250.

from the Latin liturgical tradition (the vestment known as the *pluviale* or *cappa*), its ground fabric was most likely imported from the Byzantine East and its inscription is in Fatimid Kufic style.<sup>108</sup> Despite these disparate elements the Arabic inscription attests to the fact that the mantle was made in the *tiraz* (silkworks) of Roger II.<sup>109</sup> The imagery of the lion overcoming the camel has been interpreted by scholars in fairly simplistic terms – i.e. the triumph of Christianity (the lion) over Islam (the camel);<sup>110</sup> however, William Tronzo has argued that the interpretation may be more complicated, designed to represent Roger as rightful king: ‘...the lion, noble and strong, holds in check the accursed beast – the rightful and powerful ruler prevents the ignoble from rising up...it is the right and power of the king that guarantees the power of the kingdom...’.<sup>111</sup> In this way, the mantle may have been intended to persuade the doubting South Italian barons of Roger’s rightful place as king rather than as a disparagement to Islam.



Figure 3: Roger II’s coronation mantle (acc. no. WS XIII 14).  
Source: *Kunsthistorisches Museum*, Vienna

<sup>108</sup> Isabelle Dolezalek, *Arabic Script on Christian Kings. Textile Inscriptions on Royal Garments from Norman Sicily* (Berlin & Boston: de Gruyter, 2017), p. 4 & p. 10.

<sup>109</sup> William Tronzo, ‘The Mantle of Roger II of Sicily’ p. 243.

<sup>110</sup> See Oleg Grabar, ‘The Experience of Islamic Art’, in *The Experience of Islamic Art on the Margins of Islam*, ed. by Irene A. Bierman (Reading: Garnet Publishing, 2005), p. 36.

<sup>111</sup> William Tronzo, ‘The Mantle of Roger II of Sicily’ p. 250.

Roger's coronation triumph was short-lived, as the western powers proclaimed Anacletus an 'anti-pope', therefore rendering Roger's coronation null and void. Anacletus was soon defeated by a new Pope, Innocent II, who fiercely objected to Roger's royal title and, together with his supporter, Lothar II (whom he had named Holy Roman Emperor), and encouraged and supported by the barons of Southern Italy,<sup>112</sup> waged war against Roger. These conflicts continued from 1131 to 1139 and Roger spent each year from early spring to early autumn in battle in Southern Italy; this culminated in a combined attack by Innocent and Lothar in 1137 which proved an 'ambiguous victory' for the two.<sup>113</sup>

Roger's relationship with Byzantium was equally complex, oscillating between hostility and rapprochement. Roger launched attacks against Byzantine territory in the 1140s (see below) but he also worked behind the scenes to marry one of his sons to a Byzantine princess. The Byzantine historian John Kinnamos (c.1143 – c.1185) wrote about this latter event. Apparently the Byzantine emperor John II Komnenos sent an envoy to Sicily to negotiate the marriage but Roger had demanded that the marriage make him 'on an equal plane of greatness' with the emperor, a demand which was roundly refused.<sup>114</sup> Adding to the tension was the development of a German-Byzantine alliance against Roger between Conrad III and the emperor Manuel I, sealed by a marriage between Conrad's sister-in-law and Manuel's son; however, this alliance soon fell into abeyance.<sup>115</sup>

The years 1139/1140 were a turning point for Roger. His troops convincingly defeated the Papal armies at Galluccio and he was at last given Papal recognition as King of Sicily;

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<sup>112</sup> Particularly Roger's brother-in-law Rainulf and Robert of Capua chose to rebel against Roger, see Graham A. Loud, *Roger II and the Creation of the Kingdom of Sicily*, p. 82.

<sup>113</sup> I. S. Robinson, *The Papacy, 1073-1198: Continuity and Innovation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 385-386.

<sup>114</sup> John Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, trans. by Charles M. Brand (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), pp. 75-76.

<sup>115</sup> Michael Angold, *The Byzantine Empire 1025-1204: A Political History* (London & New York: Longman, 1984), pp. 162-3.

added to this, with the conquest of Naples, the South Italian barons were finally subdued.<sup>116</sup> At this time, there was a shift in Roger's fortunes and he began to assert his authority as an autonomous Mediterranean monarch, pushing forward his vision for the kingdom. This included an ambitious building program and comprehensive reform of the state administration. In undertaking this program, Roger and his advisors looked to the diverse cultural models of Sicily - Muslim, Graeco-Byzantine and Latin - as their inspiration in a process of cultural appropriation which led to one of the most culturally rich periods in Sicilian history.

### **Cultural Appropriation and State-Building under Roger II**

With the term 'appropriation' as a stepping off point, in what ways did Roger II appropriate the cultural traditions of Sicily, and of his rivals the Western Roman empire, Byzantium and the Fatimids, in building the Norman state post-1139?

In recent years 'appropriation' has become recognised as a useful term in art history, although its definition remains 'conceptually unstable'.<sup>117</sup> Unlike terms like 'origin' or 'influence', 'appropriation' suggests the act of intentionally taking, it is 'active, subjective and motivated'.<sup>118</sup> In this way incorporating and adapting the cultural forms of a predecessor can be seen as a vital political decision providing 'the possibility of resourceful ways of refashioning cultural material to fit whatever needs are at hand'.<sup>119</sup> A useful definition of 'appropriation', particularly in the context of twelfth-century Sicily, may be the ways in which

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<sup>116</sup> For an in-depth account of this conflict, see Alexander of Telese in Graham A. Loud, *Roger II and the Creation of the Kingdom of Sicily*, pp. 102-103.

<sup>117</sup> Kathleen Ashley & Veronique Plesch, 'The Cultural Processes of "Appropriation"', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, Vol. 32, 1 (2002), pp. 1.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>119</sup> Claire Sponsler, 'In Transit: Theorizing Cultural Appropriation in Medieval Europe', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, Vol. 32, 1 (2002), p. 23.

political powers *adopt* and *adapt* pre-existing cultural traditions to promote and maintain power.

In relation to the theme of ‘empire’ discussed in the Introduction, Edward Said has described the ways in which imperial powers have historically engaged culture to maintain authority; to Said without ‘...the authority of recognisable cultural formations’, empire is not possible.<sup>120</sup> According to Said, these cultural formations are often cobbled together from a variety of sources: ‘...far from being unitary or monolithic or autonomous things, cultures usually assume more ‘foreign’ elements, alterities, differences than they consciously exclude’.<sup>121</sup> Four centuries before Roger, the creators of Charlemagne’s palace at Aachen looked to their Byzantine rivals for artistic inspiration in creating his imperial palace, as such the space represents ‘a network of reciprocal influences...borrowing and copying which reinforced the status of current rulers...lending credibility to the exalted worthiness of the empire’.<sup>122</sup>

Two hundred years after the death of Roger II, Ibn Khaldun wrote in his influential historical work, *Al-Muqaddimah*, about the conditions necessary to promote culture as a unifying political force:

...when a nation has gained the upper hand and taken possession of the holdings of its predecessors...its prosperity and well-being grow...From the necessities of life and a life of austerity, they progress to the luxuries and a life of comfort and beauty. They come to adopt the customs and (enjoy) the conditions of their predecessors. Luxuries require development of the customs necessary to produce them.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 12.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>122</sup> Rita Tekippe, ‘Copying Power: Emulation, Appropriation, and Borrowing for Royal Political Purposes’, *Visual Resources*, Vol. 20 (2004), p. 144.

<sup>123</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Muqadimmah*, Book I, trans. by Franz Rosenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 133.

Ibn Khaldun's expertise was built on a high-level political career in North Africa where he had seen his employers rise and fall. Following Ibn Khaldun's theory, it is only when a state attains peace that the 'luxurious' elements of society come to the fore. These 'luxuries' are the artistic and literary manifestations of power; seemingly light-weight, these elements are in fact an essential part of maintaining and promoting state power, the arena of 'soft power' to use Joseph S. Nye's term.<sup>124</sup> Constructed to promote the superiority of the state and its ruler, 'carefully tailored forms of self-representation were essential to the reproduction of...empires'.<sup>125</sup> As discussed above by 1139 Roger had attained this long-awaited Khaldunian peace and it is from this time that the king, along with his advisor George of Antioch, began a major program of artistic output, administrative reform and foreign expansion. These steps were designed to bolster the future of the Norman kingdom and I argue that the *Book of Roger* was an integral part of this program.

### *Artistic Output*

Based on the traditions of what Maria Rosa Menocal has neatly termed an 'enobling predecessor',<sup>126</sup> the artistic commissions undertaken by Roger throughout the 1130s were appropriations in the truest sense, drawn largely from Byzantine and Islamic sources and forged to create something both unique and powerful. Two of the few existing images of the king clearly demonstrate this hybridity; both images come from architectural monuments constructed in Palermo in the 1130s and 1140s. The first is the most ubiquitous image of Roger, found in the *Santa Maria dell'Amiraglio* church (also known as *La Martorana*; foundation charter 1143; figure 4). The image is unequivocally Byzantine in style; Roger is clothed in

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<sup>124</sup> See Joseph S. Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).

<sup>125</sup> C. A. Bayly & P. F. Bang, 'Pre-Modern Empires', *The Medieval History Journal*, Vol. 6, 2 (2003), p. 5.

<sup>126</sup> Here Menocal is referring to Muslim Spain, see Maria Rosa Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 2002).

imperial garb<sup>127</sup> and receives the crown directly from the hands of Christ, leaving no doubt in the viewer as to the divine right of the king. The Greek inscription reads *Rogeros Rex* using the Latin word for ‘king’ and this propagandist image presents Roger as supreme ruler, responsible to no earthly authority.

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<sup>127</sup> The style of clothing does not reflect contemporary Byzantine practice of the 1140s but one of some generations earlier; see Ernst Kitzinger, *I mosaici di santa maria dell'ammiraglio* (Palermo: Istituto Siciliano di Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici, 1990), p. 192ff.



Figure 4: Roger II crowned by Christ, *Santa Maria dell'Amiraglio*, Palermo, c.1143.  
Source: Wikicommons

The second image (figure 5) comes from the *Cappella Palatina* (Palatine Chapel) in the *Palazzo dei Normanni*; it is one of two images of the king found in the chapel. In striking contrast to the image presented above, here Roger appears in Islamic garb,<sup>128</sup> with a swarthy complexion, kohl painted eyes, and surrounded by attendants, one playing an oud, the other pouring wine.



Figure 5: Roger in Muslim garb, *Cappella Palatina*, Palermo, 1130s  
Source: Wikicommons

These two images apparently present a somewhat conflicted impression, one Graeco-Byzantine, the other Islamic. However, this hybrid self-representation was entirely deliberate, designed to present Roger as a multi-faceted figure, an embodiment of all the cultures of his kingdom and the Mediterranean at large. The art historian William Tronzo has written on both

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<sup>128</sup> Hubert Houben has described the king's crown in this image as 'Arabic-pattern' but notes that Roger may have worn Byzantine and Latin style crowns also, depending on the occasion see Hubert Houben, *Roger II of Sicily*, p. 122 & p. 126.

images, arguing that the first embodies the political ideology of the Norman crown; depicting Roger in Byzantine imperial garb presents a powerful symbol of sovereignty:

He was at the top of the pyramid of the medieval hierarchy of rule, and in assimilating himself to the emperor the king proclaimed himself sovereign ruler in his own land – in the phrase of John of Salisbury (1168), ‘rex imperator in regno suo’, or ‘the king is emperor in his own land’.<sup>129</sup>

On the other hand, Tronzo maintains, the second image depicts Roger closer to his own people in Sicily, wearing clothes that would have been common in the streets of Palermo. According to Tronzo, this second image is ‘earthly’ and relatable, while the Byzantine image is ‘heavenly’ and distant.<sup>130</sup>

The major architectural and artistic projects undertaken by Roger through the 1130s and 1140s, including the cathedral at Cefalù (begun in 1131 CE) and the *Cappella Palatina*, are also a skilful blend of Byzantine and Islamic motifs, as well as Latin, typifying what has become known as the Siculo-Norman style. The *Cappella Palatina* was clearly an important project for Roger, and the Latin chronicler, Romuald of Salerno (1110x1120 – 1 April 1181/2 CE), nicely describes Roger’s decision to commission the building:

Meanwhile King Roger possessed his realm in peace and tranquillity. Since in neither peace nor war did he know how to be idle, he ordered a very beautiful palace to be built at Palermo, in which he constructed a chapel floored in astonishing stone, which he covered with a gilded roof, and endowed and beautified with various ornaments.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> William Tronzo, *The Cultures of His Kingdom: Roger II and the Cappella Palatina in Palermo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 141.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 143-144.

<sup>131</sup> Romuald of Salerno, ‘Chronicon sive Annales, 1153-69’, in *The History of the Tyrants of Sicily by ‘Hugo Falcandus’*, trans. by Graham A. Loud and Thomas Wiedemann (Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 219.

Construction on the chapel began in 1132 and the space was used for royal ceremonies as well as religious services where the liturgy was most probably given in Latin, Greek and Arabic;<sup>132</sup> it is not clear if the liturgy given was the Greek or Latin rite. The sophistication of the work within the chapel suggests artisans who were trained in Latin, Byzantine and Islamic church/mosque decoration.<sup>133</sup> The chapel's decorative features have essentially remained intact since the twelfth century and as such it offers a unique example of the artistic hybridity of Byzantine, Islamic and Latin forms.

In the apse of the chapel is the Christ Pantokrator (figure 6), the mosaic arrangement is of Middle Byzantine derivation and follows in large part established rules of Byzantine church decoration.<sup>134</sup> There are Islamic *muqarnas* (stalactite vaulting, figure 7) decorating the ceiling of the nave resembling greatly those found in the mosques of North Africa;<sup>135</sup> Arabic inscriptions in Kufic script are positioned around the chapel, the largest corpus of these are supplications made to God (*ad'iyā*) asking for '...victory and propitious fate...attainment and victory, power, perfection and good-fortune'.<sup>136</sup> Significantly, Jeremy Johns believes that 'such inscriptions were less important for their content than as demonstrations that the Norman conquerors had appropriated the languages, scripts and styles of the previous rulers of the South'.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Alex Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy*, p. 237.

<sup>133</sup> Eve Borsook, *Messages in Mosaic: The Royal Programmes of Norman Sicily, 1130-1187* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998), p. 40. Jeremy Johns believes that the painted ceilings of the chapel were undertaken by artists who had worked outside of Sicily for Muslim patrons, see Jeremy Johns, 'Arabic Inscriptions in the Cappella Palatina: Performativity, Audience, Legibility and Illegibility' in *Viewing Inscriptions in the Late Antique and Medieval Mediterranean* ed. by Antony Eastmond (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 143-144.

<sup>134</sup> Ernst Kitzinger, *I Mosaici*, pp. 2-4.

<sup>135</sup> Jonathan M. Bloom, 'The Introduction of the *Muqarnas* into Egypt', *Muqarnas V: An Annual on Islamic Art and Architecture*, ed. by Oleg Grabar (Leiden: Brill, 1988), p. 21.

<sup>136</sup> Jeremy Johns, 'Arabic Inscriptions in the Cappella Palatina', p. 132.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.* p. 124.

Finally, there is a quintessentially local feature - the pavement of the nave belongs to the regional Opus Sectile (or Cosmatesque) genre of South Italy (figure 9), a distinctive style of geometric inlay stonework.<sup>138</sup>

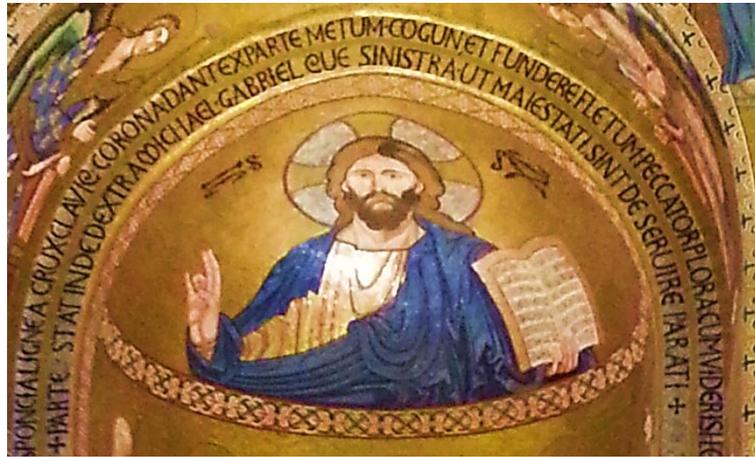


Figure 6: Christ Pantokrator in the *Cappella Palatina*  
Photo: Katherine Jacka



Figure 7: Muqarnaş in the *Cappella Palatina*  
Photo: Katherine Jacka

<sup>138</sup> See Dorothy F. Glass, *Studies on Cosmatesque Pavements* (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1980).



Figure 8: Arabic Inscriptions in the *Cappella Palatina*  
 Photo: Jeremy Johns<sup>139</sup>



Figure 9: Optus Sectile in the *Cappella Palatina*  
 Photo: Katherine Jacka

<sup>139</sup> Jeremy Johns, 'Arabic Inscriptions in the Cappella Palatina', p. 127.

The melding together of disparate styles in the *Cappella Palatina* was clearly deliberate but what exactly was its purpose? William Tronzo attests to Roger's ability to 'cull the princely cultures of the medieval Mediterranean, to draw upon them and assemble from them forms', the artistic program of the chapel is 'synthetic, recombinant, hybrid or even mongrel'.<sup>140</sup> To Tronzo, this was entirely intentional on Roger's part; like Jeremy Johns, he believes that the chapel was designed to reflect Roger's mastery over the cultures of his kingdom and Mediterranean culture at large. That Roger may have invited artisans from Constantinople and North Africa to work on the chapel reinforces this point – the chapel was a representational space for Roger who needed to convince both his own subjects and surrounding empires that he was, at the same time, one of the them but also unique and distinct. This hybrid display of magnificence would 'keep them [the Normans] competitive amongst the courts of medieval Europe and the near East'.<sup>141</sup>

### *Administrative Reform*

It was not just in the field of art and architecture that Roger appropriated the systems of non-Latin sources but also in his program of administrative reform which continued apace throughout the 1140s. Towards the end of his life, it appears Roger wanted to put issues of land, and who it belonged to, into coherent order. As such, under Roger two new institutions were established, the *Dīwān Al-Ma'mur*, (lit. the Office of Verification), or royal chancery and the *Dīwān Al-Taḥqīq Al-Ma'mur* (lit. the Busy Office of Verification) both based firmly on Fatimid models.<sup>142</sup> The *Dīwān Al-Ma'mur* dealt with fiscal administration and management of

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<sup>140</sup> William Tronzo, 'The Artistic Culture of Twelfth-Century Sicily with a Focus on Palermo', in *Sicily and the Mediterranean, Migration, Exchange, Reinvention*, ed. by Claudia Karagoz et al (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2015), p. 62.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>142</sup> The concept of the royal *dīwān* had been perfected from the mid-8<sup>th</sup> to mid-9<sup>th</sup> centuries CE by the Fatimids in Cairo; from a provincial institution they developed an 'elaborate and sophisticated imperial bureaucracy', see Jeremy Johns, *Arabic Administration in Norman Sicily* (Cambridge:

crown lands and vassals while the *Dīwān Al-Taḥqīq Al-Ma'mur* composed and verified confirmations of crown lands and vassals through the issuing of royal *diplomata*.<sup>143</sup>

Jeremy Johns' 2002 book *Arabic Administration in Norman Sicily* deals directly with the establishment of these institutions and their primary purpose. From the time of Roger I's conquest there was an urgent need to ascertain land ownership and to 'divide the spoils' amongst the Latin church and lay followers of the Normans, a process which began from the 1090s.<sup>144</sup> Under Roger II, this process was formalised under the auspices of the *Dīwān Al-Taḥqīq Al-Ma'mur* where most of the royal *diplomata* were produced in Arabic and Greek. In 1144, Roger took this process further, commanding his vassals in Calabria and Sicily to present all privileges granted to them by him and his ancestors.<sup>145</sup> These were to be scrutinised and re-issued and, in the space of nine months, more than thirty documents were issued, far exceeding the normal rate of production of such documents (four times the annual average).<sup>146</sup> Through these actions Roger was '...keen to define the royal demesne and therefore to limit the possessions and rights of barons or land-owning institutions...'.<sup>147</sup> Before this major shakeup in 1144, ownership of land in Sicily and South Italy had been ascertained by oral testimony, recorded in *dafātīr* (sing. *daftār*), an Arabic word meaning 'register', 'leger' or 'codex'.<sup>148</sup> Boundary disputes did occur, though these were usually adjudicated through an inquest.

Throughout the 1140s Roger was stamping his authority on land-holding in the Kingdom of Sicily, and there was a deliberate program, administered through the royal *dīwān*, to consolidate Roger's power over land distribution. From this action, it appears that Roger was concerned about the claims of Latin Church and laymen, rather than the Muslim villein

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Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 14.

<sup>143</sup> Alex Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy*, p. 154.

<sup>144</sup> Jeremy Johns, *Arabic Administration in Norman Sicily*, p. 39.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>147</sup> Alex Metcalfe, *Muslims and Christians in Norman Sicily*, p. 116.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

population, who from the early conquest period found themselves in the possession of Christian lords. From 1145, there was a switch from maintaining registers of villeins, to compiling registers of land-boundaries, and this was now the primary tool for ascertaining land holding.<sup>149</sup> Roger was stamping his authority on land-holding in the Kingdom of Sicily and those awaiting renewals of land and privileges were at a distinct disadvantage due to their inability to understand the very documents that gave them their rights:

As they returned to estates and churches, they carried with them a vivid, but disturbing and perplexing, impression of the new regime, and a tangible statement of the authority of the royal *dīwān*, its central role in the administration of the kingdom and in the execution of royal policy, written in letters which they could understand only as symbols of royal power.<sup>150</sup>

Significantly, through the example of the power of the *dīwān*, and its deliberate policy of issuing documents primarily in Arabic and Greek, Roger was wielding language as an exclusionary tool. It can be argued that the *Book of Roger* was a part of this exclusionary process, providing a comprehensive snapshot of the settlements of Sicily written in a language that was out of reach of the Latin nobility.

The *diplomata* produced by the *dīwān* were designed to ‘reaffirm Roger’s rights and privileges as king to dispose of his lands and men in the way in which he commanded via his officials’<sup>151</sup> and rather than previous systems of automatic inheritance, these ‘foreign’ administrative models aided Roger in consolidating and centralising power into his own hands. Commenting on the establishment of these institutions, Jeremy Johns states that:

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<sup>149</sup> Jeremy Johns, *Arabic Administration in Norman Sicily*, p.145.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 300.

<sup>151</sup> Alex Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy*, p. 157.

In Sicily, the De Hautevilles had conquered a province on the periphery of the Fatimid empire and when, a generation after their neglect had caused the collapse of the indigenous system, Roger II sought to repair it...Roger thus gave a new lease of life to previously moribund Arabic and Islamic institutions and practices, restoring them to such health that they outlasted his dynasty.<sup>152</sup>

### *Foreign Expansion*

In keeping with his new-found confidence, under Roger's orders throughout the 1140s the Norman navy undertook a series of campaigns of territorial expansion into Muslim and Byzantine territory. These campaigns held economic benefits in terms of trade, taxation revenue and the collection of booty, and served also to increase the security of the Sicilian coast. Economically, Roger '...made provision for the future and prepared a vast treasure for the defence of the realm, which he stored at Palermo'.<sup>153</sup>

As an island, Sicily's connection to the sea has always been profound, the sea being the medium by which food and merchandise are exported, thereby increasing the wealth of the island. This relationship has created both opportunities and challenges as: 'the exposure of the island on all sides made it the target of invaders from every direction...the island's openness to the Mediterranean also brought it prosperity'.<sup>154</sup> The well-being of the kingdom's maritime cities relied on foreign exports and wealth came from what could be produced in the kingdom; wheat was a major export commodity as well as seafood (in particular tuna), oil, timber and minerals from various mines.<sup>155</sup> Roger clearly recognised this fact and worked to foster

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<sup>152</sup> Jeremy Johns, *Arabic Administration in Norman Sicily*, p. 5.

<sup>153</sup> Hugo Falcandus, *The History of the Tyrants of Sicily*, p. 58.

<sup>154</sup> David Abulafia, 'Medieval Sicily: An Island Open on all Sides', in *Sicily and the Sea* (Zwolle: W Books, 2015), p. 134.

<sup>155</sup> Donald Matthew, *The Norman Kingdom of Sicily* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992),

favourable trade relations with the maritime states of Venice, Genoa and Pisa.<sup>156</sup> Although it is difficult to accurately calculate the wealth of the Kingdom of Sicily in the mid-twelfth century, the documents surviving from the period ‘create an impression of general economic well-being’.<sup>157</sup>

Although Roger’s motivations in undertaking conquests into the Eastern Mediterranean and North Africa at first appear purely economic, there was a political bent to his belligerent position. Charles Dalli has convincingly argued that rather than attempting to create a land empire, Sicily’s strategic position in the central Mediterranean set it up ideally for the creation of a *thalassocracy*, or sea empire.<sup>158</sup> Roger’s father, Roger I, had from the first worked to set up smooth and profitable trade networks with Zirid *Ifriqya*, supplying grain to the region, and as such, North Africa had become dependent on Sicily’s grain supplies.<sup>159</sup> Under Roger II, this commercial cooperation turned to confrontation. A serious famine in North Africa during the 1140s did not soften Roger’s position, and through the inability of the Zirids to continue paying for grain shipments, Roger struck aggressively. At first the attacks on North African cities were punitive, with the example of Djidjelli in modern-day Algeria a stark example: in 1143 Roger’s fleet plundered and destroyed the city.<sup>160</sup> However, Roger had larger ambitions of permanent Norman settlement in North Africa, and in 1146 the Norman fleet captured Tripoli where a Muslim governor, loyal to Palermo, was installed and taxes collected from the city’s citizens.<sup>161</sup>

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p. 73

<sup>156</sup> David Abulafia, ‘The Crown and the Economy under Roger II’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 37 (1983), p. 14; Timothy Smit, “‘This Island of Many Natural Riches and Many Peoples’”: Geography, Population and the Economic Identities of Norman Sicily’, in *Mediterranean Identities in the Premodern Era: Entrepôts, Islands, Empires* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), p. 97.

<sup>157</sup> Donald Matthew, *The Norman Kingdom of Sicily*, p. 71.

<sup>158</sup> Charles Dalli, ‘Bridging Europe and Africa: Norman Sicily’s Other Kingdom’, in *Bridging the Gaps. Sources, Methodology and Approaches to Religion in History* (Pisa: Pisa University Press, 2008), pp. 77-93.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79.

<sup>160</sup> Hubert Houben, *Roger II of Sicily*, p. 79.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

In 1147 Roger launched attacks against Byzantium, briefly taking Corfu, and sacking Athens, Thebes and Corinth.<sup>162</sup> In 1149, in a daring move, Roger launched an attack on Constantinople itself and the crew of his forty ships loudly proclaimed the greatness of King Roger. The Arab chronicler Ibn Al-Athīr (1160-1233 CE) in his famous work *Al-Khāmil fī-l-Tarīkh* (The Complete History) wrote of the attack:

...in one year his [Roger's] fleet came to the city of Constantinople and entered the mouth of the harbour, where they captured several of the Byzantine galleys and took a number of prisoners. The Franks shot arrows at the windows of the imperial palace.<sup>163</sup>

This attack was probably not meant to be a serious move against Constantinople, but rather a humiliating insult to Byzantine authority. Despite some early successes, ultimately, Sicilian domination of North Africa and the eastern Mediterranean was short-lived (figure 10). Revolts across the region became too difficult to quell and by 1160 – six years after Roger's death – Norman Africa had been lost.<sup>164</sup> However, although the Norman presence outside Sicily and South Italy was brief, there is little doubt that the foreign expansion undertaken by Roger's navy throughout the 1140s was an attempt to assert the power of the Normans in the central Mediterranean and to perhaps create a *thalassocracy* as Charles Dalli has argued.

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., pp. 84-85.

<sup>163</sup> Ibn Al-Athīr, *The Chronicle of Ibn Al-Athir for the Crusading Period from Al-Kamil fī 'l-tarikh*, Part 2, trans. by D.S. Richards (Farnham: Ashgate, 2007), p. 32.

<sup>164</sup> Alex Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy*, p. 174.



Figure 10: Maximum expansion of the Kingdom of Sicily, Twelfth Century CE  
Source: Wikicommons

### George of Antioch

The question remains – why did Roger choose to appropriate non-Latin systems in promoting Norman power? In answering this question I would argue that Roger was not necessarily the architect of this appropriation but he was careful to surround himself with advisors who could assist him in negotiating the intricacies of Mediterranean culture. In fact, his closest advisor, George of Antioch, was an Arabic-speaking Greek who had a profound influence on Roger and his adoption of non-Latin culture and systems into his administration. Indeed it was George who constructed the *Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio* church, which contains the Byzantine-style image of Roger discussed above.

The Egyptian historian, Al-Maqrīzi (1364 – 1442 CE), wrote a short biographical note on George and his relationship to Roger. According to Al-Maqrīzi, George's family was well-connected, having worked for the emperor in Constantinople; however, for some unknown reason, the family had lost favour there and been sent into exile. George's ship was intercepted by the Zirid sultan Tamīm ibn al-Mu'izz in about 1087/88 CE and he and his family were

brought to Mahdia in *Ifrīqya*. Al-Mu'izz first appointed George as his financial advisor and he later rose to become governor of the city of Sousse. Again George fell out of favour and beseeched Roger to take him in, which the latter did in 1108. George became emīr to the king in 1125. According to Al-Maqrīzi, George was instrumental in promoting Roger's Mediterranean image and in organising his administration:

[George] amassed the revenues and organised the foundations of the kingdom. He veiled Roger from [his] subjects, and arranged for him to dress in clothes like the Muslims, and not to ride out, nor to show himself in public, except on holidays, when he would process, preceded by horses adorned with saddles of gold and silver.

George was promoted to 'emīr of emīrs' and the admiral of Roger's navy (this led to the term *ammiratus* (admiral) coming into general use to describe supreme naval commanders).<sup>165</sup> According to Al-Maqrīzi:

Roger's state grew under George's management...Thus the island flourished in a most splendid way, and travellers from every land made for it with all sorts of goods and rare merchandise, until the year 546 H [20 April 1151 – 7 April 1152], [when] George the vizier died at the age of ninety.<sup>166</sup>

George's influence on Roger cannot be underestimated; he was an astute Mediterranean player, well-versed in Graeco-Byzantine and Islamic administration. As admiral of Roger's fleet, he was instrumental in the military successes of the Normans throughout the 1140s, and according to Romuald of Salerno, under the leadership of George of Antioch, the king 'obtained many victories on land and sea'.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> David Abulafia, 'Medieval Sicily: An Island Open on all Sides', p. 132.

<sup>166</sup> Quotation from Jeremy Johns, *Arabic Administration in Norman Sicily*, pp. 80-82.

<sup>167</sup> Romuald of Salerno, *Chronicon*, p. 220.

The church George constructed, *Santa Maria dell’Ammiraglio*, contains the only image we have of George himself, depicted as a white-bearded supplicant at the feet of the Virgin Mary (figure 11). George’s construction of the church had a primarily political purpose, designed to rival the splendour of a Byzantium and to place Roger on par with the emperor, ‘...the church is the medium through which strongly political statements about the nature of Roger’s kingdom and George of Antioch’s role within it are made’.<sup>168</sup>



Figure 11: Image of George of Antioch, *Santa Maria dell’Ammiraglio*, Palermo  
Photo: Katherine Jacka

<sup>168</sup> Jeremy Johns, *Arabic Administration in Norman Sicily*, p. 109.

## Conclusion

This chapter has shown the ways in which Islamic, Graeco-Byzantine and Latin artistic and administrative models were incorporated by Roger II into the state apparatus. Based on the traditions of what Maria Rosa Menocal has termed an ‘enobling predecessor’, Roger deftly appropriated the cultural traditions of his kingdom and surrounding superpowers in order to develop and maintain the Norman state.

These were traditions and systems that had been created by the very empires that Roger was in conflict with; rather than rejecting non-Latin systems, Roger and his advisor George of Antioch emulated and, in the final analysis, *appropriated* these to suit their political purposes. If not attempting to create an empire *per se*, Roger was at the very least presenting himself as a viable threat in the Mediterranean, building cultural capital in Sicily in a bid to challenge and usurp his opponents. Importantly, in emulating Islamic and Byzantine cultural forms, Roger was also appealing to the diverse cultural groups of his own kingdom, demonstrating that he was one and the same with them.

This cultural appropriation, therefore, was a feature of Roger’s kingship and one that I argue was tied to his decision to commission the *Book of Roger*. The following chapter will discuss the genesis of the book and the arrival of its author, Idrīsi, to Sicily and show how the book played a part in the political program undertaken by Roger throughout the 1140s.

## Chapter Two: ‘Wisdom not less than Power’: State-Building and the *Book of Roger*

Chapter One showed the ways in which Roger co-opted diverse Islamic, Byzantine and Latin traditions in order to forge a uniquely Sicilian royal identity and to bolster the burgeoning Norman state. In this chapter I will extend this argument to the king’s decision to commission the *Book of Roger*. What motivations can be identified in Roger’s choice to commission such a large-scale work of original scholarship based as it is on Islamic models and written in a language Roger would not have necessarily understood?

According to the Latin chronicler Hugo Falcandus (wrote second half of the twelfth century), throughout the 1140s Roger ‘took enormous care both to sort out present problems and to make careful provision for the future out of present conditions, and he made certain that he would use wisdom not less than power both in destroying his enemies and in increasing his kingdom by extending his territories’.<sup>169</sup>

As discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, most historians of Roger mention the *Book of Roger* in brief terms and tend to depict Roger as a ‘philosopher-king’, a figure purely interested in the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. While there is evidence from the Latin sources, particularly Falcandus, that Roger was intellectually curious, there has been little attempt to make connections between the appearance of the *Book of Roger* and the political exigencies of twelfth-century Sicily. This chapter will analyse how Roger’s commissioning of the book was a shrewd political and strategic move, tied to the background of the author of the book, Idrīsi.

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<sup>169</sup>Hugo Falcandus, *A History of the Tyrants of Sicily*, p. 57.

## The Book of Roger

At the time of its production, the work known most commonly as the *Book of Roger* was in fact entitled *Nuzhat Al-Mushtāq fī Ikhtirāq Al-Afāq* (Eng. The Book of Pleasure for those who Desire to Visit Far Away Places). The fact that the *Book of Roger* became the common name of the work, including in Arabic speaking regions, demonstrates to what degree Roger, rather than Idrīsi, has historically been associated with the book's production.

Precise dating for the commencement and completion of the *Book of Roger* comes from the book's preface. Idrīsi explains that research on the book took a period of 'nearly fifteen years';<sup>170</sup> he then states that Roger ordered the book to be called:

...The Book of Pleasure for those who Desire to Visit Far Away Places and this took place in the first part of January, in accordance with the month of *Shawwāl* in the year of 548 [1154 CE] and the order was obeyed and the decree was carried out.<sup>171</sup>

Roberto Rubinacci has convincingly argued that Idrīsi most probably began researching the book in 1139 and began writing in 1154.<sup>172</sup> The book appears to have taken a few years beyond 1154 to complete, as Idrīsi mentions that Frederick Barbarossa is living in Burgundy, which would have only occurred after his marriage to Beatrice of Burgundy in 1156/57.<sup>173</sup> Therefore it seems most probable that the writing of the work began in 1154 and continued up to at least 1157. Idrīsi may have pushed himself to finish before Roger's impending death; however, it appears that Idrīsi had not finished the book by the time Roger died in February 1154.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Idrīsi, *Opus geographicum*, fasc. 1, p. 6.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>172</sup> Roberto Rubinacci, 'La data della Geografia di Idrīsi', pp. 531-535.

<sup>173</sup> See Henri Bresc and Anliese Nef's introduction in Idrīsi, *La première géographie de l'Occident*, p. 18.

<sup>174</sup> Idrīsi, *La première géographie de l'Occident*, pp. 17-18.

Like other Arabic geographical treatises of the period, the *Book of Roger* divides the globe into ‘climates’ (based on the Greek *klima*, meaning ‘inclination’) this being based on the system developed by Ptolemy (c. 100 – c. 170 CE) in his famous work *Geography*; this concept was to be taken up by Idrīsi and other Muslim geographers as *iqlīm* (pl. *aqālīm*). These climatic zones represented lines of latitude, beginning at the Equator and tending northward; the southern lands were believed to be uninhabited due to extreme heat and so were not divided along climatic lines.<sup>175</sup> Figure 12 shows the world map from the *Book of Roger* (MS Pococke 375) dated to 1553 and housed at the Bodleian Library in Oxford; the lines of latitude can be clearly seen in red. It is imperative to note that at no point in his text does Idrīsi mention a world map and I suggest that the world map may have been added by copyists and was not in fact in the original text.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Aristotle (b. 384 BCE) described the two poles as being ‘inhospitable’ in his treatise *Meteorology*, see Aristotle, *Meteorologica*, Vol.3, trans. by E.W. Webster (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1908).

<sup>176</sup> The ‘encircling’ ocean (*al-baḥr al-muḥīṭ*) is present on the world map. The Atlantic in this case, although like the Greek geographers, Idrīsi believed there was an ocean encircling the entire globe.



Figure 12: World Map from the *Book of Roger* (MS Pococke 375), 1553  
Source: Bodleian Library, Oxford

The *Book of Roger* was the first example of an Arabic geographical text divided into ten sections longitudinally. The ‘known world’ (*oikumene*) was therefore divided into seventy sections – seven lines of latitude divided by ten lines of longitude.<sup>177</sup> Idrīsi describes each of the seventy parts of the known world, including a regional map for each – making a total of seventy sets of text of varying length, and seventy sectional maps.

Idrīsi’s ‘world’ included most of Europe, Africa (North, West and East), the Middle East, India, parts of East Asia including China, the Indian Ocean and its islands. The Mediterranean, Black Sea and Caspian Sea are also included. Based on the text from the critical

<sup>177</sup> Sayyid Maqbul Ahmad, ‘Geography of Sharif Idrīsi’, p. 158.

edition of the *Book of Roger*, table 1 below illustrates Idrīsi's division of the world's regions.

The description of Sicily takes up most of Climate Four, Section Two (highlighted in yellow).

Note that this table is my own summary and does not cover all the places mentioned in the text.

TABLE 1: DIVISION OF THE WORLD IN THE <i>BOOK OF ROGER</i>										
Part:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>Climat e 1:</b>	The Atlantic Morocco Senegal Mauritania	Mali Ghana Niger	Mali Nubia	Nubia Abyssinia Egypt	Abyssinia	Somalia Yemen	Indian Ocean Kenya & Tanzania	Mozambique Sri Lanka	Mozambique Madagascar Sumatra	China Sea India
<b>Climat e 2:</b>	Sahara	South-west Libya Chad	<i>Kuwār</i> Oasis <sup>178</sup> South-west Libya	Oases of South-eastern Egypt	The Red Sea Mecca Medina	The Persian Gulf Oman	Baluchistan Sindh Iran (Eastern)	India	India China	China
<b>Climat e 3:</b>	The ‘Encircling’ Ocean Sahara Morocco	Algeria Tunisia Libya	Libya (eastern)	Egypt The Nile	The Red Sea Arabia Damascus Antioch	Bahrein Oman Iraq	South-east Iran	Uzbekistan Turkmenistan	Tibet <i>Taghzhaz</i> <sup>179</sup>	China
<b>Climat e 4:</b>	Morocco Spain	Sardinia Corsica Sicily	Calabria Corfu Cefalonia	Greek islands Peloponnes	Rhodes Cyprus Syria	Armenia Azerbaijan Iraq Iran	Iran	Central Asia	Central Asia	Central Asia
<b>Climat e 5:</b>	Northern Andalusia Gascony	Burgundy	Italy The Adriatic	Romania Sea of Marmara	Anatolia	Armenia Azerbaijan	Caspian Sea	Caspian Sea	Central Asia	Gog and Magog <sup>180</sup>

<sup>178</sup> An oasis on the trading route between Fezan and Lake Chad, see Dierk Lange, ‘The Chad region as a Crossroads’, in *General History of Africa*, ed. by M. Elfasi (London: UNESCO, 1988), p. 3.

<sup>179</sup> Nomadic peoples who settled in Eastern Iran during the Sassanid period – also known as ‘*Turu*’, see Amani Mansour, ‘Political Relationship Between Sassanid and Eastern Nomadic Tribes During Arabs Invasion’, *Pazhohesh Namey-e Tarikh*, Vol. 4, 13 (2009), pp. 1-29.

<sup>180</sup> Gog and Magog (*Yajūj wa Majūj*) appear in the Book of Revelation and Surah 18 of the *Qūr’ān*, these figures are associated with the Apocalypse but Idrīsi

<b>Climat e 6:</b>	Brittany	France, Germany, England	Bohemia, Hungary, Poland, Romania	Macedonia, Russia	The Black Sea, Russia	Bulgaria	The Caspian Sea	Gog and Magog	and	Land of the <i>Kipchaks</i> <sup>181</sup> , Lands of the Turks, Gog and Magog	Gog and Magog
<b>Climat e 7:</b>	Atlantic Ocean, Islands of the Atlantic (uninhabited)	England, Scotland, Ireland	Poland, Sweden, Finland	Russia, Finland	Northern Russia	Bulgaria	The Caspian Sea	<i>Bilād Q.ḡrā</i> <sup>182</sup>		Gog and Magog	All shadow

is most probably referring to the lands to the east of Azerbaijan, and perhaps the Mongols, see Jean-Pierre Filiu, *Apocalypse in Islam*, trans. by M. B. De Bevoise (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011).

<sup>181</sup> Precursors to the modern Kazakhs, see Jean-Paul Roux, *L'Asie Centrale, Histoire et Civilisation* (Paris: Librairie Arthème-Fayard, 1997).

<sup>182</sup> Unknown; this section is taken from the work of the tenth-century Persian geographer Al-Jihāni, see Idrīsi, *Opus Geographicum*, fasc. 8, p. 961.

While the table above shows an impressive scope, it must be remembered that the bulk of Idrīsi's text comes from earlier Arabic geographical sources (see Chapter Three). It is only when dealing with the Mediterranean region and parts of Europe and the Near East that we find a substantial amount of original material in the *Book of Roger*. Plagiarism was of course not thought of in the twelfth century as it is today<sup>183</sup> and Idrīsi's use of earlier well-known sources most probably gave the book added credibility. I will now turn to the book's author himself, Idrīsi, and discuss how the scholar's arrival at Roger's court was a strategic move on the part of the king.

### Idrīsi

There is very little information on Idrīsi himself and most of what is known about him comes from Arabic sources, though even these are not always in agreement.<sup>184</sup> Idrīsi was well-connected in his own community, holding a position of some prestige: he was a descendant of the Shia Idrīsid dynasty (r.788-974 CE) and the Ḥammūdids, the Iberian branch of the Idrīsids (r.1016-1058 CE).<sup>185</sup> The Hammudid dynasty had briefly ruled Córdoba and Málaga

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<sup>183</sup> Alexander Lindey, *Plagiarism and Originality* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1974).

<sup>184</sup> These are Al-Ṣafadi (1297-1363 CE), Ibn Bashrūn (f. twelfth century) and Ibn Al-Athīr (1160-1233 CE).

<sup>185</sup> Idrīsi's birthplace is still a matter of debate. The diplomat and geographer Leo Africanus (c. 1494 – c. 1554? CE) claimed that Idrīsi had in fact been born in Mazara on the coast of western Sicily. See Giovanni Oman, 'Osservazioni sulle notizie biografiche comunemente diffuse sullo scrittore arabo al-Sharif Idrīsi (VI-XII sec.)', *Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli*, Vol. 30, 20 (1970), pp. 209-239. As-Safadi's entry on Idrīsi's father Mu.hammad b. 'Abd Allah b. al-'Ali Idrīs in *Al-Wafī bi Al-Wafayāt* states that the latter sought refuge in Sicily from the political strife in Spain in the second half of the eleventh century and that Idrīsi was brought up (*nasha'a*) at Roger I's court, prompting Allaoua Amara and Annliese Nef to suggest that Idrīsi may indeed have been born in Italy. See Amara and Nef, 'Al-Idrīsī et les Hammūides de Sicile: nouvelles données biographiques sur l'auteur du *Livre de Roger*', *Arabica*, Vol. 48, 1 (2000), pp. 121-127.

in the eleventh century. Idrīsi's family traced its lineage directly to the Prophet Muhammed through the Ḥasanid branch of 'Ali's family, and as such he was considered a *Sharīf*, of noble birth. He was most probably educated in Córdoba, the intellectual centre of Andalusia and appears to have spent some years in the Iberian Peninsula around 1115.<sup>186</sup>

The Arab biographer As-Ṣafadi (1297-1363 CE) stated that Idrīsi came to Sicily at Roger's invitation as he had been forced to leave Spain due to his affiliation with the Hammudids, who had by that time lost political power.<sup>187</sup> According to As-Ṣafadi, Roger 'admired scholars of philosophy' and invited Idrīsi to his court from a rather ambiguous location: 'the coast' (*al-'adwa*).<sup>188</sup> The king welcomed Idrīsi to his court, acknowledging the scholar's noble lineage, the political trouble his family had faced and offering him safe haven:

He [Roger II] asked him to stay and told him [to al-Idrīsī], "you belong to the house of the caliphate and when you lived among the Muslims, their Kings sought to kill you, and if you [decide] to come to me, you will be safe". He answered him about that [that he will stay] and he arranged [his stay] with a generosity that was only reserved for Kings.<sup>189</sup>

Once Idrīsi was settled in Sicily Roger made clear his intentions regarding their geographical project:

He [Roger II] told him, "I want to research the stories of the countries

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<sup>186</sup> César E. Dubler, 'Idrīsiana Hispanica', p. 92.

<sup>187</sup> See 'Hammūdids' in *EI2*.

<sup>188</sup> Jeremy Johns has probably rightly interpreted this 'coast' to refer to the greater Mediterranean coast as it does in other Islamic sources see Jeremy Johns, *Arabic Administration in Norman Sicily*, p. 236, n. 101.

<sup>189</sup> Quotation from Wael Abu-'Uksa, 'Lives of Frankish princes from al-Ṣafadī's biographical dictionary, *al-wāfī bil-wafayāt*', *Mediterranean Historical Review*, Vol. 32, 1 (2017), p. 93.

through direct observation and not through books”. They selected wise, smart, and clever people, and *Rujār* sent them to the countries of the east, west, south, and north, and he sent with them map-makers in order to draw what they saw with their own eyes. He commanded them to investigate and to comprehend what is worthwhile knowing. If any one of them came back with a form [or map], [then] al- Idrīsī would record it until he completed what he wanted. He collected it [this information] in a composition, and it is the book “*Nuzhat al-mushtāq*” by al-Sharīf al-Idrīsī.<sup>190</sup>

If As-Ṣafadī’s version of events is to be believed, Idrīsī was in fact in exile, unable to return to his homeland and living by the favour of the king. As-Ṣafadī wrote notices on both Idrīsī and Roger in his biographical dictionary, *Al-Wafī bi Al-Wafayāt* (Sufficiency of Obituaries). As-Ṣafadī claims that Idrīsī was ‘a witty scholar and an elegant poet’ and provides a few of Idrīsī’s poems in his entry on the scholar.<sup>191</sup> These are the only surviving examples of Idrīsī’s poetry and so are, needless to say, very valuable. An analysis of these poems is beyond the scope of this thesis but it is important to note that they are dark in nature and express longing for an undefined homeland. This supports the argument that Idrīsī was in fact in exile at Roger’s court and unable to return home.

Idrīsī remained in Sicily after Roger’s death in 1154 in the employ of Roger’s son, William I. After completing the *Book of Roger*, Idrīsī wrote a compendium on drugs, *Kitāb al-Djāmi ‘ li- ṣifāt ashtāt al-nabāt wa-ḍurūb anwā ‘i al-mufradāt* (Book of Simple Remedies and Plants),<sup>192</sup> and a work of poetry, now lost. The Sicilian Arab poet Ibn Bashrūn claimed that Idrīsī wrote a second book of geography for William, entitled *Rawḍ Al-Uns wa Nuzhat An-*

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>191</sup> Al-Ṣafadī, *Das biographische Lexikon del Salahaddin Halil Ibn Aibak as-safadi*, Teil I, (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1962), pp. 163-164.

<sup>192</sup> This work is currently being edited by a group of French scholars. For more on Idrīsī’s use of language in the work see Cristina La Rosa, ‘La Terminologia Botanica Sicula e Andalusica nel *Kitāb al-Djāmi ‘ li-ashtāt al-nabāt* di Idrīsī’, *Annali di Ca’ Foscari*, Vol. 50 (2014), pp. 97-121.

*Nafs* (Gardens of the Heart and Pleasure of the Soul).<sup>193</sup> He may have been referring to what has become known as the *Uns Al-Muhaj wa Rawḍ Al-Furaj* (The Entertainment of Hearts and Meadows of Contemplation) or the ‘Little Idrīsi’, discovered in Istanbul by J. Horowitz in the 1920s.<sup>194</sup> The so-called ‘Little Idrīsi’ contains a description of Sicily although it is much shorter than that of the *Book of Roger*; in recent decades, Idrīsi’s authorship of *Uns* has been called into question.<sup>195</sup>

It is clear that Idrīsi’s invitation to Roger’s court was strategic, designed to provide Roger with vital information on Spain and North Africa. Roger may have also been looking to ingratiate himself with his own Muslim subjects by hiring a Muslim intellectual of such noble lineage. The fact that Idrīsi was given refuge in Sicily beyond Roger’s death suggests that he had been successful at obtaining the trust and respect of the Norman court at large, and had delivered a solid piece of scholarship in the *Book of Roger*. What remains to be considered is Roger’s motives for commissioning the book itself.

### **Preface to the Book of Roger**

The book’s Preface is often quoted by those writing about the *Book of Roger* as it offers the clearest explanation of Roger’s motivations for commissioning the book as well as Idrīsi’s methodology. Idrīsi lauds the talents of Roger, his leadership and scientific knowledge, and presents the king as the driving intellectual force behind the work. While the information in the Preface is useful, it is important to remember that Idrīsi was a servant of the king and therefore

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<sup>193</sup> Ahmad Sousa, *Arab geography of Al Sharif al Idrīsi*, p. 282.

<sup>194</sup> Idrīsi, *The Entertainment of Hearts and Meadows of Contemplation*, ed. by Fuat Sezgin (Frankfurt am Main: Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Science of the Johann Wolfgang University, 1984).

<sup>195</sup> It is possible that *Uns* was not in fact authored by Idrīsi as there are stark discrepancies between it and the *Book of Roger*, see Roberto Rubinacci, ‘Intorno al cosiddetto Piccolo Idrīsi’, *Yād-Nāma in memoria di Alessandro Bausani* (Rome: Bardi Editore, 1991), pp. 87-98.

probably sought to exalt his patron through panegyric; it appears also to have been written shortly before the king's imminent death in February 1154 and could be seen as a kind of eulogy. All quotations from the Preface are my own translations.

Idrīsi spends a good deal of the Preface lauding the king effusively; he writes of Roger's political acumen and commitment to Christianity:

The great king Roger, the one who finds his pride in God, the highly capable, king of Sicily, Italy, Lombardy and Calabria, superior to the king of the Rum, the victor of Christianity...<sup>196</sup>

The fact that Idrīsi states that Roger is better than the king of the *Rūm* (Romans, including Byzantium) may have been an attempt to portray Roger as the defender of Latin Christianity as opposed to eastern Orthodoxy; this was at a time when Roger was making attacks against Byzantium in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Idrīsi goes on to describe Roger's political skills, which he claims are exceptional. Amongst his own diverse community, he:

...handles matters with his determined will, works towards justice, he unites his community with his great and gracious leadership...<sup>197</sup>

Idrīsi then mentions Roger's foreign conquests; the king has extended the kingdom and humiliated his enemies:

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<sup>196</sup> Idrīsi, *Opus Geographicum*, fasc. 1, p. 4.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

He extended the borders of the country to the east and the west and humiliated the strongmen of his own denomination both near and far with the use of his available armies...<sup>198</sup>

The extension of his borders refers to Roger's campaigns against Byzantium and North Africa through the 1140s. The strongmen of Roger's own religious community surely refers to the Papacy and Byzantium and to Roger's difficult relationship with each. Roger is depicted as a fearless ruler, unafraid of challenging his enemies, even those of the same faith.

Idrīsi then echoes the opinions of the Latin chroniclers regarding Roger's intellectual capability:

He combines generosity with high morals, beauty of action and goodness with a courageous spirit, clarity of mind with profound intellect; the ability to dream with well-founded opinions...<sup>199</sup>

Indeed Idrīsi suggests that Roger himself was an inventor:

He has innovated wondrous innovations and pioneered unique originalities, no king before him has done what he has done...<sup>200</sup>

It is impossible to know if Roger did in fact invent anything, though a tri-lingual (Latin, Greek and Arabic) inscription on the wall of the Palatine Chapel from 1142 states that Roger had a water clock constructed.<sup>201</sup> Whatever the truth of the matter, Roger has clearly given instructions that he appear in the book as a learned monarch, the intellectual equal of any ruler operating in the Mediterranean.

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>201</sup> Michele Amari, Michele, *Storia dei musulmani di Sicilia*, III, pp. 29-36.

The next section of the Preface deals with Roger's motivations for commissioning the work – and here we glean one of the most crucial motives, and the one tied to this thesis' question, namely that Roger wanted to understand his own lands i.e. Sicily better and to place his kingdom in context with the rest of the world. Idrīsi clearly states in the book's preface that Roger had consulted earlier Arabic geographical work and found it lacking in regards to information provided on the Mediterranean and Europe:

...And not finding in these works a complete and detailed explanation but rather stupidity, he called on the scholars of this field and questioned them but alas did not gain any more information from them than what was found in the books.<sup>202</sup>

The next passage is crucial, now Idrīsi clearly states Roger's primary motivation in commissioning the book. According to Idrīsi:

He [Roger] wanted to know the true nature of his lands, to study them with certainty and experience, to learn their borders and routes by land and sea, and in which *clima* they lay, the location of its seas and gulfs and this along with knowledge of the other lands and territories of the seven climatic zones (agreed upon by the scholars and examined in manuscripts by the scribes and authors) and what countries are contained in each section of the seven climatic zones...<sup>203</sup>

Roger had an urgent need to understand Sicily and Europe better, the best source for geographical information in the twelfth century was from Arabic sources; however, this work had not provided the answers Roger needed. Idrīsi was therefore employed to redress this situation, it was imperative that the new information the book provided be as accurate as

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<sup>202</sup> Idrīsi, *Opus Geographicum*, fasc.1, p. 6.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

possible; the data collected was not to be second- or third-hand but rather gathered through painstaking empirical research with those that had visited the place described.

To this end, according to Idrīsi, Roger himself was involved in interviewing travellers who visited Sicily:

...he questioned the travellers to his lands, he brought to him the knowledgeable and those who had travelled and questioned them as a group and then individually and what was agreed upon in their testimony and what they all verified was written down and preserved and when they differed, he rejected this information and put it aside and he continued doing this work for a period of nearly fifteen years...<sup>204</sup>

Idrīsi states that travellers and itinerants, who presumably worked on the ships that pulled in at Sicily, were interviewed. In order to ensure the veracity of this information, these stories were compared and editorial decisions made as to what to include and what to discard. Checking the information became a process involving:

...the travellers that had witnessed the place and the itinerants who had mentioned and verified it. We then ensured that this testimony was placed in the correct part of the book according to what was known and possible...<sup>205</sup>

Roger determined that wise and educated men, along with illustrators, would, where possible, be sent to chronicle and draw notable features of the places described. Michele Amari writes that to this end researchers were sent to the Levant and the West to gather information and illustrate landmarks, which were then verified by Idrīsi based on what he had gathered through interviews.<sup>206</sup> In this way, the most accurate data could be ensured. This painstaking

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>206</sup> Michele Amari, *Storia dei musulmani di Sicilia*, III, p. 467.

attention to detail, in which undoubtedly no expense or effort was spared, demonstrates the ambitious nature of this work and indeed of its creators, particularly Roger as the project's financier. There was a desire in Roger to leave his mark by commissioning a 'world geography' similar to Ptolemy's, but with extended geographical knowledge of Europe and the Mediterranean. There seems no doubt that Roger, along with political motivations, also wished to produce a 'great work' as part of his legacy.

Adding to the enormous cost of the project, Roger ordered a silver globe to accompany the work, an integral part of Roger's vision:

So he ordered [in order to depict the world as described in the book] that this be concentrated into a great and detailed silver sphere, of immense size. The body weighs four hundred Roman pounds and each pound is worth one hundred dirhams; They engraved [onto the planisphere] the depiction of the seven climatic zones, incorporating the world's countries, regions, coasts, countryside, gulfs, seas, waterways the location of the rivers, its inhabitants and visitors...<sup>207</sup>

This globe remained, along with the text of the book, in Roger's palace, though was sadly destroyed during riots in 1161.<sup>208</sup>

From the *Book of Roger's* Preface, it is clear that Roger intended his book to go beyond the Arabic geographical scholarship which had come before. Idrīsi was clearly under orders to undertake painstaking empirical research to improve upon previous descriptions of Europe, the Mediterranean and, as I will demonstrate in the following chapters, the island of Sicily. It is hard to believe that this precise information was not meant to have a practical application and to play a part in Roger's political program. This last point brings me to the question of language

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<sup>207</sup> Idrīsi, *Opus Geographicum*, fasc. 1, pp. 6-7.

<sup>208</sup> Alex Metcalfe, *Muslims and Christians in Norman Sicily*, pp. 106-107.

– firstly, given Roger could not have read the *Book of Roger* himself, how was he to access its data? And secondly, who was the intended audience of the book if not the king himself?

### **The Language Question**

The question of the intended audience for the *Book of Roger* is a challenging one and, given Roger's death in 1154, has largely been left unanswered; although we may make suggestions as to whom the work was targeted, we really do not know the intended audience and many questions still remain. It is clear that Roger wanted to find the best intellectuals to undertake original scholarship at his court. As far as the field of geography went, in the twelfth century, Arabo-Muslim scholars were producing more advanced geographical work than Europeans (see Chapter Three), and Roger appears to have been aware of this fact.

Idrīsi clearly states in the *Book of Roger's* Preface that Roger had consulted earlier Arabic geographical work and found it lacking. Indeed Idrīsi cites only two non-Arab references for the book – Ptolemy whose work *Geography* provided much of the mathematical geography that subsequent Muslim geography was based on, and a figure called Arsīyūs Al-Anṭāki (Arsius of Antioch).

This last name has proved difficult to identify. I posit that Idrīsi could be referring to the Hispano-Roman priest and historian Orosius (c. 375 - c. 418 CE). Orosius was a Christian priest, historian and theologian who wrote the famous *Historiarum Adversum Paganos Libri VII* (*Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*).<sup>209</sup> The book is a historical narration focussing on the pagan peoples from the earliest time up until the time Orosius was alive and contains a

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<sup>209</sup> Martinez Pedro Cavero et al., 'El Commonitorium de Orosio. Traducción y comentario', *Faventia* Vol. 21, 1 (1999), pp. 65-83.

geographical section. However, although Orosius travelled to Jerusalem,<sup>210</sup> there is no connection between this man and Antioch. The book was translated into Arabic in the ninth century and given as a gift by the Byzantine emperor Romanus II to the Caliph of Córdoba,<sup>211</sup> so it is possible that Idrīsi had an awareness of or access to the work during his years at Córdoba although this is impossible to prove. Roger may have been aware of this Latin work and may have asked Idrīsi to use it.

Apart from these two, all the authors cited by Idrīsi as sources for the *Book of Roger* were Muslims writing in Arabic. Roger did not appear aware of similar geographical work undertaken in Latin in Europe, and indeed in terms of large-scale descriptive geography, in the European context, I would argue that there are no extant contemporaneous examples that can compare with the *Book of Roger*.<sup>212</sup> It is at no point stated in the book that Roger intended the book to be translated into Latin and to be available to a European audience. Therefore, we can assume that he intended the work to be read exclusively by Arabic speakers. If this is so, how could Roger be expected to understand the work?

The answer to this question relates to the advisors and courtiers in Palermo many of whom were Arabic speakers. Chapter One discussed the role of George of Antioch in assisting Roger to navigate the realities of Mediterranean political life; indeed, George of Antioch may have suggested the commissioning of Greek scholarship (see below), well-versed as he was in

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>211</sup> David Rohrbacher, *The Historians of Late Antiquity* (London & New York, Routledge, 2002), p. 149.

<sup>212</sup> Cartography is another story, as there were a handful of sophisticated maps produced in Spain before the *Book of Roger*, including Isidore of Seville's T and O map (c. 636 CE) and the world map of Saint Beatus of Liébana (c. 730 – c. 800 CE). These maps represent the three continents described by Idrīsi – Europe, Africa and Asia, as well as the 'encircling ocean', see John Henderson, *The Medieval World of Isidore of Seville: Truth from Words* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007) and *Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits* 'Le Renouveau des Connaissances Géographiques' (Latin 8878, f. 45v-46), [http://expositions.bnf.fr/marine/grand/por\\_109.htm](http://expositions.bnf.fr/marine/grand/por_109.htm) [accessed 21 August 2018]

Byzantine cultural life. However, it is doubtful these high-ranking and busy men would have been available to interpret the *Book of Roger* for the king.

The group termed the ‘Palace Saracens’ may have played a part. The Latin sources Hugo Falcandus and Romauld of Salerno described these men in some detail; they were eunuchs, at least nominally Christian converts, who performed a variety of administrative functions in the service of the king. The Andalusian traveller Ibn Jubayr (1145 – 1217 CE) who travelled to Sicily after Roger’s death in December 1184 to January 1185, still observed these servants working under Roger’s grandson, William II:

Their King, William, is admirable for his just conduct, and the use he makes of the industry of the Muslims, and for using eunuch pages who all, or nearly all, concealing their faith, yet hold firm to the Muslim divine law. He has much confidence in Muslims, relying on them for his affairs, and the most important matters, even the supervisor of his kitchen being Muslim...His ministers and chamberlains he appoints from among his pages, of whom he has a great number and who are his public officials and are described as his courtiers.<sup>213</sup>

It is clear from this passage that the status of the Palace Saracens had not changed under Roger’s son and grandson, William I and William II. They were not simply servants, but trusted officials who remained close to the king, groomed for high-level service.<sup>214</sup> These men, some of whom were educated in the palace,<sup>215</sup> were Arabic speakers who could no doubt also converse with the king in Norman French. Due to this valuable linguistic resource, the commissioning of scholarship in languages foreign to Roger was not a major obstacle.

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<sup>213</sup> Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, trans. by R.J.C. Broadhurst (London: Jonathan Cape, 1952), p. 340.

<sup>214</sup> Alex Metcalfe, *Muslims and Christians in Norman Sicily*, pp. 46-49.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

The *Book of Roger*, through the prestige of its author and the innovative nature of the work itself, clearly provided Roger with strategic advantage in his ongoing battles with surrounding empires. However, the *Book of Roger* was not the only original scholarship Roger commissioned, and looking briefly at two other works, both written in Greek, I will demonstrate how Roger used, in Falcandus' words, 'wisdom not less than power' in his political battles.

### **The History of the Five Patriarchates**

Within two years of commissioning the *Book of Roger*, Roger commissioned another original work of scholarship, this time in Greek and written by a prominent Byzantine theologian, Nilos Doxapatres. This work, the *Taxiz ton pitriarchieion Thronon (History of the Five Patriarchates)*, was an anti-Rome polemic which argued for the primacy of Constantinople over Rome as the Imperial capital.<sup>216</sup> The commissioning of both of these original works at roughly the same time was a shrewd design on the part of Roger to use 'knowledge as power' in his ongoing battle against his enemies and for the future prosperity of the kingdom.

Like Idrīsi, Doxapatres appears to have been in exile also. Little is known of his early life – where and when he was born. What is known is that in Constantinople he had held the illustrious position of deacon at *Hagia Sophia*; he was a respected jurist in both civil and canonical law and had produced several influential works on ecclesiastical and legal matters.

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<sup>216</sup> See Vera von Falkenhausen, 'The South Italian Sources' in *Byzantines and Crusaders in Non-Greek Sources, 1025–1204*, ed. by Mary Whitby (Oxford & New York: Published for the British Academy by Oxford University Press, 2007); Vera von Falkenhausen, 'Doxapatres, Nilo', in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Vol. 41 (1992) [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/ricerca/doxapatres/Dizionario\\_Biografico](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/ricerca/doxapatres/Dizionario_Biografico) [accessed 17 October 2018]; Stefaan Neiryck, 'Nilus Doxapatres' De Oeconomia Dei. In Search of the Author behind the Compilation', in *Encyclopaedic Trends in Byzantium? Proceedings of the International Conference held in Leuven, 6-8 May 2009*, ed. by Peter van Deun and Caroline Macé (Paris: Peeters, 2011), pp. 257-268.

For some unknown reason, in the early 1140s he fell into disfavour with the emperor John II Komnenos.<sup>217</sup> His position at Constantinople was no longer secure, and he was forced to seek employment elsewhere.

If the *Book of Roger* was a terrestrial geography, Doxapatres' book can be considered an 'ecclesiastical geography'. The book traced the history of the five patriarchates of Antioch, Rome, Alexandria, Jerusalem and Constantinople. The book was much smaller in scale than the *Book of Roger*, taking a mere two years to complete between 1141 and 1143.

In the book, Doxapatres argues for the primacy of Constantinople over Rome in the Pentarchy, and as such it was an anti-Rome polemic, designed to prove that the Holy See had been established by rights at Constantinople with the fall of Rome to the Visigoths. The work included lists of all the cities, archdioceses and dioceses under the jurisdiction of the patriarch of Constantinople. Following its appearance, the book became quite widely diffused in the Byzantine Empire and was even translated into Armenian in the late twelfth century.<sup>218</sup>

The originality of this work – and one that would have suited Roger's political purposes - is that Doxapatres argues that the ecclesiastical jurisdiction over South Italy by the Primate of Rome had been lost. Controversially, Doxapatres maintains that due to the primacy of Constantinople, the church of South Italy should now be under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of that city. It is clear that the book would have been considered nothing less than seditious by the Pope in Rome. With characteristic rebelliousness, Roger, though a Latin Christian, was willing to turn to Eastern Orthodoxy and the Byzantine empire if this meant the survival of the kingdom he was spending his entire life trying to establish. Therefore, is it possible to draw conclusions regarding Roger's motivations for commissioning such a work?

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<sup>217</sup> Vera von Falkenhausen, *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*.

<sup>218</sup> Nilos Doxapatres, *Taxiz ton pitriarchieon Thronon*, (*armenisch und griechisch*), trans. by Frank Nikolaus Fink (Vagharshabad: Mayr Athorho, 1902).

Behind the *Five Patriarchates*, there is a straight-forward political motivation: Roger ‘ordered the work to be written as a threat to Rome...that he might make the bishoprics of his kingdom subject to the Patriarch of Constantinople’.<sup>219</sup>

Of course this was by no means a sign that Roger had become pro-Byzantine. That Roger’s relations with Byzantium were as strained as those with the Papacy is demonstrated by his attacks on the Byzantine Empire, discussed in Chapter One. However, with characteristic acuity, the king appeared to see Doxapatres’ work as an insurance policy of sorts, to be used if necessary. Although he had received Papal recognition, his position was uncertain, and indeed his perspicacity was well-founded, as on Innocent’s death in 1143 the new Pope Celestine II refused to recognise Roger’s investiture. Doxapatres’ work was a weapon in the king’s arsenal to be drawn upon if and when the need should arise.

### **The Madrid Skylitzes**

In a recent monograph, Elena Boeck has convincingly argued that the famous *Madrid Skylitzes* was in fact produced in the chancery of Roger II, and therefore is likely to have been commissioned by Roger or one of his senior advisors. The *Madrid Skylitzes* is held by the National Library of Spain and is a copy of the famous eleventh-century work by the Byzantine historian John Skylitzes. The work is a visual guide to the lives and deaths of the Byzantine emperors between 811 – 1057 CE and highlights ‘tyranny, succession troubles and problematic legitimacy’<sup>220</sup> amongst the Byzantine emperors and the ways that usurpers – which many Byzantine emperors were – could boost their credibility. As such rather than a pure history, the work can be considered as a manual in Byzantine statecraft.

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<sup>219</sup> Hubert Houben, *Roger II of Sicily*, p. 102.

<sup>220</sup> Elena N. Boeck, *Imagining the Byzantine Past, The Perception of History in the Illustrated Manuscripts of Skylitzes and Manasses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 76.

The work is often cited by Byzantine historians as it provides a large number of images of emperors and their political affairs. Below is a famous image found in the *Madrid Skylitzes* of the Abbassid Caliph, Al-Ma'mūn, sending an envoy to the Byzantine emperor, Theophilus (813 - 842 CE; figure 13).



Figure 13: *Madrid Skylitzes* (Biblioteca Nacional, vitr.26-2)  
Source: National Library of Spain, Madrid

If the *Madrid Skylitzes* was indeed produced at Roger's orders, this provides yet another example of the Sicilian king's appropriation of diverse cultural material to aid him in his imperial program. The work was produced at a time when Roger was increasingly challenging Byzantium, culminating in the attack on Constantinople in 1149, discussed in Chapter One. The *Skylitzes* would have been a useful tool for Roger as it 'seeks to both master the Byzantine mythology of power and expose cracks in the façade of legitimacy'.<sup>221</sup>

### Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that Roger's decision to commission the *Book of Roger* was part of his larger political program carried out throughout the 1130s and 1140s. Particularly regarding Roger's land reforms in Sicily as well as Norman military expansion into North

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., p. 250.

Africa and the eastern Mediterranean, it was imperative that the king have accurate data on his own land and surrounding territories. Idrīsi states in the *Book of Roger's* Preface that Roger had found earlier Arabic geographical work lacking and the author was under orders to redress this situation by providing the most painstaking empirical research.

The original intellectual output exemplified by Idrīsi and Doxapatres is linked to the process of state-building and foreign conquest that Roger II undertook throughout the last decades of his life up until his death in 1154. While hardly squeamish about utilising military power to extend the Norman kingdom, Roger and his advisors equally appreciated the benefits of acquiring sound information. Like the art, architecture and administration of the Norman Kingdom, Roger did not hesitate on drawing on diverse intellectual and cultural traditions to do this. From 1139, Roger was increasingly able to operate in both the eastern and western spheres, and his co-optation of Greek and Islamic scholarship was a clear expression of this new-found confidence. Due to the influences of his court, Roger saw knowledge much as a Muslim caliph or Byzantine emperor might have, as an expression of power and prestige and an investment in ensuring future success.

Chapter Three will take the theme of 'appropriation' further through an in-depth examination of the development of Arabic geographical writing and the *Book of Roger's* place within it. The next chapter will show how Roger employed Arabic geographical scholarship, developed under the early Abbasid caliphs who shared many of Roger's problems of legitimacy, as an effective tool of state-building.

### **Chapter Three: Routes and Kingdoms: Geography, Power and the *Book of Roger***

The *Book of Roger* has been described as firmly grounded in the Islamic geographical genre of *al-Masālik w'al-Mamālik* (Engl. Routes and Kingdoms).<sup>222</sup> Routes and Kingdoms scholarship was descriptive, human geography which developed from the ninth century CE at the court of the Abbasid caliphs in Baghdad.

The aim of this chapter is to situate the *Book of Roger* within the wider context of Arabic geographical work, particularly the genre of Routes and Kingdoms. Existing scholarship on the book has not explored this connection to any great extent.<sup>223</sup> This chapter will discuss the development of Arabic geographical work in the Muslim East and argue that an understanding of this intellectual history, and the *Book of Roger's* place within it, is essential to fully understanding Roger's motivations for commissioning the work in Sicily.

This chapter will address two key problems: firstly, how and why did Routes and Kingdoms emerge in ninth-century Baghdad? Secondly, to what extent is the *Book of Roger* part of the Routes and Kingdoms tradition and what purpose did Roger have in choosing to commission a work in this genre?

The field of geography, embodied in the *Book of Roger*, was uniquely placed to provide Roger with the tools he needed to effectively administer his burgeoning kingdom and to wage war on surrounding empires. In recent decades, geography as a discipline has been called into question by scholars who have raised questions over the discipline's use in promoting imperial power.<sup>224</sup> The following section will investigate the extent to which this corpus of critical theory relates to a pre-modern setting; can wider theoretical debates about the field of geography help us to better understand Roger's decision to commission the *Book of Roger*?

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<sup>222</sup> Alex Metcalfe, *Muslims and Christians in Norman Sicily*, p. 101.

<sup>223</sup> Exceptions to this include Henri Bresc and Anliese Nef's introduction to their revision of Jaubert's translation of the *Book of Roger*, *La première géographie de l'occident* and Sayyid Maqbul Ahmad's chapter on Idrīsi in *The History of Cartography*.

<sup>224</sup> See David Livingstone, *The Geographical Tradition: Episodes in the History of a Contested Enterprise* (Oxford & Cambridge, Mass., Blackwell, 1992) and Anna Godlewska & Neil Smith, *Geography and Empire* (Oxford & Cambridge, Mass., Blackwell, 1994).

## Geography and Power

The importance of geographical knowledge has been emphasised in writings since Antiquity. Eratosthenes coined the term from ‘*geographia*’,<sup>225</sup> a literal translation of which would be ‘to describe or write about the Earth’.<sup>226</sup> According to the Greeks, without a clear understanding of their environment, basic human survival was in the balance, Aristotle (384– 322 BCE) posited that nature (*physis*) is everything outside culture (*nomos*); it is the principle of life and the origin of all living things.<sup>227</sup>

In the opening paragraph of his voluminous work *Geography*, Strabo (64 or 63 BCE – c. 24 CE) emphasised the fundamental connection between geography and philosophy. Strabo believed that geography was a form of philosophy, the study of which could lead to the fulfilment of the ‘art of life’ i.e. happiness:

... wide learning, which alone makes it possible to undertake a work on geography, is possessed solely by the man who has investigated things both human and divine — knowledge of which, they say, constitutes philosophy. And so, too, the utility of geography — and its utility is manifold, not only as regards the activities of statesmen and commanders but also as regards knowledge both of the heavens and of things on land and sea, animals, plants, fruits, and everything else to be seen in various regions.<sup>228</sup>

In the fourteenth century, the Tunisian historiographer and historian Ibn Khaldūn emphasised the fundamental nature of geography based on the human need for food; he wrote:

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<sup>225</sup> Preston E. James & Geoffrey J. Martin, *All Possible Worlds, A History of Geographical Ideas* (New York: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 1981), p. 31.

<sup>226</sup> See Douglas Harper, *Online Etymology Dictionary*, <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=geography> [accessed 14 August 2018].

<sup>227</sup> Peter Coates, *Nature* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), p. 23.

<sup>228</sup> Strabo, *Geography*, Book I, Ch. I, trans. by Horace Leonard Jones (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1924).

This is what civilization means. (The necessary character of human social organization or civilization) is explained by the fact that God created and fashioned man in a form that can live and subsist only with the help of food. He guided man to a natural desire for food and instilled in him the power that enables him to obtain it.<sup>229</sup>

Throughout the centuries philosophy has maintained that geography is fundamental to human civilisation. Like Ibn Khaldūn, the German Enlightenment philosophers Immanuel Kant (1724 -1804 CE) and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770 – 1831 CE) both drew a connection between ‘geography’ and ‘civilisation’ and wrote and lectured extensively on the importance of geography as a discipline. Kant wrote that geographical knowledge was ‘integral to the moral and political life of the citizen’,<sup>230</sup> the basis of a civil society. Martin Heidegger (1889 – 1976) took the link between philosophy and geography further: in his 1927 book, *Being and Time (Sein und Zeit)*, Heidegger explored the problem of spatiality, the inherent differences between *space* and *place*. Heidegger believed that geographical knowledge could only be considered as such when it could explain the meaning that space has for the individual; geography did not deal with a meaningless space, but with a space that is ‘consciously lived, perceived and historically determined’, i.e. *place*.<sup>231</sup>

Modern historians too have become concerned with geography as it relates to human history; this ‘environmental turn’ was espoused in Fernand Braudel’s famous 1949 work, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Phillip II*. In the book, Braudel argued for a study of *longue durée* history, namely a history that included a deep-time analysis of humans in relation to their environment. Along with other members of the so-called *Annales*

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<sup>229</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Muqadimmah*, p. 133.

<sup>230</sup> Stuart Elden & Eduardo Mendieta (eds.) *Reading Kant’s Geography* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2011), p.3.

<sup>231</sup> Ernesto C. Sferrazza Papa, ‘The Contribution of Heidegger’s Philosophy to Geography’ in *Truth and Experience. Between Phenomenology and Hermeneutics*, ed. by Gaetano Chiurazzi & Søren Tinning (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), p. 284.

school, Braudel called for an interdisciplinary historical approach that incorporated geography.<sup>232</sup> According to Braudel, geography ‘...gives us a history in slow motion from which permanent values can be detected...Geography in this context is no longer an end in itself but a means to an end’.<sup>233</sup>

In recent decades, these philosophical and environmental concerns regarding geography have given way to a more critical approach – an exploration of the ways in which geography has been used to promote imperial control. Edward Said has been fundamental to this debate. In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), he writes: ‘...imperialism after all is an act of geographical violence through which every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control...’.<sup>234</sup> In the wake of twentieth-century decolonisation and the development of the field of post-colonial theory, geography as a discipline has been criticised for its use in promoting and maintaining hegemonic authority. Edward Said’s quotation above is representative of this type of criticism; geography, rather than being an innocuous intellectual pursuit, has been used as an effective tool of empire, a method of creating and categorising the world in order to better control it.

Echoing Hobsbawm’s ‘Invented Traditions’, in *Culture and Imperialism* Said develops his theory of ‘imagined geographies’, the ways in which societies research, view and present geographical space, in particular that of a foreign ‘other’. This perception of space, whether diffused through popular literature or ‘scholarly’ geographical texts, plays an equal role with military might in maintaining imperial power, of emphasising difference and the superiority of one culture over another.

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<sup>232</sup> See Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: The Annales School, 1929-89* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1990).

<sup>233</sup> Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Phillip II*, Vol. 1, trans. by Sian Reynolds (London: Harper Colophon Books, 1972), p. 23.

<sup>234</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 225.

Michel Foucault, through his extensive writings on knowledge and power, drew a link between geographical knowledge and the advancement of political and social power. In *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and other Writings* (1980) Foucault breaks down the nomenclature of geography, linking geographic terms to domination, citing the example of ‘region’, from the Latin ‘*regere*’ (to command) and ‘province’ from the Latin ‘*vincere*’ (to win), to designate conquered territory. He goes further, showing that eighteenth-century French diplomatic correspondence not only contained information on ‘marvels, incredible plants, monstrous animals’ but also strategic information on ‘...economic resources, markets, wealth...’.<sup>235</sup>

Geographers themselves have worked hard to challenge the intellectual history of their discipline. David Livingstone’s influential 1992 book *The Geographical Tradition: Episodes in the History of a Contested Enterprise* has been a fundamental text in showing how ‘geographical knowledge’ has been engaged to meet the needs and interests of particular communities at particular times; to Livingstone, geography is less a discipline and more a *tradition*, a set of practices used by many outside the field of geography such as politicians and law-makers. With an emphasis on the geographers of early modern Europe, Livingstone writes that geography was a valuable political tool designed to justify European hegemony in the so-called New World: ‘geography was not merely engaged in *discovering* the world; it was *making* it’.<sup>236</sup>

In *Geography and Empire*, Anna Godlewska and Neil Smith highlight geography’s attachment to authority, associated with ‘...territoriality, war and attempts to manipulate and dominate both the natural and human environment’.<sup>237</sup> The precision and accuracy needed to

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<sup>235</sup> Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and other Writings*, ed. by Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), p. 69.

<sup>236</sup> David Livingstone, *The Geographical Tradition: Episodes in the History of a Contested Enterprise* (Oxford & Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1992), p. 168.

<sup>237</sup> Anna Godlewska & Neil Smith, *Geography and Empire* (Oxford & Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1994), p. 13.

perform such tasks made geography very expensive, ensuring that it was commissioned by those in power, i.e. the state, and ‘...as such, it has been substantially shaped by the attention, support and demands of governments’.<sup>238</sup> Professional geographers were employees of the state, participating in ‘...the fact of imperialism but also in the elaboration and implementation of a nationalist imperialist ideology’.<sup>239</sup> In eighteenth-century Egypt, Napoleon worked with a team of ‘*ingénieurs-géographes*’, who accompanied his military on their campaigns and were even involved in fighting themselves. These geographers produced tens of thousands of maps that not only assisted in military victory but also ‘helped to form perceptions about the invaded regions and cultures well beyond military circles’.<sup>240</sup>

Although the critical texts cited above deal mostly with European empires of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the link between geographical knowledge and power is no recent phenomenon; rather the two have been linked from the very beginning: ‘...imperial systems throughout history, from classical Greece and Rome to China and the Arab world, exercised their power through their ability to impose order and meaning upon space’.<sup>241</sup>

This phenomenon is equally true for the development of Arabic geographical literature from the second half of the eighth century CE. This scholarship, which developed under the caliph Al-Ma‘mūn (786 – 833 CE), served an urgent politico-social purpose at a time when Abbasid authority was facing significant challenges. Going further, I argue that there are significant parallels between the processes at work under the early Abbasid empire and the Norman state: both were attempting to construct a cohesive socio-political polity combining a

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>241</sup> Gearóid ó Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics, The Politics of Writing Global Space* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 1. See also John Allen, *Lost Geographies of Power* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2003) and Andrew Herod et al (eds.), *Geographies of Power: Placing Scale* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2002).

range of cultures, and both had a critical need to understand the lands they had conquered and to set them within a coherent context. The field of geography was uniquely suited to this purpose.

The following pages will examine the genesis of Arabic geographical literature and its development into Routes and Kingdoms; then I will examine the *Book of Roger's* position within this field and show how, through his commissioning of the book, Roger was yet again engaged in a process of cultural appropriation designed to bolster the burgeoning Norman state.

### **Intellectual Life under the Abbasids**

The Abbasid caliphate was a huge and amorphous entity, and at its height from the eighth to tenth centuries CE stretched from Tunisia to the frontiers of India. It was culturally diverse, made up of Muslims, Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, Buddhists and Manichaeans; a plethora of languages were spoken including Arabic, Persian, Greek, Syriac, Aramaic, Armenian, Coptic and Berber.<sup>242</sup>

Like Roger, the Abbasids were ‘foreigners’ in the new capital they created in Baghdad. Al-Manṣūr (714 – 775 CE), in many ways the founder of the Abbasid Caliphate, established the permanent capital of the Empire in the new city on the west bank of the Tigris, near the ruins of the ancient Sassanian city of Ctesiphon and at the intersection of several important trade-routes. Its official name was *Madīnat al-Salām* (City of Peace), but it came to be known by the Persian name of the small town that had previously occupied the site.<sup>243</sup>

With the move of its capital to Iraq, the situation of the Arab empire with regard to its cultural orientations changed drastically.<sup>244</sup> Away from Byzantine influence in Damascus,

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<sup>242</sup> Amira K. Bennison, *The Great Caliphs, The Golden Age of the Abbasid Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>243</sup> ‘*Baghdād*’ in *EI2*.

<sup>244</sup> Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture. The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbasid Society* (London & New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 18-21.

there developed a new multicultural society based on the demographic mix of Iraq. The majority of the population were Aramaic speakers, both Christians and Jews, next were Persian and Arab Christians and Muslims. Like Roger in Sicily, the Abbasids were at pains to appear as the ‘natural successors’ to the former rulers, in their case ancient imperial dynasties of Iraq and Iran, and as such they enthusiastically incorporated Sassanian Persian culture into their own.<sup>245</sup>

Like Roger’s adoption of foreign scholarship, the early Abbasids realised the value of Persian, and later Greek, work to their imperial mission. Al-Manṣūr in particular drew on Persian astrology to legitimise his rule. The Arab historian Mas‘udi (b. circa 893-896 – d. 957 CE) wrote of the caliph:

Al-Manṣūr was the first caliph to favour astrologers and to act on the basis of astrological prognostications. He had in his retinue the astrologer Nawbakht the Zoroastrian... Al-Manṣūr was the first caliph to have books translated from foreign languages into Arabic...there were also translated for him books by Aristotle on logic....and other ancient books from classical Greek, Byzantine Greek, Pahlavi, Neopersian and Syriac.<sup>246</sup>

This activity was extended through the institution known as the House of Wisdom (*Bayt al-Hikma*) which was established by Al-Manṣūr in the second half of the eighth century CE, and where the first translations carried out were Persian works of astrology.

Dimitri Gutas’ important book on the translation movement under the Abbasids demonstrates that in promoting this ‘foreign’ science the early Abbasid caliphs had both a political motivation and an ideological one. Politically, they used Persian astrological prognostications to demonstrate that their rule was ordained by the stars; ideologically, this

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid., pp. 18-21.

<sup>246</sup> Quotation in Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, p.30.

work set the Abbasids up as the legitimate and only successor to the ancient empires of Mesopotamia and Iran.<sup>247</sup>

Greek learning was also highly prized but for different reasons. The famed ‘translation movement’ of Greek scholarship into Arabic happened primarily under the caliphs Harūn Ar-Rashīd and in particular his son Al-Ma‘mūn, the latter ruling from 813 to 833 CE, who was in many ways the ‘golden boy’ of the translation movement.<sup>248</sup> The monastic libraries of cities conquered by the Abbasids contained original Greek and Syriac works of scholars such as Plato, Aristotle, Hippocrates, Galen, and, importantly for the later work of Idrīsi, Claudius Ptolemy.<sup>249</sup> While Al-Manṣūr looked to Persia as his imperial model, Al-Ma‘mūn cleverly appropriated classical Greek scholarship.

Al-Ma‘mūn’s patronage of Greek translations was tied to issues of political stability during his reign. Like Roger, Al-Ma‘mūn was plagued by questions of legitimacy albeit of a different sort: he had come to power in the wake of the Great Abbasid Civil War, a fratricidal war between Al-Ma‘mūn and his brother, Al-Amin, where Al-Ma‘mūn had ordered his brother to be executed.<sup>250</sup> Despite his victory, Al-Ma‘mūn spent a decade consolidating his rule after a series of uprisings against him.<sup>251</sup> It was imperative that Al-Ma‘mūn appear as a credible caliph and, like Roger, he co-opted ‘foreign’ scholarship to do so.

### *Geographical Scholarship under Al-Ma‘mūn*

The development of Arabic geographical scholarship, including cartography, has been termed by the famous historian of the discipline, André Miquel, as ‘*filie du caliphate de Baghdad*’ (the

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid., p.46.

<sup>248</sup> Amira K. Bennison, *The Great Caliphs*, p. 179.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., pp. 185-194.

<sup>250</sup> ‘Al-Ma‘mūn’ in *EI2*.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

daughter of the Baghdadian caliphate).<sup>252</sup> Namely, this geography was financed and encouraged by the regime to serve its own political purposes.

Al-Ma‘mūn’s interest in geography and cartography spoke to an immediate need to comprehend and effectively administer the rapidly expanding Abbasid Empire. The Byzantine and Sassanid empires had both possessed a sophisticated corpus of administrative documents including tax records, lists of postal routes, land surveys and government maps, all of which were translated into Arabic.<sup>253</sup> There was also a religious impetus to this interest as the direction of Mecca, orientation of mosques and calculation of prayer times all had to be ascertained according to local conditions.<sup>254</sup>

Drawing on Ptolemy’s *Almagest*, Al-Ma‘mūn commissioned his astronomers and geographers to depict the earth’s surface and create a world map.<sup>255</sup> Although influenced by Ptolemy, this was not to be simply a reconstruction of Ptolemy’s world view but a completely new work which took into consideration the new political and geographical conditions of the empire. This world map came to be known as *As-Ṣurat Al-Ma‘mūniya* (Al-Ma‘mūn’s map) and the work represented a substantial development on from Ptolemy. The map added two new zones south of the equator; it also corrected Ptolemy’s depiction of the Indian Ocean as a land-locked sea, showing it rather as a sea that ‘encircled’ the inhabited world which was still present in Idrīsi’s twelfth-century world map (the ‘encircling’ ocean (*al-baḥr al-muḥīṭ*), see Chapter Two).

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<sup>252</sup> André Miquel, *La géographie humaine du monde musulman jusqu’au milieu du 11<sup>e</sup> siècle*, tome 1: *Géographie et géographie humaine dans la littérature arabe des origines à 1050*, 1973, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Paris: Mouton & Co and École pratique des Hautes Études, 1973), p. 1.

<sup>253</sup> Sayyid Maqbul Ahmad, *A History of Arab-Islamic Geography* (Amman: Al-Bayt University, 1995), pp. 5-8.

<sup>254</sup> Phillip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, 10<sup>th</sup> ed. (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1970), pp. 383-384.

<sup>255</sup> Fuat Sezgin, *Mathematical Geography and Cartography in Islam and Their Continuation in the Occident: Historical presentation, pt. 1-2* (Frankfurt am Main: Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Science, 2007), p.78.

Although there is no extant copy of the map, Mas‘udi wrote a century after the map was produced that it presented ‘...the universe with its spheres and stars, the land and the sea, inhabited and uninhabited parts, the populated areas of the peoples, cities and similar aspects’.<sup>256</sup> The map included some 530 important cities and towns as well as seas, rivers and mountains. It also contained information on ‘famous and marvellous things’ (‘*ajā‘ib*’) within these territories.<sup>257</sup>

The translation of Ptolemy’s work and the commissioning of a world map by Al-Mā‘mūn clearly served the political purposes of the Abbasid caliphate. In order to administer new territories effectively, precise information was needed regarding toponymy, distances between settlements, trading and postal routes, and there was a desire, both political and practical, to provide more accurate information on the burgeoning Muslim world.

The need for accurate information was tied to economics as trade became the life-blood of the Abbasid Empire.<sup>258</sup> An inadvertent effect of the Islamic empire was its opening up of the trade routes, particularly those of the Byzantine and Persian trading zones which had been disrupted by years of conflict between the two empires. Under the Abbasids, international commerce flourished, the population of urban centres swelled and there was a demand for not only basic foodstuffs but luxury items such as spices, precious metals and textiles.<sup>259</sup> Baghdad’s strategic position on the Tigris meant it could receive goods from China via the Persian Gulf; in addition, trans-Saharan trade to West Africa opened up under the Abbasids. This new mobility meant the Abbasids were open to the world in a way that pre-Islamic Arabs had not been. There was also a need to more fully understand the world at large:

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<sup>256</sup> Quotation from Gerald R. Tibbetts, ‘The Beginnings of a Cartographic Tradition’ in *The History of Cartography*, Vol. 2, p. 95.

<sup>257</sup> Jonathan Lyons, *The House of Wisdom, How the Arabs Transformed Western Civilisation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), p. 89. Lyons is quoting the twelfth-century geographer from Grenada, ‘Abu ‘Abdallah al-Zuhri.

<sup>258</sup> Amira K. Bennison, *The Great Caliphs*, pp. 137-157.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

...commerce gave an often politically fragmented world its unity and justified the Arab geographers' understanding of it as a series of provinces within a single cultural and economic sphere...all those who followed the trade routes – merchants, pilgrims, scholars – found that they were never complete strangers and that there was a universal Islamic culture which enabled them to communicate and operate with colleagues from places as different as Seville and Samarkand.<sup>260</sup>

In tandem with the rise in international commerce, geographical work continued apace through the ninth century CE though at this stage the work was focussed primarily on cartography rather than geographical descriptions. Muslim scholars such as Al-Khwārizmi (c. 780 – c. 850 CE) and Al-Farghāni (c.800/805-870 CE) were known as astronomers and mathematicians rather than geographers.<sup>261</sup> To a large extent, Muslim geography espoused the Ptolemaic cosmological view: the Earth was at the centre of the universe, it was spherical and stationary while the other planets orbited around it,<sup>262</sup> and was surrounded by 'breezes' (Ar. *nasīm*) which drew objects towards it, an embryonic idea of gravity.<sup>263</sup>

In the tenth century, a shift in the focus of geographical scholarship occurred as, due to the work of the cartographers of the eighth and ninth centuries, a corpus of reliable maps had been created. Now there was a move to descriptive, or human, geography, which came to be known as *Routes and Kingdoms*. These new works extended knowledge beyond toponymy, distances between settlements, trading and postal routes, to include information on reliable ports and fresh water sources, commerce, population, culture and defence.

### *Routes and Kingdoms*

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>261</sup> Gerald R. Tibbets, 'The Beginnings of a Cartographic Tradition' in *The History of Cartography*, pp. 90-107.

<sup>262</sup> See O.A.W. Dilke, 'The Culmination of Greek Cartography in Ptolemy', in *The History of Cartography*, pp. 177-200.

<sup>263</sup> Sayyid Maqbul Ahmad, *A History of Arab-Islamic Geography*, pp. 273-276.

The identification of Routes and Kingdoms as a genre in Muslim geography was first presented in the work of the French Orientalist Régis Blachère.<sup>264</sup> Blachère broadly stated that the Routes and Kingdoms authors shared a handful of common characteristics, though he himself warned that the identification of Routes and Kingdoms as a distinct genre was not without its difficulties. Authors of the group were not always uniform in the way they presented their information; for example, some emphasised cartography over text, others included *‘ajā‘ib* (marvellous tales) and *akhbār* (anecdotal information), while others stuck to a stricter style, only recording verifiable, factual information. Despite these difficulties, the term has been widely accepted in describing what has been called Muslim geography’s apogee – a period from roughly the late ninth to the eleventh centuries CE.<sup>265</sup>

There were two distinct phases, based on geographical lines, to Routes and Kingdoms scholarship. The first, from the late ninth century to around 1000 CE was undertaken by what I will term ‘eastern’ geographers. Two prominent examples (both of whom Idrīsi cites as sources for the *Book of Roger*) are Ibn Khurdadhbih (c. 820 – 912 CE) who was Chief of Posts and Information under the Abbasids in northern Iran and as such had access to government records and Ibn Ḥawqal (d. c. 978 CE) who travelled extensively, including to Sicily (see Chapter Four). Ibn Khurdadhbih’s father had been al-Ma‘mūn’s governor in Ṭabarestān (Northern Iran)<sup>266</sup> and he had been raised in relative privilege in Baghdad, close to court circles. By Ibn Khurdadhbih’s own statement his geographical work was the fulfilment of the desire of the Caliph, for whom he also translated the work of Ptolemy (from Greek or Syriac) into Arabic.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> See Régis Blachère, & H. Darmaun, *Extraits des principaux géographes arabes du Moyen Âge*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Paris: C. Klincksieck, 1957).

<sup>265</sup> André Miquel, *La géographie humaine*, p.322.

<sup>266</sup> See ‘EBN ḲORDĀDBEH, ABU’L-QĀSEM ‘OBAYD-ALLĀH’ in *Encyclopedia Iranica* <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ebn-kordadbeh> [accessed 14 August 2018].

<sup>267</sup> *‘Djuḡhrāfiyā’* in *EI2*.

The main focus of these eastern writers was the *Dār Al-Islām* (the Islamic realm) with either Baghdad or Mecca placed at the centre of the world. The non-Islamic lands, the *Dār Al-Ḥarb*, were generally not dealt with at all, or if so, in much smaller part; this included places which could be viewed as part of the Muslim empire such as *Ifriqya*, the Maghreb and Andalusia.

There was a politico-religious impetus to the work. During the tenth century the Abbasid Empire was in a state of fracture, with two rival caliphates being established – the Shia Fatimid caliphate in North Africa from 909 and the Umayyad caliphate in Andalusia from 929. Ibn Khurdadhbih was Abbasid-loyal and, through his writings, aimed to present an Abbasid world view, just at the point this world was breaking apart.<sup>268</sup> Ibn Hawqal, on the other hand, was loyal to the Fatimids and may even have been a *dā'i* (missionary) of a Shia sect, consequently the views he presented in his book *Kitāb Ṣurat Al-ʿArd* (Book Depicting the Earth) reflected this. Whenever mentioning the caliph ʿAli, Ibn Ḥawqal is careful to follow the caliph's name with the invocation 'alayhi as-salām' (peace be upon him), a compliment reserved for Imams in Shia Islam. Despite these ideological differences both Ibn Khurdadhbih and Ibn Ḥawqal placed Baghdad at the centre of the world (see figure 14).



<sup>268</sup> See Gabriel Martinez-Gros, 'La Division du Monde Selon Idrīsi' in *Le partage du monde: échanges et colonisation dans la Méditerranée medievale*, ed. by M. Balard & Alain Ducellier (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1998).

Figure 14: Ibn Ḥawqal's world map (Arabe 2214), c.980 CE  
 Source: Bibliothèque nationale de France

This is an important point and one that is relevant to the creation of the *Book of Roger*. There was a very clear connection between this new Routes and Kingdoms writing and political conditions. The Routes and Kingdoms authors had political affiliations, they were often financed in their work by the administration, or if not were at least reliant on the state for their livelihood, and as such they used their work to present a particular world view, one of a static Islamic world, just at the point this world was fracturing. The articulation of belonging was central to this intellectual movement: Zayde Antrim's recent monograph *Routes and Realms: The Power of Place in the Early Islamic World* (2012) shows the vital importance of what she describes as the 'discourse of place' in Arabic geographical writing, namely the ways Arabic writers expressed attachment to and dominion over land in the period of Islamic expansion (9<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> centuries CE): 'Land mattered in these texts; it stimulated the geographical imagination and acted as a powerful vehicle for articulating desire, claiming authority, and establishing belonging'.<sup>269</sup>

From 1000 CE there was a rupture in what I have termed 'eastern' geographical scholarship and the concept of the *Mamlakāt Islam* (Kingdoms of Islam) disappeared quickly and totally from geographical literature in the East. Now, large-scale Routes and Kingdoms geographies gave way to smaller-scale regional monographs, geographical dictionaries and *riḥalāt* (travel accounts).<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Zayde Antrim, *Routes and Realms: The Power of Place in the Early Islamic World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 1.

<sup>270</sup> See '*Djuḡhrāfiyā*' in *EI2*.

For the first time, from 1000 CE original Routes and Kingdoms work appeared in the western portion of the *Dār Al-Islām*, in particular Spain.<sup>271</sup> In this work, precedence was given to the *western* places of production, with exhaustive research and information about Spain and North Africa, areas that had been neglected by scholars such as Ibn Ḥawqal, who no doubt wanted to downplay the effects of the resurgent Umayyads. This Andalusian geography was not an imitation of eastern geography but rather was Islamic geography produced in an emerging corner of the *Dār Al-Islām*.<sup>272</sup>

The most prominent authors of this new western-based Muslim geography were all from Andalusia. As with the Routes and Kingdoms scholars of the East, they were attached to government, and as such had access to government records. An early and prominent example of this was Ar-Rāzi (not to be confused with the Persian physician and philosopher, 854 CE – 925 CE) who wrote in the first half of the tenth century. Loyal to the Umayyads, Ar-Rāzi wrote the first geographical treatise in Arabic on the Iberian Peninsula – this was a time when the Umayyad caliphate was newly established in Córdoba and when there was a desire to legitimise Umayyad rule. Ar-Rāzi’s book on tenth-century Spain – which included information on geography of the Peninsula, its routes and principal towns, population and history up to the Muslim invasion and beyond highlighted the significance of Andalusia.<sup>273</sup> Just as the eastern geographers served the Abbasid caliphate, likewise the western geographers were loyal to their rulers and patrons. This geographical scholarship worked to feature Muslim Spain and to give it primacy and the decision to exclude the rest of the *Dār Al-Islām* was, without doubt, a calculated one.

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<sup>271</sup> André Miquel, ‘La géographie Arabe après l’an mil’ in *Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull’alto Medioevo* (Spoleto: Presso La Sede del Centro, 1983), pp. 153-162.

<sup>272</sup> See Emmanuelle Tixier du Mesnil, *Géographes d’Al-Andalus. De l’inventaire d’un territoire à la construction d’une mémoire* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2014).

<sup>273</sup> Emmanuelle Tixier du Mesnil, *Géographes d’Al-Andalus*, pp. 182-183.

Other prominent writers of this new ‘western’ geography included Al-‘Udhri and Al-Bakri who both lived and worked in the eleventh century. Idrīsi cites Al-‘Udhri as a source for the *Book of Roger* and though he does not mention Al-Bakri, it is clear Idrīsi drew on Al-Bakri’s work especially in regard to the Maghreb, West Africa and the Sudan.<sup>274</sup> Given the fact that Idrīsi had been educated in Córdoba, he may have read the work of scholars such as Al-‘Udhri and Al-Bakri during his time in Spain.

### **The Book of Roger in Context**

Returning now to the *Book of Roger* and the questions posed at the beginning of this chapter - to what extent is the *Book of Roger* part of the Routes and Kingdoms tradition and why did Roger choose to commission a work in this genre? I argue that there are significant *similarities* and *differences* of the book itself, and the conditions under which it was produced, in relation to previous Routes and Kingdoms scholarship.

In addressing the issues of similarity and difference, I would return to the discussion at the beginning of this chapter, namely the relationship between geography and empire. If ‘...imperialism after all is an act of geographical violence through which every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control...’,<sup>275</sup> it is clear that the state-sponsored geography of the Abbasids, the Fatimids, and Umayyads had an imperial purpose. All were burgeoning states with a crucial need for information, information that could help to comprehend, administer, and in the final analysis *control* populations of diverse backgrounds. They were political entities in search of a clear and legitimizing identity and Routes and Kingdoms scholarship, linked with earlier Greek geography, played a part in the creation and promotion of this image. While the Abbasids from the eighth century on struggled to bring a

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<sup>274</sup> See Henri Bresc and Anliese Nef’s introduction in Idrīsi, *La première géographie de l’Occident*, p. 30.

<sup>275</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 225.

chaotic political situation to order, the state-sponsored geographers presented a world of unity, with the new imperial city of Baghdad at its centre. This in turn was appropriated by Fatimid and Umayyad-loyal geographers in the tenth century, who took the focus away from Iraq, placing Mecca at the centre of the world, emphasising new regions in the West, and excluding geographical regions that did not correspond with this world vision.

According to this logic, the *Book of Roger* was another example of Routes and Kingdoms scholarship. Like Al-Ma‘mūn, Roger was the newly-appointed ruler of a multicultural state where diversity was both an opportunity and a challenge and where his authority was called into question. Roger’s biggest challenge came in convincing his subjects and the surrounding empires that he was ‘one of them’, and he did this most effectively through the appropriation of diverse cultural forms as I discussed in Chapter One.

I argue that the *Book of Roger* was yet another aspect of this process, perhaps even Roger’s ultimate act of appropriation: co-opting an Arabic geographical genre with prestige roots in the Muslim East, which had originally been designed to espouse an Islamo-centric world view, and focussing it on Europe, the Mediterranean, and most particularly, the seat of Roger’s own kingdom, Sicily.

Table 2 below represents this starkly, it shows Idrīsi’s sources for various geographic regions as cited in the preface to the *Book of Roger*. As discussed in the previous chapter, Idrīsi draws heavily on the work of Routes and Kingdoms writers for Africa and Asia but not at all for Europe. Simply put, Idrīsi could not have drawn on the work of earlier Routes and Kingdoms writers for Europe as it *did not exist*. In this way, the *Book of Roger* was a Routes and Kingdoms work but broke new ground in its focus on Europe and the Mediterranean, never before seen in Arabic geographical literature. While after 1000 CE the Andalusian geographers had made Spain the centre of the world, Idrīsi now placed Sicily in this premier position.

Table 2: Idrīsi's Sources for the <i>Book of Roger</i>		
AFRICA	East Africa	Mas'udi, Ibn Ḥawqal
	Egypt	Ptolemy, Al- Yaqūbi, Ibn Ḥawqal, Al-Bakri
	North Africa	Ibn Ḥawqal, Al-Bakri
	West Africa	Al- Yaqūbi, Ibn Ḥawqal, Al-Bakri
ASIA	Arabia/Yemen	Qadāma, <sup>276</sup> Ibn Ḥawqal
	Asia Minor	Mas'udi, Ibn Ḥawqal
	Caucuses/Black Sea/Caspian Sea	Ptolemy, Mas'udi, Ibn Ḥawqal
	China	Mas'udi
	India	Ibn Khurdadbih, Mas'udi, Ibn Ḥawqal
	Indian Ocean	Mas'udi
	Iraq/Iran	Qadāma, Ibn Khurdadbih, Ibn Ḥawqal
	Russia	Ibn Khurdadbih, Mas'udi, Al-Jīhāni,
	Syria/Palestine	Ibn Ḥawqal
	Turks	Ibn Khurdadbih, Mas'udi, Ibn Ḥawqal, Al-Kīmāki <sup>277</sup>
EUROPE	The British Isles/Ireland	Mas'udi
	France	
	Germany/Austria	
	Greece/Adriatic	

<sup>276</sup> Qadāma (d. c. 922-948 CE) was an ethnic Armenian residing in Basra who was Post-Master for the Abbasids, see Sayyid Maqbul Ahmad, *A History of Arab-Islamic Geography*, p. 68.

<sup>277</sup> Very little is known about Al-Kīmāki other than he was from Central Asia from the tribe of Kīmāk, see *ibid.*, p. 110.

	Italy/Sicily	
	The Mediterranean	
	Scandinavia/Baltic	
	Spain/Portugal	Al-'Udhri, Al-Bakri

It is clear then that the *Book of Roger* was part of the long-running tradition of Routes and Kingdoms, but with an important difference: it was produced in the central Mediterranean and commissioned by an administration with a vital need to understand the lands that surrounded it. The book sought to fill the lacunae found in previous Routes and Kingdoms scholarship and due to this the *Book of Roger* is more than just another text written in a well-worn tradition but rather an innovative and original expression of it.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed two important developments in Arabic geography that had an impact on what the *Book of Roger* was to become. Firstly, I have shown how this scholarship developed under the early Abbasid caliphs from the eighth century in response to the so-called 'Abbasid revolution', namely the Abbasid usurpation of the caliphate and their move from Syria to a multicultural and seemingly 'foreign' territory, Iraq. In this unfamiliar territory, geographical information was crucial for effective administration, tax collection and as an aid in further conquest. Together with these practical considerations, this work also presented an Abbasid-centric world, with Baghdad at its centre. Like Roger in Sicily, the Abbasid caliphs had an urgent need to legitimise, maintain and extend their rule in the *Dār Al-Islām* and used the field of geography as an aid in doing so.

Secondly this chapter has shown that the state-sponsored flowering of cartographic and geographic scholarship under the Abbasids and others has significant parallels with Roger's needs in Sicily. The *Book of Roger* provided Roger with important information about his rivals,

particularly in Europe and the Mediterranean, and put his kingdom into an easily-understood context. The island of Sicily was at the centre of this world and here we see one of the peculiar innovations of the book: for the first time, a Routes and Kingdoms geographical work in the Arabic language emphasised a Christian state as being predominant. As with other examples of cultural appropriation undertaken by Roger, we again see his confident and somewhat audacious method of taking on the cultural traditions of his foes and using them against them.

I argue too that the field of geography was uniquely suited to Roger's purposes. Like the European imperialists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Roger was not just discovering his world, he was *making* it. Idrīsi's emphasis on Sicily as the centre of this new world left in no doubt Roger's desire to be closely associated with the island, the embodiment of the greatness of his kingship.

The next four chapters will focus primarily on Sicily. The following chapter will examine accounts of the island prior to Idrīsi, demonstrating how the *Book of Roger* represented a huge leap forward from these earlier accounts. Chapters Five and Six will undertake an in-depth analysis of the *strategic* and *economic* information found in Idrīsi's account and show how this would have proved invaluable to Roger in his political program post-1139. Finally, Chapter Seven will discuss the limitations of Idrīsi's account which relate to information on population and culture on the island, questioning whether these omissions were in fact part of a deliberate strategy.

### Chapter Four: Sicily before the *Book of Roger*

This chapter will trace the history of geographical writing on the island of Sicily pre-dating Idrīsi. Through an exploration of these sources, some of whom Idrīsi explicitly cited, this chapter will demonstrate how Idrīsi's description represented a huge leap forward from these earlier accounts in terms of the volume and quality of information provided. Before surveying the Arabic sources, I will initially examine Greek accounts of Sicily; apart from Ptolemy, Idrīsi does not cite other Greek sources and does not appear to be aware of them. Despite this, aspects of the information presented in the work of the Greek writers are repeated in the *Book of Roger*. Following the examination of the Greek sources, I will discuss Arabic accounts of the island prior to Idrīsi.

#### Greek Accounts of Sicily

One of the earliest accounts of Sicily is found in Homer's *Odyssey* (eighth century BCE); however, it must be remembered that this is a literary account which does not necessarily describe Sicily as it was at the time. Homer's Land of the Cyclopes may refer to the *Isole dei Ciclopi* off the coast of eastern Sicily.<sup>278</sup> Although Homer's Cyclopes are fearsome, their land is fertile and inviting, as in the following passage from Book IX of the *Odyssey*:

There are meadows that in some places come right down to the sea shore, well-watered and full of luscious grass; grapes would do there excellently; there is level land for ploughing, and it would always yield heavily at harvest time, for the soil is deep. There is a good harbor where no cables are wanted, nor yet anchors, nor need a ship be

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<sup>278</sup> There is debate about this, Raymond V. Schoder places the Land of the Cyclopes on the western coast of Sicily, see Raymond V. Schoder, 'Odysseus' Route', *The Classical Journal*, Vol. 82, 4 (1987), p.320.

moored, but all one has to do is to beach one's vessel and stay there till the wind becomes fair for putting out to sea again. At the head of the harbor there is a spring of clear water coming out of a cave, and there are poplars growing all round it.<sup>279</sup>

Sicily is mentioned by name in the final book of the *Odyssey* (Book XXIV) when Odysseus tries to convince his father, who does not recognise him, that he comes from *Sicania* one of the ancient names of Sicily.

Surviving ancient Greek historical sources for Sicily, such as Herodotus (c. 484–425 BCE) in *The Histories* and Thucydides (c. 460 – c. 400 BCE) in *History of the Peloponnesian War*, provide data on Sicily in the light of the historical events these writers were most concerned with. Herodotus most famously describes the Battle of Himera (480 BCE), the Syracusan victory over the Carthaginians, and Thucydides the Athenian assault on the island (415-413 BCE). However, there is no evidence that Herodotus or Thucydides ever visited Sicily.<sup>280</sup> Thucydides does provide a detailed history of the island as part of his recounting of the Sicilian expedition in Book VI of the *The History*, agreeing with Homer that the island was founded by the Cyclopes. As mentioned in Chapter One, Thucydides maintains that the Sicilians are amenable to change and the influence of outside parties, something that was still arguably the case by the twelfth century. Various settlements are mentioned in passing in both Herodotus and Thucydides (Syracuse, Agrigento, Himera etc.) but Herodotus and Thucydides by no means provide geographical descriptions of the island.

A native Sicilian Greek source, Diodorus Siculus,<sup>281</sup> in his *Bibliotheca Historica*, written between 60 and 30 BCE, provides a mythological history of Sicily, stating that the

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<sup>279</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*, Book IX, trans. by Samuel Butler, rev. by Timothy Power and Gregory Nagy, Harvard University, [https://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~chs/HCI/getting\\_started.html](https://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~chs/HCI/getting_started.html) [accessed 21 August 2018].

<sup>280</sup> Thucydides draws heavily on Homer in his description of Sicily, see C. J. Mackie, 'Homer and Thucydides: Corcyra and Sicily', *The Classical Quarterly*, Vol. 46, 1 (1996), pp. 103-113.

<sup>281</sup> His work was drawn from that of Timaeus of Taormina, *The Histories*, only fragments of which

island is sacred to Demeter and Corê.<sup>282</sup> Like the earlier Greek writers, Diodorus is most concerned with history and sparing in geographical detail, but does provide an account of the indigenous inhabitants of the island, the Sicanians and Sicels, from the latter of whom, he states, Sicily derived its name.<sup>283</sup>

The Greek writer who provides the greatest amount of geographical information on Sicily is undoubtedly Strabo (64/63 BCE – c. 24 CE). In *Geography*, Strabo was most concerned with descriptive geography over mathematical,<sup>284</sup> and travelled extensively in the Mediterranean, perhaps even to Sicily itself.<sup>285</sup> In Book VI of *Geography* Strabo describes Sicily and mentions major settlements such as Agrigento and Syracuse and lists distances between these; he is also concerned with the coastline and routes around the coast:

Sicily is triangular in form... of the sides which these three headlands bound, two are somewhat concave, while the third is slightly convex, it runs from Lilybæum to Pelorias, and is the longest...1700 stadia adding further twenty. Of the others, that extending to Pachynus from Lilybæum is the longer, while the shortest faces the Strait and Italy, extending from Pelorias to Pachynus, being about 1120 or 1130 stadia.<sup>286</sup>

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survive, see Truesdell S. Brown, *Timæus of Tauromenium* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958).

<sup>282</sup> Diodorus Siculus, *The Library of History of Diodorus Siculus*, Book V, Chapter 2, trans. by C.H. Oldfather (Harvard University Press, 1939).

<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> Michael Gargarin (ed.), 'Strabo' in *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of Ancient Greece and Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>285</sup> Michael Maas, 'Strabo and Procopius, Classical Geography for a Christian Empire' in *From Rome to Constantinople: Studies in Honour of Averil Cameron* ed. by Hagit Amirav and Haar Romeny (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2007), pp. 67-84.

<sup>286</sup> Strabo, *Geography*, Book VI, trans. by H.C. Hamilton, Perseus Digital Library, Tufts University, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0239%3Abook%3D6> [accessed 21 August 2018].

In this way Strabo marks a turning point in Greek writing on Sicily: rather than history he provided practical geographical information which could prove useful to those visiting the island, or for his Roman audience, an aid in effective administration of the province.

There is little doubt about the influence of Ptolemy's (c.90-168 CE) work on later Muslim geography; indeed Idrīsi states in the *Book of Roger's* preface that Ptolemy is the 'father of geography'.<sup>287</sup> Ptolemy's *Almagest* and *Geography* were translated at the Abbasid House of Wisdom, though there is no extant Arabic copy of either from that period.<sup>288</sup> Though Ptolemy owed much to Roman sources of information he still represented 'a culmination as well as a final synthesis of the scientific tradition in Greek cartography [and geography]'.<sup>289</sup> His large-scale treatise *Geography* was '...highly original' and 'had a profound influence on the subsequent development of geographical science'.<sup>290</sup>

Ptolemy's *Geography* comprises three sections over eight books; included within the work are a treatise on cartography, a gazetteer providing lists of latitude and longitude coordinates and an atlas. Ptolemy divided the *Oikumene*, the known world, into three continents – Europe, Asia and Africa, and these were then divided into regions. His geographical knowledge reflected the limits of general knowledge of the world at the time he wrote; in fact the regions he included were confined to Europe, the Mediterranean, North Africa, parts of central and eastern Africa, some parts of the Indian Ocean and parts of Asia (figure 15).

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<sup>287</sup> Idrīsi, *Opus Geographicum*, fasc. 1, p.7.

<sup>288</sup> Sayyid Maqbul Ahmad, *A History of Arab-Islamic Geography*, p. 10.

<sup>289</sup> O.A.W. Dilke, 'The Culmination of Greek Cartography in Ptolemy', p. 177.

<sup>290</sup> J. Lennart Berggren and Alexander Jones, *Ptolemy's Geography: An Annotated Translation of the Theoretical Chapters* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000), p.3.



Figure 15: Ptolemy's World Map, from the codex of Nicolaus Germanus, 1467  
Source: National Library of Poland

It is in the work of the mathematician and geographer Al-Khwārizmi (c.780-c.850 CE) that the only example of a direct Arabic quotation from Ptolemy is found.<sup>291</sup> Ptolemy's *Geography* '...fell into oblivion at a fairly early stage', therefore later geographers such as Idrīsi quoted Al-Khwārizmi's work as having been authored by Ptolemy.<sup>292</sup>

As far as Ptolemy's description of Sicily found in *Geography* goes, it is difficult to believe that it would have had much influence on Idrīsi, except perhaps as a model for the *Book of Roger's* maps. As a mathematical geographer, Ptolemy's main concerns are settlements and their latitudinal and longitudinal coordinates; Ptolemy provides no descriptive geography of the island. The Sicily section is in Book III, Chapter 4 of *Geography* and the author divides Sicily into four 'corners', lists each region's major settlements as well as rivers, mountains and

<sup>291</sup> Sayyid Maqbul Ahmad, *A History of Arab-Islamic Geography*, p. 11.

<sup>292</sup> Fuat Sezgin, *Mathematical Geography*, p. 86.

surrounding islands in combination with their co-ordinates; he also includes the famous mountain Etna (Aetna).<sup>293</sup> Although Idrīsi acknowledges Ptolemy's important role in the development of the field of geography in the Preface of the *Book of Roger*, there is no evidence that Ptolemy was a source for Idrīsi's description of Sicily.

The one connecting thread between the early Greek writers is the association of Sicily as *Trinacria*, the traditional symbol for Sicily discussed in Chapter One. Reference to a 'three-sided' Sicily is found in Homer, Herodotus and Thucydides; indeed Thucydides like Diodorus Siculus writes that the island was renamed by the Sicanians and had originally been called *Trinacria*.<sup>294</sup> Strabo is in agreement: 'Sicily is triangular in shape; and for this reason it was at first called '*Trinacria*'.<sup>295</sup>

Another feature of the Greek writers is the interest surrounding Mount Etna which is mentioned by all the authors (save Homer) discussed above; indeed Strabo discusses Etna at some length, believing that ash from the mountain assists in the growing of local grapes, and accounts for the wine's distinctive taste.<sup>296</sup>

Like the Greek authors, for the most part the Arabic accounts of Sicily that appeared from the ninth century describe Sicily as 'three-sided' and in most cases mention Mount Etna. However, the Arabic accounts are more geographically detailed, providing new information on the island not found in the earlier Greek sources.

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<sup>293</sup> Claudius Ptolemy, *The Geography*, Book III, Ch. 4, trans. & ed. by Edward Luther Stevenson (New York Public Library, 1932).

<sup>294</sup> Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Book VI.

<sup>295</sup> Strabo, *Geography*, Book VI, Chapter 2.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*

### Arabic Sources on Sicily before Idrīsi

*Tar'ikh Jazīrat Šiqilliya* (History of the Island of Sicily), also known as the *Cambridge Chronicle*, is an anonymous chronicle covering the years 827 – 965 CE. It is the earliest native Sicilian chronicle of Muslim Sicily and was probably written by a Sicilian Christian (perhaps a resident of Palermo) in the tenth or eleventh century.<sup>297</sup> The *Chronicle* does not mention any geographical information save for a short listing of toponyms.

The next geographic account of Sicily comes from the work of Mas'udi. Mas'udi was primarily a historian though he included geographical information into his histories. He believed in first-hand experience to ensure accuracy of information and to this end spent most of his life travelling, including to India where he remained for two years, writing about his time there.<sup>298</sup>

His most famous work was the thirty-volume *Kitāb Murūj al-dhahab wa M'ādin al-ju'āhir* (Book of Meadows of Gold and Mines of Jewels) and it is to this work that Mas'udi owes his reputation. As well as history of the Islamic world up to 974 CE, the book provided geographical information on various countries including India, China, Persia, Greece, Rome as well as information on, among others, the tribes of Turkey, Africa and the Slavs.<sup>299</sup>

Idrīsi explicitly cites Mas'udi as a source for the *Book of Roger*, naming his book as *Kitāb Al-'Ajā'ib* (Book of Wonders), though he is probably referring to *Kitāb Murūj al-dhahab wa M'ādin al-ju'āhir*. As seen in the table on Idrīsi's sources from the previous chapter, Idrīsi drew on Mas'udi for the major part of his descriptions of China, India, East Africa, Russia, the

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<sup>297</sup> Michele Amari, *BAS*, I, pp. XLI-XLII.

<sup>298</sup> Sayyid Maqbul Ahmad, *A History of Arab-Islamic Geography*, p.48.

<sup>299</sup> 'Al-Mas'udi' in *EI2*.

Caucasus as well as the British Isles and Ireland, and pays tribute to Mas'udi within these sections as his source of data.

Mas'udi's description of Sicily from *Kitāb Murūj al-dhahab* is very brief. Like the Greek writers he mentions Mount Etna and states the island is 'seven day's long', a view which is shared by subsequent Arabic sources, including Idrīsi.<sup>300</sup> It is clear from Mas'udi's perfunctory treatment of Sicily that he most probably had not visited the island and did not know much about it; it is also clear that while Mas'udi was a major source for Idrīsi in other sections of the *Book of Roger*, he could not have been a significant source for Sicily where Idrīsi provides a much greater amount of information.

The Arabic writer before Idrīsi who provides the most detailed geographical description of Sicily is Maqdisi<sup>301</sup> (c.945/946 - 991 CE) in his book *Aḥsan al-taqāsim fī ma'rifat al-aqālīm* (The Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Regions); Idrīsi does not cite Maqdisi at all. Maqdisi, like the other eastern geographers discussed in Chapter Three, was concerned with descriptions of the *Dār al-Islām*, he had completed the *Hajj* to Mecca at least twice and travelled for a period of twenty years, from northwest Africa to the Sind.<sup>302</sup> The notes and observations of his travels presumably made up the content of *Aḥsan*, and he was at least forty when he finished the work. There is some suggestion that he was a *dā'i*, or propagandist missionary for the Fatimids.<sup>303</sup>

Maqdisi was concerned with a better understanding of the lands of Islam, and of the diversity found within them, and, like Roger regarding Europe, had found the work of earlier geographers lacking. He wrote:

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<sup>300</sup> Mas'udi in Michele Amari, *BAS*, I, pp. 1-2.

<sup>301</sup> Meaning one who comes from Jerusalem 'al-Quds'. See Maqdisi, *Aḥsan al-Taqasim fī ma'arifat al-aqālīm*, trans. by Basil Anthony Collins (Reading: Garnet Publishing Limited, 1994), p. xxiii.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, p.xxi.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*, p.xxi.

...it occurred to me to...specialise in a branch of learning they had not dealt with, except defectively – I mean an account of the Islamic regions.<sup>304</sup>

Unlike Idrīsi, whose geography of Sicily is decidedly ‘people-less’ (see Chapter Seven), Maqdisi wished to discuss ‘the diversity of the peoples of the countries in their expressions, intonations, languages, complexions’.<sup>305</sup> This included descriptions of Christians, Jews, Nestorians and Zoroastrians.

At the time that Maqdisi wrote, Sicily was under Kalbid rule, the Kalbids being the agents of the Fatimids. If the assertion that Maqdisi was a *dā'i* is true, he may well have spent time in Sicily, though there is no hard evidence of this. His description of the island is the most detailed of any Arab writer up to the end of the tenth century, although that said, it is only a few hundred words in length and fairly general in its descriptions.

Maqdisi describes major settlements, beginning with Palermo and including Syracuse, Taormina and Catania in the east and Agrigento, Mazara and Trapani in the west. His major concerns are water sources, fortification and city walls, information which he gives for the majority of places described. For Petralia, Maqdisi mentions that there is a church within the city walls, and he talks about the grand mosque in Palermo.<sup>306</sup> His description of Palermo does not provide a great amount of detail, though he does state that the city has ‘grapes in abundance’,<sup>307</sup> something that Idrīsi fails to mention one hundred and fifty years later.

Unlike Idrīsi, Maqdisi is never specific about distances, Maqdisi uses phrases like ‘to the west/east etc.’, again suggesting that he had not travelled to the island himself, as in other

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<sup>304</sup> Ibid., p.1.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid., pp.1-2.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., pp.207-208.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid., p.207.

parts of *Aḥsan*, such as the section on Syria, Maqdisi is quite specific regarding directions and distances.

Although Idrīsi names many more settlements than Maqdisi, Maqdisi mentions a few settlements Idrīsi does not; these all are in the *Val di Mazara* portion of the island and have conspicuously Arabic names such as *‘Ain Al-Mughṭa* (the Covered Spring). These settlements are not identifiable with a modern town and indeed Maqdisi’s book contains the only reference to these places. This was perhaps due to Maqdisi’s source/s who had some familiarity with these places; by the time Idrīsi wrote, these settlements were either abandoned, renamed or not considered important enough by Idrīsi to mention.

Interestingly, Maqdisi and Idrīsi are the only Arab writers to mention *Būrḡād*, close to *Th.rma* (Termini Imerese), no sign of which remains (see Chapter Five). As it is fairly clear that Maqdisi was most probably not a source for Idrīsi on Sicily, the conclusion is that *Būrḡād* was still an active settlement in the twelfth century.

Maqdisi mentions two slightly larger settlements that Idrīsi fails to mention, these are *R.mṭa* (Rometta) and *B.rṭ.na* (Partanna). Rometta, close to Messina, had been one of the last Byzantine strongholds against the Muslim invasion; it was badly damaged through the fighting and abandoned but was restored during the Muslim period,<sup>308</sup> though the restoration took place sometime later than when Maqdisi wrote in his book. Although Maqdisi focussed mostly on the coastal settlements, Partanna is in the south-west interior of Sicily. Originally either a Greek or Sicani settlement, Partanna had been the site of fierce fighting between the Muslims and Count Roger I’s forces. At the period Maqdisi was writing, it was probably a minor settlement, a homestead with surrounding buildings<sup>309</sup> and it is unclear why Maqdisi decided to include it. Michele Amari posited that Idrīsi *did* mention Partanna but referred to it as *Qaṣr Ibn Mankūd*

<sup>308</sup> Ferdinando Maurici, *Castelli medievali in Sicilia* (Palermo: Sellerio, 1992), p.88.

<sup>309</sup> Rodo Santoro & Fabio Militello, *Castelli di Sicilia* (Palermo: Kalós, 2006), p. 355.

(the Palace of Ibn Mankūd), a seemingly grand name for what was a minor settlement at the time both Maqdisi and Idrīsi were writing.

Maqdisi limits his description almost exclusively to the coastal settlements, unlike Idrīsi who describes over one hundred settlements in the interior of the island. The interior settlements were much more isolated than the coastal settlements and would not have been frequented much by outsiders, the fact that Idrīsi describes this area in such great detail demonstrates the increased level of knowledge of the island presented in the *Book of Roger* in comparison to earlier geographical accounts. Finally, Maqdisi ends his account by stating that the Muslims do not have dominion over any island ‘greater than Sicily’ and this is reminiscent of Idrīsi’s superlative description of the island.

Ibn Ḥawqal is another significant Arabic source for Sicily. A contemporary of Maqdisi, he extolled the Fatimids and like Maqdisi may also have been a *dā‘i*. He wrote one book of geography *Kitāb Ṣurat Al-Arḍ* (Book of the Depiction of the Earth, also known as *Kitāb al-masālik wa-l-mamālik*, Book of Routes and Kingdoms), which includes a description of Palermo.<sup>310</sup> Ibn Ḥawqal was open about himself in his book; he had travelled extensively between 943 and 973 CE, including to Sicily. As such his description of Palermo is very much a series of observations and opinions along with some geographical information; it is unclear why he did not list any settlements outside Palermo but this was presumably due to the fact he stayed exclusively in the capital.

Ibn Ḥawqal was equally interested in cartography and his maps made up an essential part of his work. The maps in the *Book of Roger* closely resemble Ibn Ḥawqal’s and it is clear Idrīsi was influenced by Ibn Ḥawqal’s cartographic style.<sup>311</sup> Idrīsi drew on Ibn Ḥawqal

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<sup>310</sup> Ibn Ḥawqal, *Opus Geographicum*, pp.118-131.

<sup>311</sup> Sayyid Maqbul Ahmad, ‘Cartography of al-Sharif al Idrīsi’, p. 157. Compare Idrīsi’s world map (figure 12) and Ibn Ḥawqal’s (figure 14); both place south at the top of the map and include the twin

extensively for the *Book of Roger*'s section on Africa – western, northern and eastern, as well as Egypt, the Caucasus, the Black Sea region, Turkish lands, Iraq, Iran and India.

Ibn Ḥawqal's description of Palermo is often cited as a detailed picture of the city in the period of Kalbid rule. He states that *Balarm* (Palermo) is divided into five quarters (*ḥārāt*) – first is *Balarm* itself which contains the great mosque (he also later writes this is also called the *Qaṣr* [palace] quarter, the name that Idrīsi uses), followed by *Al-Khālṣa*, where the Sultan lives, the *Ḥārat al-Ṣ.qlāba* (the Quarter of the Slavs), *Ḥārat al-Masjid* (the Quarter of the Mosque), which is also known as *Ibn S.qlāb* and finally the *Ḥārat al-Jadīd* (the new Quarter).<sup>312</sup>

He mentions the *ʿAbbās river* (Oreto), upon which there are many mills but no orchards or gardens as well as a plethora of springs throughout the city and its surrounds. Regarding the surrounding settlements, he mentions a village (*qurīya*) called *Al-Bīḍa* ' which had been destroyed following civil strife.<sup>313</sup>

Ibn Ḥawqal was impressed by the great number of mosques throughout the city. He attests he had not seen a greater number in any city of Palermo's size and while admitting that Córdoba may have had more, he states that he had not been able to verify this, having not seen Córdoba 'with his own eyes'.<sup>314</sup> However, he is taken aback that the locals build individual mosques for themselves, something not in keeping with the Islamic ideal of congregational prayer (*salat al-jama'a*), Ibn Ḥawqal puts this down to Sicilians' pride:

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sources of the Nile as well as the 'encircling ocean', discussed in Chapter Two.

<sup>312</sup> Ibn Ḥawqal, *Opus Geographicum*, pp. 118-119.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*, p.120.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, p.120.

One day I was standing beside the house of Abu Muhammad al-Qafsi, the lawyer, a specialist in contracts. Looking out from his mosque at a distance of a shot of an arrow, I noticed about ten mosques, some of them facing each other, often separated by a road. Inquiring as to the excessive number of them, I was told that the people are extremely proud, each wanting his own private mosque to share with only his family and his small inner circle. Among them were two brothers who lived next door to each other, and whose walls were adjacent. Each one built his own mosque so that he could pray there in private.<sup>315</sup>

Ibn Ḥawqal appears generally impressed with Palermo, the extent of its markets and mercantile activities which he lists in detail, its abundance and fecundity. However, he is highly critical of the Sicilian people whom he considers to be crude and dim-witted, lacking in spirit, owing largely to the fact they drink stagnant water from the city's wells and eat raw onions, morning and night.<sup>316</sup> He is scathing towards the Islamic teachers of the city and also the inhabitants of the *ribāṭs*,<sup>317</sup> small monastic and defensive settlements along the coast, whom he believes are 'low-lives', among other expletives:

There are quite a few ribat on the coastline, full of freeloaders, scoundrels and renegades, both old and young, poor and ignorant. These people would pretend to perform their prostrations, standing in order to steal money given to charity, or to defame honorable women. Most of them were pimps and perverts. They sought refuge

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<sup>315</sup> This English translation is by William Granara, 'Ibn Hawqal in Sicily', *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, No. 3 (1983), p. 97. I believe that Granara's translation is of a high standard and as my focus in this thesis was the translation of Idrīsi's work, I chose to utilise this text rather than providing my own translation which I do not believe could have improved on the standard of Granara's work.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.130-1

<sup>317</sup> See '*Ribāṭ*' in *EI2*. These were retreats or bases built on frontier territories primarily in North Africa; Ibn Ḥawqal is the first and only Arab geographer to mention these in Sicily.

there because they were incapable of doing anything else, and because they had no place to go. They were low-life and rabble..<sup>318</sup>

Ibn Ḥawqal also states that he has written a separate treatise on the Muslims of Sicily. This has since been lost and most probably was highly critical of them. Ibn Ḥawqal's account is highly personal, with repeated use of the first person, and reads more like a travelogue than the more austere descriptive geographical writing of either Maqdisi or Idrīsi.

The newly discovered *Kitāb Gharā'ib al-funūn wa-mulāḥ al-ʿuyūn* (the *Book of Strange Arts and Visual Delights*, more commonly known as the *Book of Curiosities*) was compiled in Egypt by an anonymous author between 1020 and 1050 CE.<sup>319</sup> Although this work is a significant discovery, I argue that its greatest significance is in the field of cartography, particularly in its two world maps - one of which is identical to the world map found in copies of the *Book of Roger*<sup>320</sup> and a second rectangular world map offering the earliest extant example in Arabic of a map showing scale.<sup>321</sup> The work contains two parts – the first on celestial matters and the second on terrestrial. The author provides most information on Egypt but also on *Ifriqya*. There is a description of Sicily as well as a detailed, if slightly muddled, map of the island (see figure 16). The map gives Palermo a central position, taking up a large proportion of the island, and lists the settlements of Syracuse and Cefalù, as well as various ports and mountains, including Mount Etna.

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<sup>318</sup> William Granara, 'Ibn Hawqal in Sicily', p. 97.

<sup>319</sup> The book is housed at the Bodleian Library, Oxford (MS. Arab c.90) and is available digitally through Digital Bodleian:

<https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/inquire/Discover/Search/#/?p=c+9,t+book%20of%20curiosities,rsrcs+0,rsrcs+10,fa+ox%3Acollection%5EArabic,so+ox%3Asort%5Easc,scids+,pid+748a9d50-5a3a-440e-ab9d-567dd68b6abb,vi+> [accessed 21 August 2018].

<sup>320</sup> As stated in Chapter Two Idrīsi never mentions a world map in his text.

<sup>321</sup> See Jeremy Johns and Emilie Savage-Smith, 'The Book of Curiosities: A Newly Discovered Series of Islamic Maps', *Imago Mundi*, Vol. 55 (2003), pp. 7-24.

The text is a combination of the history of the island in the Aghlabid era, throughout the ninth century, and a description of Palermo. Given that the author of the *Book of Curiosities* was writing in the first half of the eleventh century, this history is largely out-of-date and does not mention the Kalbid conquest of the island in the late tenth century. The anonymous author often states cites Ibn Ḥawqal as a source and he has without doubt drawn on the latter for his description of Palermo. However, the author appears to have visited the city himself, or interviewed one or more people who had done so, as he provides information not found in Ibn Ḥawqal's text. Like Ibn Ḥawqal the author has a negative view of Sicilians:

The predominant characteristics of the population are that they are rough and quarrelsome.

But he offers new information regarding the customs of the people:

Some of them intermarry with their neighbours amongst the Byzantines of the island on the condition that if they are given a boy child he will retain the religion of his father, and if a girl, the religion of her mother.<sup>322</sup>

In keeping with the author's interest in astrology, he writes that Sicily is a difficult place to rule, as:

The astrologers claim that [when] the House of Leo rises obliquely, it exercises, despite its reputation for beneficence, malign influence so that in every land in which it is influential, it is difficult for the ruler to govern. And it [Leo] rules over Samarqand, Ardabīl, Mecca, Damascus [and Sicily]. These cities [sic] do not suit their rulers and their rulers do not suit them.<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>322</sup> Anonymous, *The Book of Curiosities*, MS. Arab c.90, fol. 32a.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*, fol. 32a.

Apart from Palermo, the author mentions three other settlements in the text – Enna, Gagliano and Cosenza (although Cosenza is in Calabria) – but does not describe them; the latter two are not mentioned by Idrīsi in his description. As far as the text of the *Book of Curiosities* goes, it does not appear that Idrīsi was aware of the work.



Figure 16: Map of Sicily from the *Book of Curiosities*, MS. Arab. c. 90  
Source: Bodleian Library, Oxford

## Conclusion

Accounts of the island of Sicily prior to the *Book of Roger* were few and limited in scope. The early Greek writers - Herodotus, Thucydides and Diodorus Siculus - were historians first, and the geographical data they provided on Sicily was fairly narrow. Strabo's *Geography* marked a new stage, where geographical information was given precedence; Strabo names the major

coastal settlements, provides distances, discusses some of the ports and rivers of the island, combined with the history of the island.

In terms of the Arabic geographical writing that emerged from the ninth century, it is the *al-masālik wa-l-mamālik* (Routes and Kingdoms) authors Maqdisi and Ibn Ḥawqal who provide the most detailed descriptions. Maqdisi in particular lists settlements around the island, again mostly coastal, as well as the names of settlements not mentioned in any other extant text. However, his description of each place is general and limited, and though Maqdisi was renowned as a geographer who emphasised first-hand experience in compiling his work, it appears that he did not travel to Sicily himself.

Ibn Ḥawqal's account is that of an eye-witness and he provides a detailed account of Palermo under Kalbid rule. Although coloured by his own feelings and preoccupations, this is an indispensable source for those interested in the city at the height of Muslim rule. There is a vivid liveliness to Ibn Ḥawqal's account, perhaps owing to the fervour with which he criticises Sicily's Muslim community, but also to his enthusiasm over the life of the city – its markets, mosques and gardens.

As the following two chapters will show, in comparison with the earlier texts discussed above, Idrīsi's description is by far the longest and most descriptive, far surpassing anything that came before it in terms of detail. The following chapter will deal in greater detail with the strategic information included in Idrīsi's text regarding toponomy, distances, settlements and ports of the island, information which I argue would have assisted Roger in his political program post-1139.

**Chapter Five: ‘The True Nature of His Lands’, Part I: Strategic Information on Sicily  
in the *Book of Roger***

Idrīsi’s description of Sicily commences towards the beginning of Climate IV, Section II of the *Book of Roger* and continues for the remainder of Section II, making up more than forty pages of the critical edition. Relative to the island’s size, this is the longest description of any place in the book giving some indication as to the centrality Idrīsi, or more accurately Roger, wanted to attribute to the island.

According to Idrīsi, Roger’s purpose in commissioning the *Book of Roger* was:

He [Roger] wanted to know the true nature of his lands, to study them with certainty and experience, to learn their borders and routes by land and sea...<sup>324</sup>

As discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, most scholarship on Roger has dealt with the book in the briefest terms. These works attribute Roger’s motivation for commissioning the book to his ‘intellectual curiosity’ and desire to be perceived as a ‘philosopher-king’ and indeed Idrīsi himself plays up this angle in the preface to the work. I argue that this view misses the mark and underplays the utility of the book, thereby robbing us of a deeper understanding of Roger and the kingdom he was trying to create.

Although the work is not entirely comparable in every way to the *Domesday Book*, commissioned by the Norman king William I of England in 1085, I argue that the *Book of Roger*’s description of Sicily shares a similar purpose to *Domesday*. The *Domesday Book* was an inventory of England concerned with land ownership and tax collection; William I commissioned *Domesday* in the last years of his reign when he was under threat from a number

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<sup>324</sup> Idrīsi, *Opus Geographicum*, fasc. 1, p. 5. All translations provided from the *Book of Roger* in this and the following chapters are my own. See Appendix I for the full translation.

of quarters and when he was keen to raise tax revenue.<sup>325</sup> In Sicily, Roger too was ageing and understood that the future of his kingdom was shaky at best, and this perspicacity was well-founded as, on Pope Innocent's death in 1143, the new Pope Celestine II refused to recognise Roger's investiture. Both kings no doubt understood that the successful future of their respective kingdoms was not a given and that accurate information regarding their land was power. As such *Domesday* lists for each village and manor, tenants-in-chief, tenants and under tenants (all of whom are named explicitly), parcels of land, crops, livestock and, most importantly, expected tax revenue.

A significant difference between the two documents is that the *Book of Roger* does not seek to attribute land ownership to anyone, and is conspicuously *people-less*, something that will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter Seven. What the *Book of Roger* does have in common with the *Domesday Book* is its comprehensive description of settlements around the island of Sicily, with around one hundred and fifty places described. However, I argue that the *Book of Roger* goes further than *Domesday* in its detailed geographical account of toponymy, distances, settlement types, agriculture, trade, fresh water sources, shipping and reliable ports; I have divided these into two broad categories – *strategic* information and *economic* information.

The present chapter will deal with information provided by Idrīsi that would have proved *strategically* useful to Roger throughout the 1140s. Firstly, linked to Roger's program of land reform, administered through the Royal *Dīwān*, this comprises:

- 1) Toponymy
- 2) Distances
- 3) Settlement Types

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<sup>325</sup> Thomas Hinde (ed.), *The Domesday Book* (London: Guild Publishing, 1985), p.11.

Secondly, linked to Roger's foreign expansion:

#### 4) Shipping and Ports

In this and the following chapter, I will present Idrīsi's data on a series of maps using ArcGIS software, something which has not been attempted previously. The process of converting Idrīsi's text to ArcGIS maps was not without its challenges as it was necessary to identify all of the toponyms mentioned by Idrīsi and ascertain their exact location, adding longitude and latitude coordinates for each. Finding the exact location of each settlement described was a significant obstacle as many of the settlements, particularly in the interior of the island, no longer exist. In dealing with this issue secondary source material was indispensable, particularly the works of two Sicilian scholars - Illuminato Peri's *Città e campagna in Sicilia. Dominazione normanna* (1952-1953) and Ferdinand Maurici's *Castelli medievali in Sicilia: dai bizantini ai normanni* (1992). Using these and other works<sup>326</sup>I was able to identify a great number of toponyms with increased accuracy. Although I have striven to ensure accuracy in the maps provided they must be read with a degree of caution –these maps are not infallible but rather represent a contribution to scholarship on Sicily in the Middle Ages. It is my hope that others, in particular archeologists through their knowledge of early Norman and pre-Norman sites around the island, can improve upon them.<sup>327</sup>Before beginning the discussion of the strategic elements of Idrīsi's description, the next section will provide an overview of how Idrīsi divided the island.

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<sup>326</sup> See note 339.

<sup>327</sup> At my presentation at the 'Normans in the South' conference held at the University of Oxford in July 2017 I was approached by a number of archeologists who were keen to access the GIS maps I had created; it was clear that they had wanted to draw on Idrīsi as a source for the Muslim period as well as the Norman but had been put off due to their inability to understand Arabic and their mistrust of existing translations.

## Idrīsi's Division of Sicily

Idrīsi divides his description of Sicily into four distinct categories: *Balarm* (Palermo), *Al-Bilād Al-Bahrīa* (the coastal settlements), *Al-Bilād Al-Barīa* (the interior settlements) and finally *Mirās Al-Jazīra* (the ports/anchorages of the island). Idrīsi clearly considers these as four distinct categories and deals with them separately, highlighting different features for each.<sup>328</sup>

Idrīsi provides the greatest amount of data regarding the coastal settlements, the majority of which were ancient towns, settled in the Greek period, such as Taormina, Catania and Syracuse.<sup>329</sup> This is not surprising as the coastal settlements have since ancient times been the lifeblood of the island,<sup>330</sup> the best conduits for the transportation of agricultural and other commodities for domestic consumption or export. In the Middle Ages, the coastal settlements were also more conveniently reached than the interior settlements as cabotage had long been the preferred means of transporting goods, travel by mule being expensive and cumbersome.<sup>331</sup> In addition, Sicily had long been a major supplier of grain<sup>332</sup> and as such it has been imperative that routes leading from the wheat growing regions of the interior to the coast were well-established; this ensured that grain grown in coastal areas, as well as further inland, could be exported quickly and efficiently from a variety of ports dotted around the island.<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> Idrīsi's description of Sicily includes the islands of *Ar-Rāhib* (Favignana), *M.īṭma* (Marettimo) and *Al-Yābisa* (Levanzo) some seven kilometres off Sicily's north-western coast but other islands such as the Aeolian islands and Pantellaria are treated as separate from Sicily in the previous section of the book.

<sup>329</sup> Idrīsi also lists settlements that revived in the Muslim period including Palermo, Brucato, Calatrasi and Rometta, see Ferdinando Maurici, *Castelli medievali*, p. 88.

<sup>330</sup> Moses Finley states that early Greek settlers beached their ships on the south coast of the island, and provided with all they needed, were not inclined to venture inland; this appears to have been true of many of Sicily's settlers (Phoenicians, Carthaginians), including from the Neolithic period, see Moses Finley, *A History of Sicily*, p.24.

<sup>331</sup> A mule could carry a '*salma*' - around 225 kilograms – as such the routes could not be overly long, see Carmelo Trasselli, 'Les routes siciliennes du Moyen Age au XIX siècle', *Revue Historique* T. 251, Fasc. 1 (509) (1974), p.27.

<sup>332</sup> Moses Finley, *A History of Sicily*, p. 35.

<sup>333</sup> Carmelo Trasselli, 'Les routes siciliennes du Moyen Age au XIX siècle', p. 27ff.

Sicily's topography has been another factor behind the prominence of the coastal settlements vis-à-vis those of the interior. The majority of Sicily – over sixty per cent – is categorised as ‘hilly’ meaning an altitude of at least 200 to 600 metres above sea level, much of this relief occurs abruptly rather than gradually, meaning there are sudden jumps in elevation from the coastal plains to the hills and mountains, rendering travel inland hard-going.<sup>334</sup> Over twenty-four per cent of Sicily is categorised as ‘mountainous’ and this is particularly true in the north-east of the island, where the mountain chain of the Nebrodi, Peloritani and Madonie occurs; Mount Etna is part of this group. There is considerable relief in other parts of the island also – for example the Sicani mountains in the central west, which includes the sharply rising peak Rocca Busambra, the highest point in western Sicily (1,163m) as well as the Iblei mountains of the south-east and the Erei mountains of the central east<sup>335</sup> (figure 17).



Figure 17: Topography of Sicily  
Source: Wikicommons

<sup>334</sup> *Regione Siciliana (official page), 'Territory and Environment'*, [http://pti.regione.sicilia.it/portal/page/portal/PIR\\_PORTALE/PIR\\_LaStrutturaRegionale/PIR\\_AssessoratoEconomia/PIR\\_DipBilancioTesoro/PIR\\_ServizioStatistica/PIR\\_7486913.46118292/PIR\\_2651725.930937735/PIR\\_7954579.572264052/01\\_Territory.pdf](http://pti.regione.sicilia.it/portal/page/portal/PIR_PORTALE/PIR_LaStrutturaRegionale/PIR_AssessoratoEconomia/PIR_DipBilancioTesoro/PIR_ServizioStatistica/PIR_7486913.46118292/PIR_2651725.930937735/PIR_7954579.572264052/01_Territory.pdf) [accessed 5 September 2018].

<sup>335</sup> See Daniela Pasquinelli D'Allegra, *La Geografia Dell'italia. Identità, Paesaggi, Regioni* (Rome: Carocci, 2009).

Hugging the seashore are the coastal plains, which vary from a narrow strip along the north coast to wider coastal plains at places such as Catania and the *Conca d'Oro* (*lit.* the Golden Basin, otherwise known as the Plain of Palermo). On the other hand, at the time Idrīsi wrote, the interior settlements were isolated places, elevated and built as a point of defence for the surrounding population.<sup>336</sup> Although more numerous than the coastal settlements, the interior settlements were more obscure and apart from *Qaṣryānī* (Enna), in Idrīsi's description there is no major settlement, what he categorises as a *madīna* (city), in the interior of the island.

The next section will deal with the strategic elements of Idrīsi's description beginning with toponymy.

### 1) Toponymy

The sheer volume of toponyms listed in the *Book of Roger*, especially in comparison with earlier geographical work described in the previous chapter, adds weight to the argument that Idrīsi had a clear mandate to provide Roger with the 'true nature of his lands'. Idrīsi's list of toponyms in Sicily is the most comprehensive produced up to the twelfth century, and arguably well beyond that period. The only other work of geography that comes close is Maqdisi's description with around thirty toponyms described, as discussed in the previous chapter. Using ArcGIS software, I have created maps representing the toponyms described by Idrīsi. Idrīsi lists one hundred and fifty toponyms and I have divided the maps into 'coastal' (figure 19) and 'interior' (figure 20) just as Idrīsi categorised them. For comparative purposes, I am also including the map of Sicily found in the *Book of Roger* (figure 18; MS Pococke 375). As can be seen Idrīsi's map only displays the main coastal settlements and a couple of interior settlements, far fewer than he describes in the text.

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<sup>336</sup> Ferdinando Maurici, *Castelli medievali*, p.70.

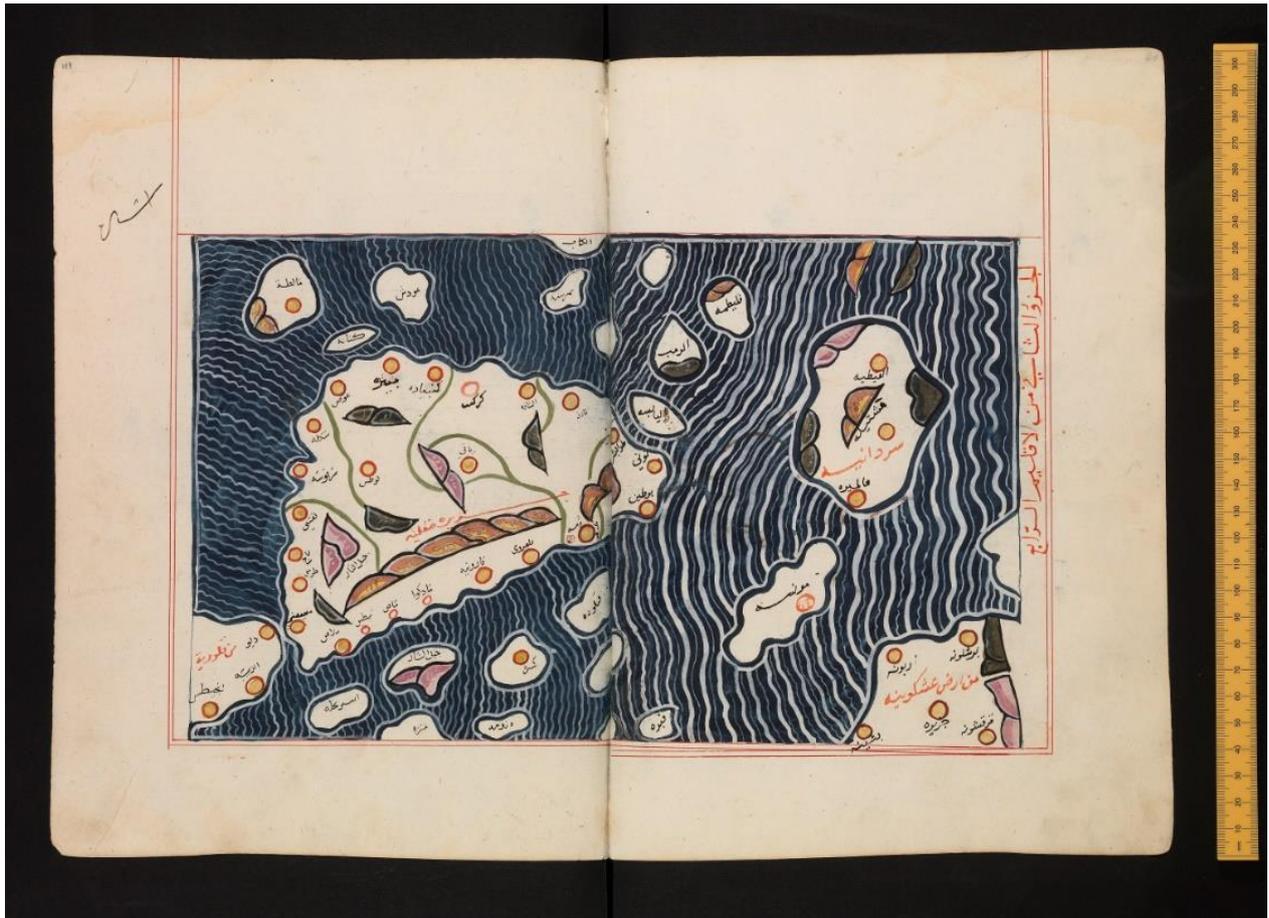


Figure 18: Sicily in the *Book of Roger* (MS Pococke 375), 1553  
Source: Bodleian Library, Oxford



Figure 19: Coastal Settlements



In comparison to earlier geographical work on Sicily, Idrīsi's description particularly stands out in regard to the interior settlements, which were largely overlooked by geographers such as Maqdisi and Ibn Ḥawqal. The toponyms of the interior are by far the most numerous for any part of the island despite the fact that the detail Idrīsi provides for them is much less substantial than that of Palermo or the coastal settlements. In the interior, a much larger ratio of toponyms are of Arabic derivation. Many of these are unidentifiable today, meaning they were probably renamed, destroyed, abandoned or built over after the twelfth-century. Despite these difficulties, in many cases, Idrīsi is the only source that mentions these settlements and as such is an invaluable source for both Muslim and early Norman sites.

Unlike the coastal settlements which are listed from Palermo around the island in a clock-wise direction, Idrīsi describes the interior in an altogether different manner, dividing the area into a number of sections and then moving in a basically clock-wise direction as he describes each. Tables 3 and 4 provide a list of the coastal and interior settlements in the *Book of Roger*, including the Arabic name given by Idrīsi, its transliteration and the Italian equivalent, where possible.<sup>337</sup> The list also includes the 'Settlement Type' according to Idrīsi. Settlement types will be discussed more fully below.

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<sup>337</sup> Curiously, Idrīsi states that there are thirty-five coastal settlements described in his book although the actual number is forty-three, the reason for this not insubstantial error in a work committed to precision is difficult to fathom; it is possible this could be evidence of a collaborator or secretary's error.

Table 3: Coastal Settlements				
	Arabic Name	Transliteration <sup>338</sup>	Italian Name <sup>339</sup>	Settlement Type
1	بلرم	Balarm	Palermo	Madīna
2	ثرمة	Th.rma	Termini	Qal'a
3	التربيعة	At-Tarbī'a	Trabia	Maḥal
4	بورقاد	Būrḡād	Brucato	ḡ <sup>340</sup>
5	صخرة الحديد	Ṣakhrat Al-Ḥadīd	Campofelice di Roccella	Manzil
6	جفلودي	Jaflūdi	Cefalù	Ḥiṣn
7	طزعة	Ṭ. ḡ'a	Tusa	Ḥiṣn
8	قلعة القوارب	Qal'at Al-Qawārib	Santo Stefano Vecchio	Qal'a
9	القارونية	Al-Qārūnyya	Caronia	Qal'a
10	شنتت مراكو	Shant Markū	San Marco d'Alunzio	Qal'a
11	ناصر	Nāṣū	Naso	Ḥiṣn
12	بقطش	B.qṭ.sh	Patti	Ḥiṣn

<sup>338</sup> Please note that when it is unclear what vowel sound Idrīsi intended, I have replaced vowel with a full stop.

<sup>339</sup> The Italian toponyms provided for the coast and interior come from five sources: Michele Amari, *BAS*; Illuminato Peri, *Città e campagna in Sicilia. Dominazione normanna*, 2 vols., (Palermo: Atti della Accademia di Scienze Lettere e Arti di Palermo, 1952-1953); Ferdinando Maurici, *Castelli medievali*; Girolamo Caracausi, *Dizionario onomastico della Sicilia: repertorio storico-etimologico di nomi di famiglia e di luogo*, 2 vols., (Palermo: L'Epos, 1993) and Luigi Santagati, *La Sicilia di Al-Idrīsi ne «Il libro di Ruggero»* (Caltanissetta-Rome: Sciascia, 2010).

<sup>340</sup> Where a question mark is found, Idrīsi has not mentioned the settlement type.

13	ليبري	L.bīri	Oliveri	Manzil
14	ميلاص	Mīlāṣ	Milazzo	Ḥiṣn
15	مسيني	Masīnā	Messina	Madīna
16	طبرمين	Ṭabramīn	Taormina	Ḥiṣn
17	لياج	Liyāj	Aci Castello	Balada
18	قطانية	Qaṭāniyya	Catania	Madīna
19	لنتيني	L.ntīni	Lentini	Qal'a
20	سرقوسة	Sarqūsa	Siracusa	Madīna
21	نوطس	Nūṭ.s	Noto	Qal'a
22	قسباري	Qasbāri	Cassibile	Raḥl
23	مرسى البوالص	Marsa Al-Bawāliṣ	Porto di Ulisse	Marsa
24	شكلا	Shakla	Scicli	Qal'a
25	رغوص	Raghūṣ	Ragusa	Qal'a
26	بثيرة	Buthayra	Butera	Qal'a
27	لنبياذة	Linbiyādha	Licata	Ḥiṣn
28	كركنت	Karakant	Agrigento	Madīna
29	الشاقا	Ash-Shāqa	Sciacca	Balada

30	قلعة البلوط	Qal'at Al-Balūṭ	Caltabellotta	Ḥiṣn
31	الأصنام	Al-Aṣnām	Marinella di Selinunte	Raḥl
32	مازر	Māzar	Mazara	Madīna
33	مرسى علي	Marsa 'Alī	Marsala	Madīna
34	طرابنش	Ṭarābansh	Trapani	Madīna
35	الراهب	Ar-Rāhib	Favignana	Jazīra
36	اليابسة	Al-Yābisa	Levanzo	Jazīra
37	مليطمة	M.līṭma	Marettimo	Jazīra
38	جبل حامد	Jabel Ḥāmid	Erice	Ḥiṣn
39	الحمّة	Al-Ḥamma	Cefalà Diana	Qal'a
40	قلعة اوبي	Qal'at Awbī	Calatubo	Qal'a
41	برطنيق	Barṭanīq	Partinico	Balada
42	شنس	Shins	Cinisi	Manzil
43	قرنيش	Qarnīsh	Carini	Balada

Table 4: Interior Settlements				
	Arabic Name	Transliteration	Italian Name	Settlement Type
	بلرم	Balarm	Palermo	Madīna
1	منزل الأمير	Manzil Al-Amīr	Misilmeri	Manzil
2	الخان	Al-Khazzān	? <sup>341</sup>	Ḥiṣn
3	قجانة	Qajāna	?	?
4	جفلة	Jifla	Cefalà Diana	Balada
5	مرناو	Marnāw	Marineo	?
6	بيقوا	Bīqwā	Vicari	Ḥiṣn
7	بثرانة	Bithrāna	Peterrana <sup>342</sup>	Ḥiṣn
8	جاطوا	Jāṭwā	Monte Iato <sup>343</sup>	Ḥiṣn
9	طرزي	Ṭarzī	Calatrasi	Ḥiṣn
10	قرليون	Qurliyyūn	Corleone	Ḥiṣn
11	قلعة الطريق	Qal'at At-Ṭarīq <sup>344</sup>	?	Qal'a
12	راية	Rāya	?	Raḥl
13	برزوا	Barzwā	Prizzi	Ḥiṣn
14	قصر نوبو	Qaṣr Nūbū	Castronovo	Maḥal
15	مرغنة	Marghana	Mārgana <sup>345</sup>	?
16	الغدران	Al-Ghudrān	Godrano	?
17	منزل يوسف	Manzil Yūsuf	Mezzojuso	?
18	الأبرجا	Al-Abrajā	?	?
19	ققبش	Qaqbash	Caccamo	?
20	خاصوا	Khāṣwā	?	Raḥl
21	بطلاري	B.ṭ.lāri	?	Ḥiṣn
22	رحل المرأة	Raḥl Al-Mar'a	?	?
23	ألصنم	As-Ṣanam	?	Raḥl
24	قمرطة	Qamrāṭa	Cammarata	Raḥl
25	ابلاطنو	Iblāṭnū	Plātani <sup>346</sup>	Ḥiṣn
26	علقمة	'Alqama	Àlcamo	Manzil
27	ميرجا	Mīrjā	?	Ḥiṣn
28	حصن المدارج	Ḥiṣn Al-Madārij	?	Ḥiṣn

<sup>341</sup> Where a question mark is placed none of the references consulted has provided an Italian name.

<sup>342</sup> Girolamo Caracausi, *Dizionario onomastico*, p. 1207. Known also as Pitirrana and Petterana, see Luigi Santagati, *La Sicilia di Al-Idrīsi*, p. 94.

<sup>343</sup> Idrīsi states that there is an underground prison located at Jāṭwā where prisoners who 'displease the king' are sent, see Idrīsi, fasc. 5, p. 604.

<sup>344</sup> This toponym is only found in Idrīsi, see Ferdinando Maurici, *Castelli medievali*, p. 355.

<sup>345</sup> This toponym is mentioned in various sources and probably has Arabic roots, though there is no modern settlement called Mārgana, see Girolamo Caracausi, *Dizionario onomastico*, p. 961.

<sup>346</sup> Idrīsi describes this as a *ḥiṣn*; this is now the name of a major river in Sicily, see Girolamo Caracausi, *Dizionario onomastico*, p. 1255.

29	قلعة فيمي	Qal'at Fimī	Calatafimi	Hiṣn
30	رحل القائد	Raḥl Al-Qā'id	?	Raḥl
31	قصر ابن منكود	Qaṣr Ibn Mankūd	?	Raḥl
32	بلجة	Balaja	Bèlice <sup>347</sup>	Hiṣn
33	منزل سندي	Manzil S.ndī	?	Manzil
34	رحل الأرملة	Raḥl Al-Armal	?	Raḥl
35	قلعة مورو	Qal'at Mūrū	Castello di Calatamauro <sup>348</sup>	Qal'a
36	الشاقة	Ash-Shāqa	Sciacca	?
37	غرذوطة	Ghardhūta	?	Manzil
38	سطير	Suṭayr	Sutera	Manzil
39	المنشار	Al-Minshār	?	Hiṣn
40	القطاع	Al-Qiṭā'	?	Maḥal
41	ناروا	Nār wā	Naro	Raḥl
42	السابوقة	As-Sābūqa	Sabuci	Hiṣn
43	قلعة النساء	Qal'at An-Nisā'	Caltanissetta	Qal'a
44	قصرياني	Qaṣryānī	Enna	Madīna
45	محكان	Maḥkān	?	?
46	قصر...??	Qaṣr...??	Missing from all MSS	?
47	قرقودي	Qarqūdhī	?	Balada
48	شعراء نزار	Shu'arā' Nizār	?	?
49	جفلة	Jifla	?	?
50	حراقة	H.rāqa	?	?
51	الحجر المثقوب	Al-Ḥajjar Al-Mathqūb	Pietraperzìa	Hiṣn
52	شليطة	Sh.lyāṭa	?	Manzil
53	ابلاطسة	Iblāṭsa	?	Hiṣn
54	قلعة الخنزارية	Qal'at Al-Khinzāriyya	?	Hiṣn
55	رغوص	R.ghūṣ	Ragusa	Manzil
56	مودقة	Mūdhiqa	Modica	?
57	أبي شامة	Abī Shāma	Buscemi	Qal'a
58	بزيني	Bizīni	Vizzini	?
59	بنتارغة	Bintārgħa	Pantàlica <sup>349</sup>	?
60	قلعة ميناو	Qal'at Mīnāu	Mineo	Qal'a
	قلعة الفار	Qal'at Al-Fār	?	Qal'a
61	ملجأ خليل/منزل خليل	Malja' Khalīl/Manzil Abī Khalīl	?	Manzil
62	بكير	Bukayr	Buccheri	Manzil
63	باترنو	Bātirnū	Paterno	?

<sup>347</sup> Idrīsi describes this as a *hiṣn*; this is now the name of a river in Sicily, see *ibid.*, pp. 131-132.

<sup>348</sup> The ruins of this fortress are located between Fondacazzo and Bisacchino in western Sicily.

<sup>349</sup> Necropolis dating to the 13<sup>th</sup> century BCE, see Girolamo Caracausi, *Dizionario onomastico*, p. 1160.

64	بلنسول	Balansūl	Palazzolo Acreide	?
65	قيري	Qīrī	?	?
66	أيدوني	Aydhūnī	Aidone	?
67	طابس	Ṭābis	Tavi	Ḥiṣn
68	جودقة	Jūdhīqa	Castel di Iudica	Manzil
69	شنت فيلب	Shant Fīlib	Agira <sup>350</sup>	?
70	شنتورب	Shantūrib	Centuripe	Maḥal
71	أذرنو	Adhr.nū	Adrano	Manzil
72	نسطاسية	Nasṭāsiya	Motta Sant'Anastasia	?
73	حجر سارلو	Ḥajar Sārḷū <sup>351</sup>	Il Sasso di Serlone	?
74	غليانية	Gh.lyāniyya	Gagliano	?
75	انتر نستيري	Int.r N.stīri	?	?
76	سقلافية	S.qḷāfiyya	Sclafani Bagni	?
77	قلعة أبي ثور	Qal'at Abī Thūr	Caltavuturo	Ḥiṣn
78	بولس	Būlis	Polizzi	Ḥiṣn
79	بطلرية	B.ṭr.liyya	Petralia Sottana	Ḥiṣn
80	مقارة	M.qāra	?	Ḥiṣn
81	اسبرلكنة	Isbr.l.kna	Sperlinga	Ḥiṣn
82	النقيشين	An-Nīqishīn	Nicosia	Ḥiṣn
83	طرجينس	Ṭarajīns	Troina	Ḥiṣn
84	جرامي	Jirāmi	Cerami	Manzil
85	قيسي	Qīsī	Capizzi	Ḥiṣn
86	جارس	Jārās	Geraci	?
87	رقة باسيلي	Ruqqa Bāsīlī	?	Ruqqa
88	الحمار	Al-Ḥimār	Isnello	Manzil
89	قلعة الصراط	Qal'at As-Ṣirāṭ	Collesano	Qal'a
90	قرطيرش	Q.rṭīr.sh	Grattieri	Ḥiṣn
91	منياج/غيران الدقيق	Minyāj/Ghīrān Al-Daqīq	Maniace	Qurīya
92	الرنج	Ar-Randaj	Randazzo	Qurīya
93	قسطلون	Ḥiṣn Qasṭalūn	Castiglione	Ḥiṣn
94	المد	Al-Madd	Moio Alcantara	Ḥiṣn
95	مصقلة	Maṣqala	Mascali	Qurīya
96	منت البان	Munt Albān	Montalbano	Qal'a
97	منجبة	M.nj.ba	?	?
98	غلاط	Ghalāṭ	Galati	Ma'aql
99	شنت ماركو	Shant Mārķū	San Marco	Kanīsa
100	فيلادنت	Fīlādint	San Fratello	?

<sup>350</sup> This settlement was known as San Filippo d'Argirio until 1861, see *ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>351</sup> *Lit.* Serlo's Rock, referring to Serlo II of Hauteville nephew of Roger I, who died fighting Muslim forces here, see Luigi Santagati, *La Sicilia di Al-Idrīsi*, p. 149, note 285.

10 1	القارونية	Al-Qārūniyya	Caronia	Ḥiṣn
10 2	قلعة القوارب	Qal'at Al-Qawārib	?	Qal'a
10 3	قلعة رمطة	Qal'at Ramṭa	Rometta	Qal'a
10 4	منت دفرت	Munt D.fr.t	?	?
10 5	ميش	Mīq.sh	?	?
10 6	لوغاري	Lūghārī	Locadi	?
10 7	بربلس	B.rbl.s	Tripi	Qal'a

## 2) Distances

Along with a comprehensive list of toponyms, Idrīsi provides painstaking detail on distances between settlements. As I will show, these distances are remarkably accurate. Before discussing Idrīsi's distances, the next section will provide some background on road communications in Sicily up to the twelfth century.

At the time Idrīsi compiled the *Book of Roger* the Sicilian coastal communication system was largely based on the earlier Greek and Roman road systems, which were in turn based on pre-existing public roads and *trazzere* (sing. *trazzera*), paths designed for transhumance.<sup>352</sup> These routes continued to be used during the Byzantine, Muslim and Norman periods, although they were added to and improved upon, particularly in the interior of the

<sup>352</sup> See Rosa Maria Cucco, 'The Route Followed by the Via Valeria from Cefalù to Termini Imerese', *Journal of Ancient Topography*, Vol. 10 (2000), pp. 165-185.

island.<sup>353</sup> The main coastal road was the *Via Valeria* (subsequently called the *Messina Marine* and finally the modern 113 road) linking Messina, Palermo and Lilybaeum (Marsala). Next was the *Via Aurelia* which linked Palermo, Agrigento and Lilybaeum; the *Via Selinuntina* which linked Syracuse and Selinunte and was later extended to reach *Thermae Selinuntinae*, Mazara and Lilybaeum as well as the *Via Pompeia* on the east coast linking Messina, Taormina, Catania and Syracuse.<sup>354</sup> There was also a main inland road, built in the Greek period, linking Catania and Enna; using smaller paths stemming off this road, it would have been possible to reach the northern and southern coasts.<sup>355</sup>

For the coastal itinerary, Idrīsi tends to follow these ancient roads. However, for the interior his routes are difficult to trace, most probably based on informal *trazzere*. To measure distance, the unit Idrīsi most utilises is the ‘Arabic mile’ equivalent to almost two modern kilometres.<sup>356</sup> The provision of accurate distances was in keeping with other Routes and Kingdoms works, such as those by Maqdisi and Ibn Ḥawqal, both of whom provide distances between the majority of settlements mentioned in their texts, though only in the most approximate terms for Sicily. Figure 21 displays average distances between settlements provided by Idrīsi for the coastal settlements. As can be seen, despite Idrīsi’s desire to provide accuracy in his data, the greatest number of settlements is ‘not specified’.

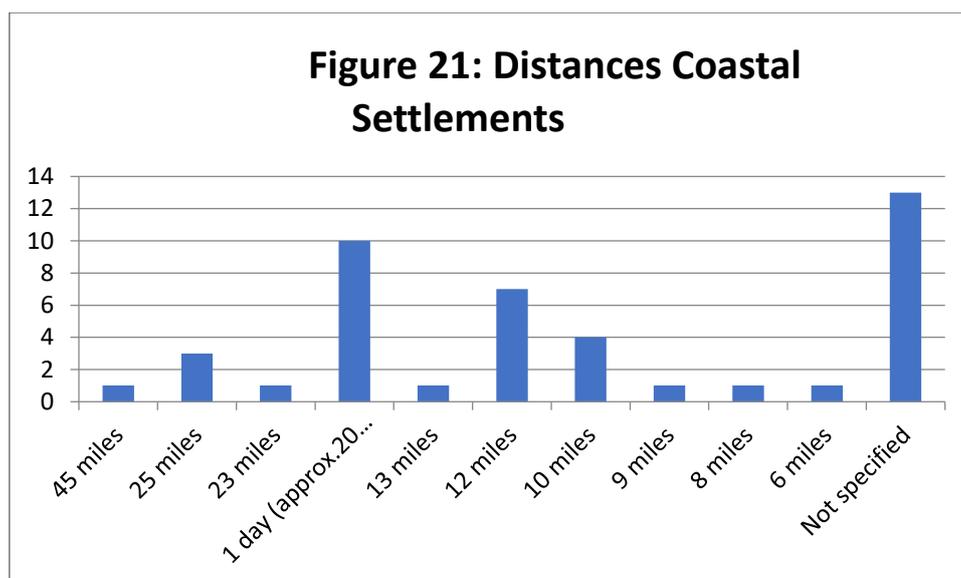
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<sup>353</sup> See Lucia Arcifa, ‘Viabilità e politica stradale in Sicilia (SecXI-XIII)’ in C. A. Di Stefano et al (eds.), *Federico e la Sicilia: dalla terra alla corona*, Vol. 1 (Syracuse: De Stefano ACA, 1995), pp. 26-33.

<sup>354</sup> Giovanni Uggeri, ‘La formazione del sistema stradale Romano in Sicilia’ in *La Sicilia romana tra repubblica ed alto impero* (Caltanissetta: Siciliantica, 2006), pp. 228-231.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 231-232.

<sup>356</sup> Edward S. Kennedy, ‘Mathematical Geography’ in *The Encyclopedia of the History of Arabic Science*, Vol. I, ed. by Roshdi Rashed (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), pp.187-188.



In his description of the settlements of Sicily, Idrīsi uses three separate units to specify distance. As stated above, the unit he most utilises is the ‘Arabic mile’ followed by a *marḥala* (one day’s journey), and finally, though mentioned only a few times (and then only in the interior section of the island), what he terms the ‘Frankish mile’. The exact calculation of an ‘Arabic mile’ into metric kilometres is still not universally agreed upon and the process of conversion between medieval and modern units is a ‘difficult and perhaps insolvable metrological problem’.<sup>357</sup> In the nineteenth century, the Italian orientalist Carlo Alfonso Nallino, drawing on the work of an array of ‘Arab geographers’, converted  $56 \frac{2}{3}$  Arab miles metrically. Nallino calculated that  $56 \frac{2}{3}$  Arab miles was equal to 111.8 kilometres per degree of latitude, and this is remarkably close to the actual figure is 111.3 kilometres.<sup>358</sup> The Nallino figure of 111.8 kilometres per degree of latitude will be used in this thesis, this figure being probably closest to what Idrīsi intended. To calculate a single Arab mile, 111.8 is divided by 56.66 with the result of 1.9731733, therefore an Arab mile is approximately 1.9 kilometres.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid., pp.187-188.

<sup>358</sup> Carlo Alfonso Nallino, ‘Il valore metrico del grado di meridiano secondo i geografi arabi’ in *Raccolta di scritti editi e inediti* (Rome: Istituto per l’Oriente, 1944), pp. 408-57.

For the most part Idrīsi considered one day's journey to be twenty-five Arab miles (47.5 kilometres) – as in the following example:

Between *Buthayra* (Butera) and *Linbiyādha* (Licata) it is one day's journey and it is a distance of twenty-five miles.<sup>359</sup>

To express one day, Idrīsi uses the term *marḥala* (stage, phase, period, grade etc.) which was commonly used in Arabic geographical literature to express a day's journey. However, a *marḥala* could be up to thirty miles (fifty-seven kilometres), as in this example:

From *Qamrāṭa* (Cammarata) to *Iblāṭnū* (Plātani) it is thirty miles, it is one day's journey.<sup>360</sup>

Idrīsi often categorises a 'day's journey' into two grades of difficulty: *marḥala khaṭīfa*, 'one day's light/easy journey', and *marḥala kibīra*, 'a big/long day's journey'. A 'light' day's journey was less than twenty miles, as in the following example:

From this place to *Barṭanīq* (Partinico) it is one day's light journey and it is nearly eighteen miles.<sup>361</sup>

Conversely, a *marḥala kibīra* exceeded thirty miles:

From *Suṭayr* (Sutera) to *Karakant* (Agrigento) it is thirty-six miles, this is a long day's journey.<sup>362</sup>

Half a day's journey is expressed as *nuṣf marḥala* totalling around ten Arabic miles (nineteen kilometres), though in one example, from *Manzil Al-Amīr* (Misilmeri) to *Jifla* (Cefalà

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<sup>359</sup> Idrīsi, *Opus Geographicum*, both examples fasc. 5, p. 599.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid., p.607.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid., p.607.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid., p.611.

Diana), the distance is ten miles but takes a full day, presumably due to the difficulty of the route:

From *Al-Kh.zān* (?) to *Jifla* it is half a day's journey – it is about ten miles... from *Manzil Al-Amīr* to *Jifla* is about the same distance but takes a day.<sup>363</sup>

After describing the coastal settlements using Arab miles, in the section dealing with the interior settlements of the island there is the first mention of 'Frankish miles' (*al-amyāl al-ifrinjiyya*). There are thirteen further cases of this. It is not clear why Idrīsi has not mentioned Frankish miles in his description of the coastal settlements of the island – perhaps indicating that the information was gathered from a source that knew Frankish rather than Arab miles. Idrīsi states that a Frankish mile is equal to a third of an Arab mile, making a Frankish mile around 0.6 kilometres.<sup>364</sup>

Although Idrīsi is interested in distance, he does not go into specifics regarding the details of the routes his reader would be travelling (except to say that a journey is a *marḥala khafīfa/ kibīra*) or other details such as bridges, obstacles, seasonal differences in conditions etc. This is no different to other Routes and Kingdoms works which rarely go into specifics regarding the quality of the routes described.

The ease of identifying the coastal settlements (as opposed to the interior settlements, a large proportion of which are impossible to identify) allows a unique opportunity to assess the accuracy of Idrīsi's distances. Idrīsi is often cited, particularly by Italian historians and archaeologists,<sup>365</sup> as being an indispensable source for Sicilian history in the twelfth century.

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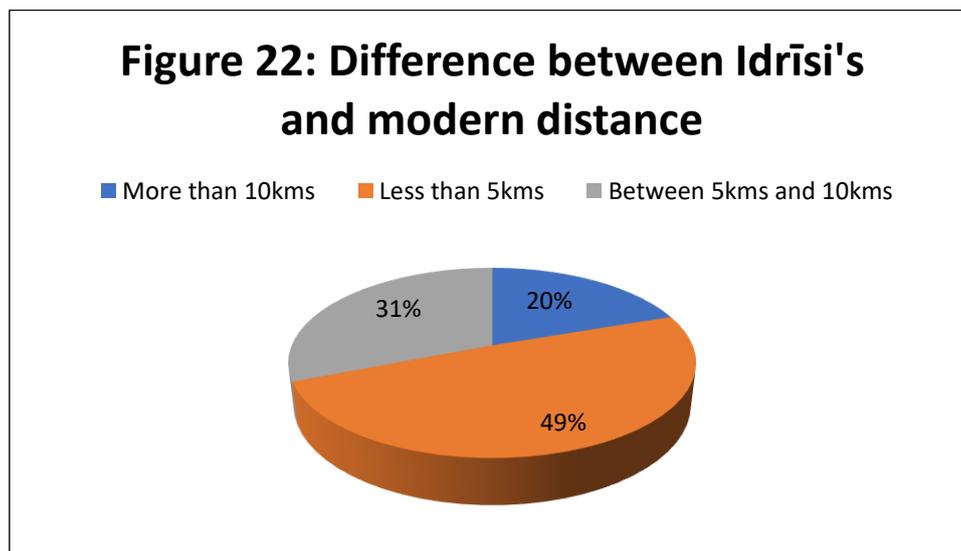
<sup>363</sup> Ibid., pp.603-604.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid., p.605.

<sup>365</sup> See Lucia Arcifa, 'Viabilità e politica stradale in Sicilia', pp.26-33.

However, his data are rarely critically assessed. Using Idrīsi's data for the coast, I have evaluated the accuracy of his distances in relation to the modern distance.

Idrīsi is very close to the modern distance in most cases. This conclusion is not without its problems, as Idrīsi is never specific, except in a few cases, about the routes he is describing. I have used calculations of distances on modern roads in comparison with Idrīsi's routes, and this is hardly a strict comparison, given that Idrīsi's traveller would have been dealing with much rougher tracks and terrain. However, given the closeness of Idrīsi's and the modern distances, an argument can be made, at least for the coastal settlements, that Idrīsi's routes were not greatly different from the modern equivalent. This is not altogether surprising; as discussed above, apart from some changes caused by earthquakes and erosion, Sicily's modern highways tend to follow ancient routes. Figure 22 expresses the differences between Idrīsi's distances and the modern distance. As can be seen the majority of the differences are remarkably close at less than five kilometres with the average difference being 6.3 kilometres, in only twenty per cent of cases the difference is more than ten kilometres.



In the great majority of cases, at least for the coastal settlements, Idrīsi's distances are quite accurate and it appears that his informants knew the island well. There are only a few examples where his distance differs substantially from the modern distance. In these cases, this is most probably due to seismic activity occurring since the twelfth century, as in the case of the distance between *T. z'a* (Tusa) and *Qal'at Al-Qawārib* (Santo Stefano Vecchio) where Idrīsi's distance differs by eleven kilometres; Santo Stefano Vecchio was destroyed by a landslide in 1682 and the settlement was subsequently moved to the coast.<sup>366</sup>

Unfortunately due to the fact that so many of the interior settlements are impossible to identify, I cannot undertake a similar check for their accuracy. However, given that Idrīsi's coastal distances are so accurate, I have some confidence that the interior distances are as well.

It is clear that Idrīsi went to great trouble in calculating distances around the island. The fact that most settlements are a day apart shows that the author was describing an easily navigable itinerary around the island. Again, this would have provided Roger with an overview of Sicily, where none existed before, an understanding of how to get from one place to another, in the quickest and most efficient way. I now want to look at the 'settlement types' as described by Idrīsi: what kind of settlements existed around the island, and what picture of Sicilian settlement did this create?

### 3) Settlement Types

Idrīsi is greatly concerned with the categorisation of the various settlements of the island into 'types' and through this system of categorisation, he suggests a hierarchy of settlements. It is clear Idrīsi considers this nomenclature to be important so that his reader understand what kind

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<sup>366</sup> See Comune di Santo Stefano di Camastra (official page), 'Origins', [https://comune.santostefanodicamastra.me.it/en/cultura-e-turismo/la-nostra-storia/origini-e-storia/#.W5Cw\\_bh9jIU](https://comune.santostefanodicamastra.me.it/en/cultura-e-turismo/la-nostra-storia/origini-e-storia/#.W5Cw_bh9jIU) [accessed 6 September 2018]. See also Vittorio Alfieri, 'Alla riscoperta di Santo Stefano di Camastra', *ArcheologiaViva*, No. 141 (2010).

of place he is talking about, thus providing a clearer picture of the typology of settlements in the twelfth century. Before examining Idrīsi's categorisation of settlements, I will discuss the history of settlement in Sicily prior to the twelfth century and show how Idrīsi's settlements fit within this scheme.

Early Greek settlement building (from 8<sup>th</sup> c. BCE) was concerned with replicating Greece on the island rather than with the construction of defensive structures. These early settlements were built as permanent colonies, part of *Magna Graecia* (Greater Greece).<sup>367</sup> A typical Greek town plan included an *agora* (town square), open at its western side as it was in Greece, surrounded by streets, houses and temples. At the same time, the Phoenicians established a series of settlements on the western side of Sicily from 800 BC, including the city of Palermo, though unlike the Greek these settlements were primarily designed as trading colonies.

Sicily was the first Roman province and was the food basket of Rome<sup>368</sup> although it remained largely culturally Greek throughout the Roman period. Under the Romans, Sicily was divided into sixty-eight *civitates*<sup>369</sup> (including Lipari and Malta) and architecture and town planning remained strongly Greek in style. As discussed in Chapter One, during this period, Sicilians were almost universally Greek-speaking.<sup>370</sup> With the crumbling of the Roman West Sicily came under 'barbarian' rule for about a century though there is no archeological sign of this.<sup>371</sup>

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<sup>367</sup> Moses Finley, *A History of Sicily*, pp.28-29.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>369</sup> An urban centre (with a rural hinterland) made up of people who held the rights of Roman citizens, see James W. Eder, *The Roman Empire, A Historical Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1 (Santa Barbara & Denver: ABC-CLIO, 2018), p. 259.

<sup>370</sup> Moses Finley, *A History of Sicily*, p.134

<sup>371</sup> See Averil Cameron, 'Vandal and Byzantine Africa' in Averil Cameron et al (eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History. Late Antiquity: Empire and Successors, A.D. 425-600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 553-559.

The Byzantine period lasted from the mid-sixth to the mid-tenth centuries CE and was characterised by government-led construction of ‘defensive structures’.<sup>372</sup> The term ‘*incastellamento*’ was coined by the French historian Pierre Toubert in the 1970s and has become one of the most celebrated historiographical theories to elucidate the functioning of Mediterranean society in the Middle Ages.<sup>373</sup> *Incastellamento* refers to the phenomenon of movement of the rural population into fortified settlements. This was a societal shift from dispersed populations to concentrated populations in fortified villages or castles under the control of a lord. These fortified settlements were usually placed at a high point, overlooking the local area.

A question arises as to what the Byzantine *incastellamento* meant in the Sicilian context. The archeological data points to the construction of *kastra* (sing. *kastron*) which were villages fortified<sup>374</sup> through the construction of city walls, sometimes with watchtowers.<sup>375</sup> In this way, the undefended Roman *civitates* became fortified *kastra* marking an important turning point in settlement construction in Sicily which now for the first time emphasised defence and protection. The Byzantine rulers had tight control of the island fiscally, politically and socially and theirs was the first movement of *incastellamento* which served to unify the island.

In 967, the Fatimid caliph Al-Mu‘izz (932 – 975 CE) ordered that the Byzantine program of *incastellamento* continue and Byzantine-era fortified settlements on the island were bolstered with a mosque for worship also constructed in each major town.<sup>376</sup> Al-Mu‘izz’s

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<sup>372</sup> Ferdinando Maurici, *Castelli medievali*, p. 47.

<sup>373</sup> Pierre Toubert, *Les structures du Latium médiéval. Le Latium méridional et la Sabine du IXe siècle à la fin du XIIe siècle*, Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d’Athènes et de Rome 221 (Rome: École française de Rome, 1973). Giovanni Tobacco argues that the advent of *incastellamento* was due to the ‘threat of the Saracens’ followed by the consolidation of the power of local lords under the feudal system, see Giovanni Tobacco, ‘Les Structures’, *Studi Medievali*, Vol. 15, 2 (1974), pp. 901-918.

<sup>374</sup> Alan Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire, 900-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 201.

<sup>375</sup> Ferdinando Maurici, *Castelli medievali*, p. 23.

<sup>376</sup> Annliese Nef, *Conquérir et gouverner la Sicile islamique aux XIe et XIIe siècles* (Rome: B.E.F.A.R, 2011), p. 394.

orders were carried out most successfully in the Christian *Val Demone* and the policy was not completely successful in other parts of the island.<sup>377</sup> There was significant urbanisation in the Islamic period, with up to 1,021 settlements established around the island; this was a substantial increase from the Byzantine period.<sup>378</sup>

New forts were constructed in 1030-40 as new threats emerged from Genoa, Pisa, the Normans and Lombards.<sup>379</sup> By and large, in the Muslim period, settlements consisted of a grand habitat, protected by some type of fortification which was elevated<sup>380</sup> and this is attested to in Idrīsi, particularly for his description of the interior settlements. The internecine struggles in the late Muslim period led to the further development of fortifications. Muslim Sicily was not unlike Andalusia, made up of vast districts (*aqalīm*), geomorphologically suited to defence; these settlements were quite autonomous, fiscally and administratively.<sup>381</sup>

As discussed in Chapter One, the Norman conquest took some thirty years to achieve, from 1060 to 1091. Calabria was the base of operations for many years, thus Messina was the first city to fall in 1061; the south-eastern portion of the island was the last to be conquered.<sup>382</sup> In the conquest period, once a settlement was overcome, the Norman method was to disarm the local population, occupy key elevated sites and forts, and, using wood and earth, bolster or construct forts to discourage rebellion.<sup>383</sup> Due to the fragility of these kinds of materials, these conquest-era fortifications no longer exist. Recent research has challenged the idea of a program of Norman *incastellamento* in Sicily as fortified settlements or structures were mostly the same as in the Byzantine and Islamic periods with some additions.<sup>384</sup> In short, the Normans

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<sup>377</sup> Ferdinando Maurici, *Castelli medievali*, p. 53.

<sup>378</sup> Henri Bresc, 'L'habitation medieval en Sicile (1100-1400)' in *Atti del colloquio internazionale di archeologia medieval*, Vol. 1 (Palermo: 1976), p.189.

<sup>379</sup> Ferdinando Maurici, *Castelli medievali*, p.87.

<sup>380</sup> *Ibid.*, p.76.

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.160-161.

<sup>384</sup> Annliese Nef, *Conquérir et gouverner la Sicile islamique aux XIe et XIIIe siècles*, p. 394.

tended to settle in places that already existed rather than establishing new settlements. Given the fact that the Normans tended to establish themselves in pre-existing settlements, Idrīsi's categorisation of settlement types probably reflects the hierarchy of settlements in the Muslim period; therefore Idrīsi's text can also be utilised by scholars studying the poorly-documented Muslim period. The next section will deal with each type of settlement Idrīsi described, providing ArcGIS maps of their location on the island.

### Mudun (*sing.* madīna)

At the top of the hierarchy of settlements is the *madīna*, the Arabic term for 'city'. In modern usage this has come to mean the old part of a city, particularly in the Maghreb,<sup>385</sup> though traditionally the word meant 'city' or 'large town' from the root *mim-dal-nun*, meaning 'to civilise' or 'to urbanise'. Idrīsi situates all but one of the *mudun* along the coast, which, as I have discussed previously, were ancient cities, settled in the Greek period.<sup>386</sup> These include *Balarm* (Palermo), *Masīnā* (Messina), *Sarqūsa* (Syracuse) and *Karakant* (Agrigento). According to Idrīsi, in the interior of the island there is only one *madīna*— *Qaṣryānī* (Enna).

*Balarm* (Palermo) is the premier city of the island and is given the superlative title of '*al-madīna*' (The City). Understandably, as the seat of Roger's government Idrīsi's description is suitably dazzling:

First is the city of *Balarm* which is the great and beautiful city, the pulpit which stands above all the countries of the world. It is the proudest and most noble city and has been the seat of kings from the present to bygone days. It is the point from which troops and

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<sup>385</sup> '*Madīna*' in *EI2*.

<sup>386</sup> See Moses Finley, *A History of Sicily*, pp.17-19 & p. 24.

armies have set off to invade and the point to which they have returned, just as they still do nowadays.

*Balarm* is situated on the coast, with the sea to the east and great, towering mountains encircle it. The city's coast sparkles with cheerful radiance. *Balarm* boasts magnificent buildings which travellers to the city wander around wondering at their excellence, their detailed features and the originality of their design.<sup>387</sup>

Idrīsi's description of Roger's palace is particularly vivid, providing the reader with an impression of imposing impregnability but also great beauty:

The castle previously mentioned is one of the most indestructible fortresses; it is elevated and impervious to the damage wrought by warfare, it does not sustain even a scratch. At the top of the castle there is a fort recently added by the great king Roger and built using small pieces of mosaic and huge blocks of carved rock. The palace has been fortified in keeping with its artistic arrangement; its towers and bulwarks have been reinforced. The king's palaces and assembly halls have been perfected, and the magnificence of their construction and design, their unique details, are praised by foreigners and travellers who declare that there is no greater city in the world for the graciousness of its villas and palaces.<sup>388</sup>

Along with its magnificent architecture, there is also a sense of bustling activity and trade throughout the city:

*Balarm* is divided into two parts, firstly, there is the *Qaṣr*<sup>389</sup> area and next there are the suburbs.<sup>390</sup> The *Qaṣr* area contains the famous ancient castle renowned in each country

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<sup>387</sup> Idrīsi, *Opus Geographicum*, fasc. 5, p. 590.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 591.

<sup>389</sup> *It. Cassaro*.

<sup>390</sup> *Ar. Rabaḍ*.

and climatic zone; the area is made up of three districts. Within the first district are found fortified palaces, imposing and noble dwellings, as well as numerous mosques, inns, bath houses and many traders' shops. The other two districts also have gracious palaces and highly impressive buildings as well as some bath houses and inns.<sup>391</sup>

Finally water and fecundity are emphasised:

Waters surround and flow throughout the city of *Balarm* and its gushing springs burst forth. The city's fruits are abundant and its buildings and parks lovely. *Balarm* dazzles those who try to describe it, it mesmerises the minds of scholars; the sight of it, in short, seduces all those who see it.<sup>392</sup>

Idrīsi's description of Palermo is by the far the most effusive of any city on the island; however, Idrīsi's descriptions of the other cities of the island are also detailed and vivid. The author tends to emphasise that these cities are 'ancient' (*azly*), and emphasises their importance as hubs of trade, as in the following description of *Karakant* (Agrigento):

*Karakant* is one of the most civilised cities, it is bustling with people who come and go. Its fort is supreme and impregnable and it is an ancient settlement famous in all countries. It is one of the most secure fortresses and one of the most glorious territories. Ships from all regions congregate here and the city's buildings are amongst the most splendid of all buildings, they captivate the beholder. There are markets with all manner of goods to trade and buy; there are gorgeous gardens where many types of fruit are available.<sup>393</sup>

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<sup>391</sup> Idrīsi, *Opus Geographicum*, fasc. 5, p. 591.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*, 591.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 599-600.

Figure 23 shows the *mudun* of Sicily according to Idrīsi. As can be seen, they are relatively low in number; nine for the entire island, prompting the question of what Idrīsi's criteria was in categorising a particular settlement as a *madīna*. Common among these settlements is a stable picture of large-scale settlements, which are 'ancient', mostly established in the early Greek period. *Mudun* are prevalent around the coast; these cities contain fortification but do not exist purely for this purpose. They are rather conduits for goods and services, containing markets where goods are bought and sold as well as bathhouses (*ḥammamāt*), inns (*funādiq*), and other dwellings. As these are trading centres, ports are emphasised, and Idrīsi speaks to their quality, as in this example of *Masīnā* (Messina):

The arsenal and the main dock for all the maritime states of *Ar-Rūm*<sup>394</sup> are here; this dock is the gathering point of huge ships, travellers and traders from the countries of *Ar-Rūm* and of Islam. The visitors to this port are from every corner of the world, its markets are splendid and their merchandise is in high demand.<sup>395</sup>

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<sup>394</sup>According to the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* the term '*Rūm*' can be used for 'the Romans, the Byzantines and the Christian Melkites interchangeably' but 'most often...the reference is to the Byzantines', see '*Rūm*' in *EI2*. In the case of the *Book of Roger* I believe the definition is probably wider still, referring also to the North Italian communes.

<sup>395</sup> Idrīsi, *Opus Geographicum*, fasc. 5, p. 595.

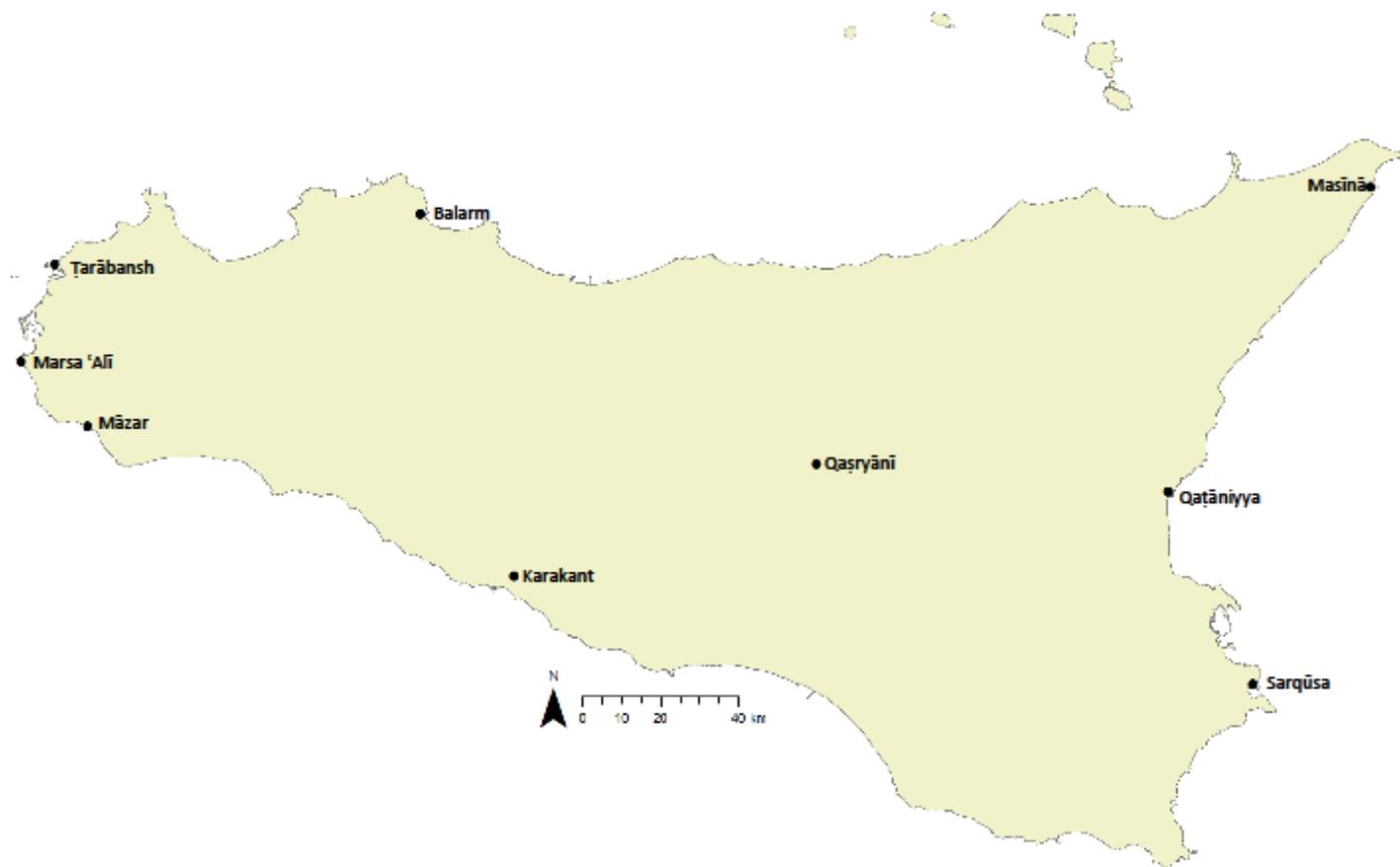


Figure 23: *Mudun*

Ḥuṣūn (*sing.* ḥiṣn) and Qalā‘a (*sing.* qal‘a)

Next in the hierarchy is the *ḥiṣn* or *qal‘a* and the vast majority of these are found in the interior with a smaller number dotted around the coast. *Ḥiṣn* is a notoriously difficult word to interpret and is often treated as one and the same as *qal‘a*; however, in the majority of cases Idrīsi uses the words separately suggesting the author saw them as having distinct meanings.

If we look to Muslim Spain, *ḥuṣūn* were fortified structures built on scarped peaks, ideal for keeping the surrounding countryside under surveillance; these were places of refuge, usually dominating a village.<sup>396</sup> There were numerous *ḥuṣūn* built to ensure the security of the major trade routes, to accommodate travellers at the end of a day’s journey, and sometimes also to provide for relay stages for a system of official couriers. The routes leading from Cordova to the larger towns in Muslim Spain were so marked out by *ḥuṣūn* built a day’s journey apart.<sup>397</sup>

In the case of Sicily, the main difference between these terms is one of topography: a *qal‘a* was a simple fort usually within a settlement and placed at a naturally inaccessible location, while a *ḥiṣn* was a more substantial structure, designed to defend a portion of territory or a strategic point, whether it be a water-well or an entire city. A *ḥiṣn* would most probably have included a defensive wall while a *qal‘a* would not necessarily have a wall.<sup>398</sup> With this in mind, I have chosen to translate *ḥiṣn* as ‘castle’ and *qal‘a* as ‘fort’ or ‘fortress’.

In Sicily, the word *qal‘a* has provided the basis for many of the Italian toponyms in current usage, including *Qal‘at Al-Balūṭ* (Caltabellotta) and *Qal‘at Awbī* (Calatubo) on the

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<sup>396</sup> ‘*Ḥiṣn*’ in *EI2*.

<sup>397</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>398</sup> Ferdinando Maurici, ‘Il vocabolario delle fortificazioni e dell’insediamento nella Sicilia ‘aperta’ dei normanni: diversità e ambiguità’ in C.D. Fonesca (ed.), *Castra ipsa possunt et debent reparari. Indagini conoscitive e metodologie di restauro delle strutture castellane normanno-sveve*, 2 vols, Atti del Convegno internazionale di Studio promosso dall’Istituto Internazionale di Studi Federiciani (Rome: C.N.R., 1998), p.29.

coast and *Qal'at Fīmī* (Calatafimi), *Qal'at Mūrū* (Calatamauro), *Qal'at An-Nisā'* (Caltanissetta), *Qal'at Abī Thūr* (Caltavuturo) and *Qal'at As-Şirāṭ* (Collesano) in the interior. Figure 24 shows a typical example of a *qal'a* built at a lofty position, in this case the twelfth-century *Qal'at Mūrū* (Calatamauro) in the province of Palermo.



Figure 24: Ruins of Calatamauro, 12<sup>th</sup> century CE  
Source: iCastelli.it

In the case of *ḥuṣūn*, many of these would have been constructed in the Byzantine period, bolstered in the Islamic period and further fortified in the Norman period. As discussed in Chapter Four, when describing these fortifications, Idrīsi uses words like ‘secure’ (*ḥaṣīn*), ‘impregnable’ or ‘impenetrable’ (*munīa*). There is a much greater sense of the difficulty of overcoming these sites than the coastal settlements and this makes sense as traditionally the interior had been the last bastion against incursions by foreign powers. Idrīsi is reinforcing this point; there is a sense that he is ‘warding off’ anyone who may have an idea of invading Sicily, as in the following example of *Ṭabramīn* (Taormina):

*Ṭabramīn* is an impregnable castle located at a precipitous and lofty position.<sup>399</sup>

Figure 25 shows the tenth-century Castle of Taormina with its defensive walls and, as Idrīsi states, located at an elevated position. The castle's position is clearly designed to provide a view out to sea in an eastward direction.



Figure 25: Taormina Castle, 10<sup>th</sup> century CE  
Source: iCastelli.it

Idrīsi provides an effusive description of *Qaṣryānī* (Enna), highlighting the city's defences. The author considers *Qaṣryānī* to be a combination of a *madīna* with a *ḥiṣn*:

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<sup>399</sup> Idrīsi, *Opus Geographicum*, fasc. 5, pp. 595-596.

This is a city (*madīna*) at the top of a mountain and it is one of the most impregnable castles (*ḥuṣūn*) ...In summary, this is one of the most secure regions that God has created, both for its situation and the solid quality of its construction. Along with its impregnability, and despite its mountainous position, there is farmland and running water. It has a superb castle, in an imposing position and it is not possible to overcome or defeat it.

Broadly Idrīsi demonstrates that the interior settlements are built for defence. The settlements are a series of *ḥuṣun*, known for their security and ‘impenetrableness’. Figure 26 is a map of the *ḥuṣūn* and *qalā‘a* in Idrīsi’s description most of which are concentrated in the interior. The mountainous topography of the interior provided the perfect location for fortified structures which served to protect the local population.



Arḥul<sup>400</sup> (*sing.* raḥl) and Manāzil (*sing.* manzil)

If the *ḥuṣūn* and *qalā'a* are fortified settlements, they are largely protecting the *arḥul* and *manāzil*. These are all found in the interior and these two terms are largely interchangeable. *Raḥl* is the same as the Andalusian term *alqueria* which refers to small rural communities consisting of a few houses and one or more families who worked the local land.<sup>401</sup> This was probably true in the case of Sicily, although under Roger II, these settlements developed into grander houses, inhabited by rural lords, in the style of a feudal manor house.<sup>402</sup> These types of settlements were 'open', meaning without walls or fortifications.<sup>403</sup> Inhabitants of a *raḥl* or *manzil* most probably relied on the protection of the nearest *ḥiṣn* or *qal'a* and in return provided food and taxation revenue to their protectors. These were a 'land and fiscal unit', without a civic centre and associated with a benefactor.<sup>404</sup> Unfortunately there are few extant examples of these types of settlement, which were largely made of timber. I have chosen 'estate' as a sound English translation for both *raḥl* and *manzil*. Figure 27 shows the *arḥul* and *manāzil* described by Idrīsi.

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<sup>400</sup> The plural of *raḥl* can be *arḥul* or *riḥāl*, see J.G Hava, *Al-Farā'id Arabic-English Dictionary* (Beirut: Dar Al-Mashreq, 1970), p. 245.

<sup>401</sup> '*Alqueria*' in *EI2*.

<sup>402</sup> Ferdinando Maurici, *Castelli medievali*, p. 87.

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*, p.119

<sup>404</sup> Lucia Arcifa, 'Alle Origini del Rahal di Abbud. I documenti di età normanna' in F. Buscemi & I. Contino (eds.), *L'insediamento rupestre di monte S. Antonio a Regalbuto*, Vol. 1 (Palermo: Paruzzo, 2012), p. 87.



Figure 27: *Arḥul* and *Manāzil*

### *Other Settlement Types*

Sparingly Idrīsi uses a variety of other terms to categorise Sicily's settlements; these include: *qaṣr* (pl. *quṣūr*) - the word *qaṣr* comes from the Greek *kastron* (Latin *castrum*) and has the sense of a 'fortified place'; in Arabic it can also mean 'a house of stone', 'fort', 'castle', 'palace' or 'mansion' although use of the term *qaṣr* by Idrīsi is a bit confused. In medieval *Maghribi* texts the word most commonly denotes 'a palace' or 'a place of residence for those wielding authority';<sup>405</sup> this latter definition could mean a large-scale fortified dwelling protecting the surrounding settlement. The appearance of the *qaṣr* in North Africa was part of the rupture between the nomadic and the sedentary. In North Africa: 'L'appellation symbolise en fait un haut-lieu; résidence d'une force sociale, culturelle, exprimée dans la structure spatiale de ce type de lieu...' (This name symbolises a landmark; a residence of social and cultural status, expressed through the spatial structure of this type of place).<sup>406</sup>

In Idrīsi's description the settlements characterised as *qaṣr* and are all found in the interior: *Qaṣr Nūbū* (Castronovo), *Qaṣr Ibn Mankūd* (?) and *Qaṣryānī* (Enna); these are all *idafa* constructions, meaning the noun after *qaṣr* denotes the person the *qaṣr* belongs to. However, each is given a different 'settlement type' by Idrīsi: *Qaṣr Nūbū* is a *maḥal*, *Qaṣr Ibn Mankūd* is a *raḥl* and *Qaṣryānī* is a *madīna*. Idrīsi does not categorise any settlement as simply a *qaṣr*, rather many of his settlements contain a *qaṣr*. The only settlement that has a clear *qaṣr* area is Palermo where Idrīsi divides the city into two parts – the *qaṣr* area (the area containing the king's palace) and the *rabaḍ*, or suburbs. Based on these examples, when categorising a place as a *qaṣr*, Idrīsi most probably meant this as a fortified building belonging to someone in

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<sup>405</sup> 'Qaṣr' in *EI2*.

<sup>406</sup> Mohamed-Habib Daghari-Ounissi, 'Le bâti traditionnel de la région de Tataouine', *Archéologie Islamique*, Vol. 11 (2001), p. 152. In Spain from the central Middle Ages, the word *alcázar* (derived from the Arabic 'al-qaṣr') came to be used to mean a fortified castle or palace, see Therese Martin, 'Chronicling the Iberian Palace: written sources and the meanings of medieval Christian rulers residences', *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies*, Vol. 2, 1 (2010), p. 112.

authority, either on its own or surrounded by a settlement. The Latin chronicler Hugo Falcandus differentiated too between the *oppidum* which referred to a fortified settlement and the *castellum* or home of the local lord.<sup>407</sup> A sound English translation is ‘palace’.

Other settlement types described by Idrīsi are *qurīya* meaning a village, small town or a group of houses or huts; *maḥāl* ‘A place where people alight or abide; quarter; site; area; inn; place of business or residence, shop. Any place’; *balada* a ‘country, town, village; region, territory’, when using this term, Idrīsi is suggesting a settlement with a large amount of surrounding territory; *jazīra* (island), *marsa* (port) and *rabaḍ* which denotes either ‘suburbs’ or ‘village’. He also uses for one settlement each *kanīsa* (church), *ma‘aql* (stronghold) and *ruqqa*.<sup>408</sup>

Curiously there are two settlement types which are absent from Idrīsi’s description of Sicily. In his description of Spain, Idrīsi uses the term *qasaba* ‘a fortified castle, a citadel; a city, a metropolis’;<sup>409</sup> he does not mention this word in the Sicily section. Also absent are the *ribāṭs* of which Ibn Ḥawqal makes special mention of in his description of Sicily. *Ribāṭs* were fortified enclosures where pious Muslims, while leading a very strict religious life, could prepare for the holy war; these were most common in Morocco and Spain.<sup>410</sup> By the twelfth century, Idrīsi makes no mention of these Islamic types of settlement and it appears that they have disappeared.

Figures 28 and 29 show the incidence of various settlement types for the coast and interior.

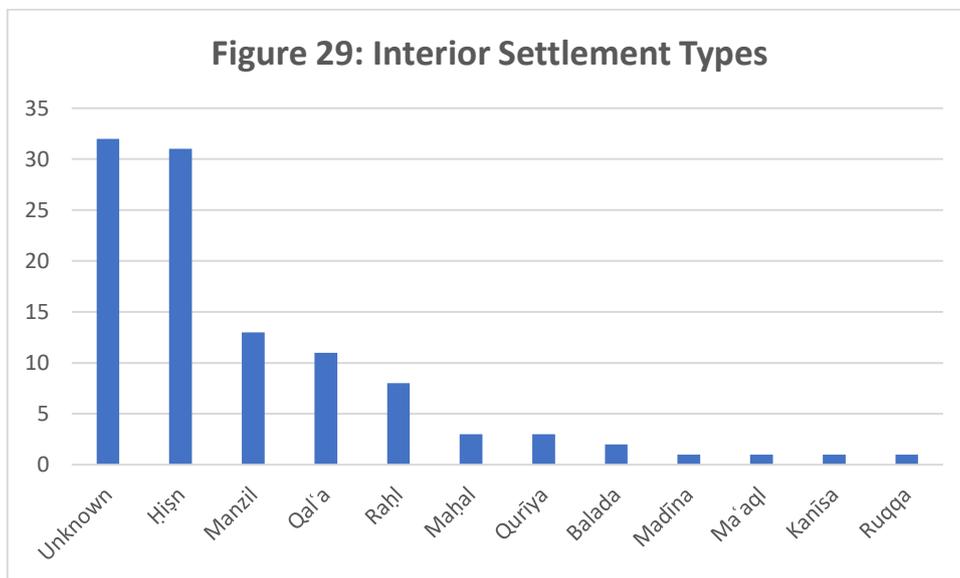
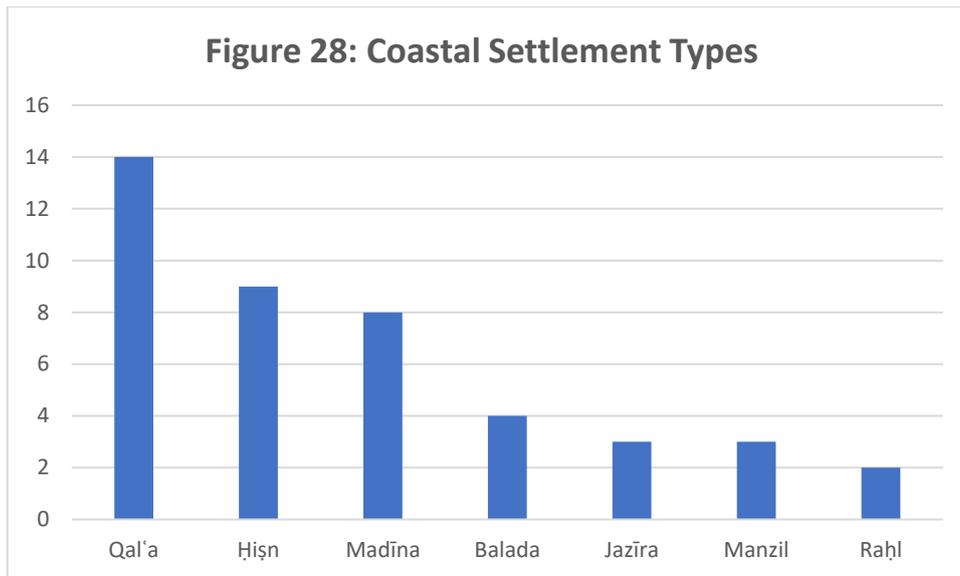
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<sup>407</sup> Hugo Falcandus, *The History of the Tyrants of Sicily*, p. 71.

<sup>408</sup> For an explanation of all these terms see Nigel Groom, *A Dictionary of Arabic Topography and Placenames* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1983). ‘*Rocca*’ in Italian means both ‘rock’ and ‘fortress’.

<sup>409</sup> As defined in *Ibid.*, pp. 227-228.

<sup>410</sup> ‘*Ribāṭ*’ in *EI2*.



As can be seen, the most common types of settlement on the coast are the *qal'a* and *hisn* though the majority of these were included within a *madina* or other settlement. In the interior, the *hisn* dominates though the interior provides a hazier picture than the coast with the largest number of settlements types not being named at all, perhaps because Idrīsi was not clear as to what kind of settlement they were. As there are a much greater number of Arabic toponyms in the interior of the island than the Greek and Latin names of the coast, many of these settlements were most probably established in the Muslim period.

#### 4) Shipping and Ports

Given the sea-bound expansion of the Normans throughout the 1140s, it is not surprising that the *Book of Roger* provides a wealth of information on shipping and ports in Sicily. In regards to shipping Idrīsi provides detail for almost every coastal settlement around the island. For example, the author writes that in *Al-Khālṣa* (Kalsa) in Palermo there is an arsenal where ships are constructed and at *Ash-Shāqa* (Sciacca) the ‘port is never too busy and the ships that travel here from *Ifrīqya* and Tripoli are never in great numbers’.<sup>411</sup> There are warnings too, for example at *Masīnā* (Messina):

Located at *Masīnā* are the straits which take you to Calabria, this stretch of sea is difficult especially when the wind drives against the sea’s current. When the sea enters the straits from both sides at the same time, nothing could save you from disaster save the grace of Allah most high. At its widest point the straits are ten miles in width and at its narrowest, three miles.<sup>412</sup>

If shipping is essential to the Sicilian economy, then knowledge of reliable ports and anchorages around the island was imperative and Idrīsi devotes the final portion of his description of the island to just this subject. Idrīsi lists 112 reliable places to drop anchor around the island, spaced at an average of six miles apart, far more information than had been provided in previous geographical accounts. Some of these were well-established and busy ports, such as Palermo and Syracuse; however, the majority are informal anchorages, known perhaps only by local sailors. The vast majority of the toponyms are of Arabic derivation, suggesting that Idrīsi interviewed Arabic-speaking sailors. As discussed in Chapter One, Roger’s navy was engaged in foreign expansion to North Africa and the Byzantine east throughout the 1140s and

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<sup>411</sup> Idrīsi, fasc. 5, p. 600.

<sup>412</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 595.

a clear understanding of the ports of the island would no doubt have proved useful both for Roger's navy and also from a defensive point of view, as these could be seen as 'weak spots' around Sicily's coast. I argue that this detailed description of ports and shipping would not just have had strategic value but also economic value, the subject of the following chapter.

Identifying the locations of the ports in order to create the GIS maps was quite challenging as their names are mostly informal with Idrīsi's text being the only record that these places existed. Unless the port still exists today (such as Syracuse or Trapani), I was obliged to use Idrīsi's distances as well as detailed pictures of the coast – accessed through Google Earth – to identify each port's position. This being the case, I offer the map of ports with the caveat that it may possess some inaccuracies although I have been as careful as possible to create a picture closely in line with Idrīsi's description.

Idrīsi's description of the ports of the island is very matter-of-fact without any information on the features or qualities of each port:

From *Marsa Ash-Shajara* to *Jazīrat Ak-Karāth* it is three miles. From *Jazīrat Ak-Karāth* to *Marsa Al-Bawāliṣ* it is three miles and from *Marsa Al-Bawāliṣ* to *Jazīrat Al-Jrmān* it is eight miles. From *Marsa Al-Bawāliṣ* to *Karam Ar-R.nbūḥ* it is three miles and from *Karam Ar-R.nbūḥ* to *Qarṭīl Bāshnu* it is three miles. From *Dakhlat Al-Q.ṣā 'ā* it is six miles. From *Dakhlat Al-Q.ṣā 'a* to *Marsa Al-Ḥammām* it is six miles and from *Marsa Al-Ḥammām* to *Dakhlat Ibn D.kni* it is six miles and from here to *Al-Qāta* it is six miles.<sup>413</sup>

Despite this lack of detail, the toponyms of the ports offer an insight into activity around Sicily in both the Muslim and Normans periods beyond what has already been described in the

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<sup>413</sup> Ibid., p. 624.

coast and interior sections of Idrīsi's description. As already mentioned, the majority of the names are of Arabic derivation and provide some idea of the diversity of activity around the island. Idrīsi mentions various springs as places of anchorage suggesting fresh water was fairly abundant, these include 'Ayūn 'Abās (*lit.* 'Abās's Springs) near Mazara and 'Ain As-Sultān (*lit.* the Spring of the Sultan) near Messina, although we are not told which sultan with author is referring to. There are also toponyms that give some indication of the trading or agricultural activity that took place at the port, such as *Al-Milāḥa* (*lit.* the Salt Farm) near Licata, *Marsa Ash-Shajara* (*lit.* the Port of the Tree) near Ragusa, perhaps with a logging industry and finally one of the rare occasions that Idrīsi mentions grapes or vines at *Karam Ar-R.nbūḥ* (*lit.* the Vineyard of Ar-R.nbūḥ) located near Syracuse.

A number of the ports are named for animals and it is not clear if this is because of the geomorphology of the port or for the activities that take place there, names include: *Anf*<sup>414</sup> *An-Nasr* (*lit.* the Point of the Eagle), *Anf Al-Khanzīr* (*lit.* the Point of the Pig), *Anf Al-Kalb* (*lit.* the Point of the Dog) and *Marsa Al-Hammām* (*lit.* the Port of the Dove). There are also ports named after people, although who these people are is difficult to know, there is the famous *Marsa 'Alī*<sup>415</sup> (Marsala) but just who this 'Alī was is not known. There is *Tarsat Abi Thūr* (*lit.* Abi Thūr's anchorage), *Tarsat 'Abād* (*lit.* 'Abād's anchorage), *Hajr Abi Khalīfa* (*lit.* the Rock of Abi Khalīfa) and *Hajr Ibn Al-F.ta* (*lit.* the Rock of Ibn Al-F.ta) among others.

In the description of ports, Idrīsi also mentions the names of small rivers or streams that are absent from his description of the coast and interior, perhaps because they were minor waterways that did not penetrate inland to any great extent. These include: the *Albu* River, the *As-Swāri* River, *Ighrīqu* River (*lit.* the Greek River) and the *Qasbāri* River, all of which were impossible to identify beyond a doubt. There is also some hint of Christian activity: near

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<sup>414</sup> *Anf* literally means 'nose' but in this context means 'point'.

<sup>415</sup> In conversation with locals in Marsala there is a general belief that the original Arabic name of the town was *Marsa Allah* (*lit.* Allah's Port) but Idrīsi uses the name 'Ali's port'.

Messina there is an anchorage called *Ath-Thalāth Kinā'is* (*lit.* the Three Churches) and near Syracuse there is *Ras Aṣ-Ṣalība* (*lit.* the Head of the Cross).

Figure 30 shows the ports mentioned by Idrīsi, as can be seen, this is a comprehensive snapshot of reliable places to drop anchor dotted around the island.



## Conclusion

The strategic information regarding Sicily found in the *Book of Roger* was unprecedented, and like the English *Domesday*, provided the king with a comprehensive view of the settlements of his kingdom. This included the description of one hundred and fifty settlements around the island, including in the interior, an area traditionally overlooked in descriptions of Sicily. Many of these toponyms were Arabic and significantly Idrīsi's text is the only source we have for the existence of these places.

Idrīsi also provided highly accurate distances around the island and it is clear that Idrīsi was greatly concerned with precision, as the majority of his distances correspond exactly with the modern distance. He also places his settlements around a day's journey apart, providing an easily navigable itinerary around the island.

Idrīsi provides great detail about the type of settlements found on the island and there is no doubt that this would have been very useful information for Roger in his program of land reform, administered through the *Diwān Al-Taḥqīq Al-Ma'mur*. This data also presents a view of the hierarchy of settlements on the island with *mudun* placed at the top due to their importance as trading hubs, followed by *ḥuṣūn* and *qalā'a* for their defensive importance. Finally, Idrīsi is detailed in his description of shipping and the ports of the island, mentioning at least 112 places to drop anchor, a level of detail that was unprecedented. This detailed maritime information would have no doubt proved invaluable to a king who was undertaking a series of high-stakes foreign military campaigns throughout the 1140s. In Chapter Six, I will examine the economic data provided by Idrīsi on Sicily in the *Book of Roger*.

## Chapter Six: 'The True Nature of His Lands', Part II: Economic Information on Sicily in the *Book of Roger*

In this chapter I will discuss the economic elements of Idrīsi's description of Sicily, namely his description of agriculture, water sources and trade. Agriculture was crucial to Sicily's wealth as a major supplier of grain and other raw materials. This was linked to trade on the island – the ability to easily move goods in and out of Sicily and to raise taxation revenue through levies on ships coming to and from the island. Water was a crucial element, firstly for survival in the arid climate of Sicily and secondly for the ability to move goods around the island via river systems and to export goods from reliable Sicilian ports. As in the previous chapter, ArcGIS maps will be provided to illustrate the economic data described in Idrīsi's *Book of Roger*.

The strategic aspects of Idrīsi's description discussed in the previous chapter are not mutually exclusive from the economic elements described in this one. Indeed, it is possible to say that in Roger's eyes, the strategic and economic were two sides of the same coin. To illustrate this, the next section will provide some background on the economic situation in Sicily under Roger II. I will then show how Idrīsi's data on Sicily's agriculture, water and trade would have assisted Roger in the larger program of reform undertaken throughout the 1140s.

### **The Sicilian Economy under Roger II**

He hardly ever gave way to idleness or recreation, so much so that if and when it should happen that he was not involved with some more profitable occupation, then either he supervised the public exactions or checked what had been or ought to have been given, or ought to be received, with the result that he always understood better in the accounts of his scribes the revenues which had to be paid to him, or from where they ought to be drawn. To sum up there was nothing which was his that was not recorded in written account, neither did he squander anything in empty generosity; hence he never lacked means for any enterprise, for he looked after his property with much care and diligence,

fearing to fall into that state which is commonly called thus, ‘he who does not live within his means (ad numerum) shall live to shame’.<sup>416</sup>

So wrote Roger’s biographer, Alexander of Telese (fl. 1127-1143 CE), in *The Deeds Done by King Roger of Sicily* and it is clear from this passage that Roger was deeply concerned with the financial affairs of the kingdom.

Economics was, as it still is, at the heart of a state’s success and it appears that Roger recognised this and worked towards bolstering the economy in the later years of his life. Fortuitously, the strategic location of Sicily near the shipping lanes that connected the eastern and western Mediterranean and in close proximity to both Africa and Europe meant that the island had long been a major trading hub.<sup>417</sup> In his famous book, *A Mediterranean Society*, Shelomo Dov Goitein provides a vivid picture of the economic life of Jewish merchants in the Mediterranean in the Middle Ages. In the Cairo Geniza documents, which form the basis of his research, there is repeated mention of Sicily and indeed Goitein writes that the importation of olive oil from Sicily ‘forms a major part of the business correspondence of the eleventh century’.<sup>418</sup> Given this fact it is surprising that Idrīsi never mentions olive groves or olive oil production in his description of the island.

David Abulafia has written extensively on the economy under Roger II and through his writings, based on Latin primary source material, a clear picture of the financial state of the island emerges. According to Abulafia:

The purpose of the Norman rulers was to build a vast fleet, to maintain a large army, to resist their enemies, and to take what chances offered themselves for new con- quests.

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<sup>416</sup> Alexander of Telese in Graham A. Loud, *Roger II and the Creation of the Kingdom of Sicily*, p. 3.

<sup>417</sup> Timothy Smit, “‘This Island of Many Natural Riches and Many Peoples’”, pp. 93-94.

<sup>418</sup> S. D. Goitein & Jacob Lassner, *A Mediterranean Society: An Abridgment in One Volume* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 252.

Alongside all this they succeeded in other ambitions: to lead lives of luxury in magnificent palaces and parks, and to build the great churches in which they prayed and hoped to be buried. The Palatine Chapel, the Norman cathedrals are in fact the best documents there are to illustrate the wealth of the Norman kings and the ambitions which that wealth serviced.<sup>419</sup>

Abulafia paints a picture of pragmatism – Roger I and Roger II both recognised the traditional value of agricultural and commodity exports to the Sicilian economy and they worked to maintain this *status quo*. According to Abulafia, the Normans cannot be described as ‘economically dynamic’, they did not encourage the development of manufacturing, except for ship-building; rather they relied on the ‘tried and true’ staples of the Sicilian economy, namely the export of raw materials and taxes on goods and ships coming in and out of Sicilian ports. This lack of imagination was not due the absence of foresight, but rather an entrenched pragmatism that ensured that the Sicilian kingdom under Roger II was very wealthy.<sup>420</sup>

Under the Normans as with previous rulers of Sicily, the primary raw material was grain, just as it had been in the Roman period. Sicily’s grain was of the finest quality, durable and suited to long-distance travel; it was also an important commodity in twelfth-century Europe, at a point when the population was rapidly rising.<sup>421</sup> To this end, Roger II established trading agreements with the foreign merchants of Genoa, Venice, and Pisa and cities such as Palermo and Messina were frequented by these foreign ships.<sup>422</sup> Sicily was an attractive trading hub to the North Italian maritime powers as ‘its markets were full, its coinage stable, its wheat desirable; and the Sicilian navy was sufficiently strong to make a reality of royal promises to

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<sup>419</sup> Abulafia, ‘The Crown and the Economy under Roger II and His Successors’, p. 14.

<sup>420</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>421</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>422</sup> See David Abulafia, *The Two Italies, Economic Relations Between the Norman Kingdom of Sicily and the Northern Communes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 59 - 84.

protect alien merchants'.<sup>423</sup> Added to trading relationships with North Italy was the lucrative trade network to Zirid North Africa, first established under Roger I. North Africa was dependent on Sicily's grain supplies and this was a powerful bargaining chip for the Normans in their dealings with the region (see Chapter One).<sup>424</sup>

There were other foodstuffs exported too, including oil, tuna fish and dried fruits. The fishing of tuna was a royal monopoly, although Roger II granted certain beneficiaries the right to fish for tuna, including the Archbishop of Cefalù in 1132.<sup>425</sup> So too there existed rights over the manufacture of steel and pitch although some of these rights may have been enforced in order to service the needs of the royal fleet, and for other military purposes.<sup>426</sup>

Shipping was crucial to the export enterprise, and according to Abulafia: 'It was the movement of raw materials out of the ports, finished goods into the ports which represented a sure source of income to the crown'.<sup>427</sup> Ships were taxed a levy of ten percent of the goods they carried into port and in addition there were taxes on roads and bridges in the interior as well as a tax on the exchange of money.<sup>428</sup>

The fertility of the kingdom, the tax structure, the monopolies should not give rise to the idea that Sicily's prosperity was easily-won: to produce its crops for the international market Sicily had to be reasonably well populated. But internal wars, Byzantine attacks, and, finally, the Norman conquest, had created large empty areas which needed to be resettled.<sup>429</sup> Roger II knew there was an issue of settlement as he had come into a land that was not overly populated; he therefore encouraged immigration, mostly from Northern Italy, in order to

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<sup>423</sup> David Abulafia, 'Pisan Commercial Colonies and Consulates in twelfth-century Sicily', *English Historical Review*, Volume XCIII, CCCLXVI (1978), p. 69.

<sup>424</sup> Charles Dalli, 'Bridging Europe and Africa: Norman Sicily's Other Kingdom', p. 78.

<sup>425</sup> David Abulafia, 'The Crown and the Economy under Roger II and His Successors', p. 6.

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>427</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>428</sup> *Ibid.*, p.9.

<sup>429</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

improve cultivation.<sup>430</sup> These new arrivals co-existed with the Muslim and Greek-Christian communities of the island for at least a century, until gradually they began to replace these native Sicilians from the 1220s.<sup>431</sup>

I am in agreement with Hubert Houben that there was an economic imperative to Roger's state-reforms of the 1140s: 'Roger II's reforms were intended not only to consolidate his rule, but also to fill the state's coffers'.<sup>432</sup> As discussed in previous chapters, in the last fifteen years of Roger's life, there was a flurry of activity based around art and architecture, administrative reform and foreign conquest; however, Roger was equally concerned with economic matters, demonstrated by his efforts to build relationships with the Italian maritime powers and to encourage settlement on the island. As stated, exports and taxation were the main revenues and these came through what could be produced in the kingdom (agricultural products and raw commodities) and ensuring that these goods could come and go through the establishment of secure ports. I argue that once again the *Book of Roger* played a part in this – Idrīsi's description contains detailed information on agriculture, mining, fresh water sources and provided Roger with a comprehensive snapshot of what was available across his island.

I will look at each of these economic aspects in turn, covering:

- 1) Agriculture/Commodities
- 2) Water
- 3) Trade and Commerce
- 1) Agriculture/Commodities

Agriculture and commodities are a major concern of Idrīsi, and for every settlement he describes the quality of the agricultural land. Idrīsi uses a range of positive adjectives which

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<sup>430</sup> Donald Matthew, *The Norman Kingdom of Sicily*, p. 71.

<sup>431</sup> Timothy Smit, "This Island of Many Natural Riches and Many Peoples", p. 99.

<sup>432</sup> Hubert Houben, *Roger II of Sicily*, p.159.

suggest fertile and abundant farmland throughout Sicily (for more on Idrīsi's use of positive adjectives, see below). However, it must be stated that Idrīsi is never overly specific about the *type* of crops being grown, rather using more generalised terms to describe agriculture. These descriptions of agriculture though not overly specific are amongst the most evocative portions of the Sicily description, designed to create an image of a bounteous place.

Below is a typical example from *T. z'a* (Tusa) on the island's north coast:

The land surrounding *T. z'a* has highly fertile soil, a wide arrangement of plots, excellent for farming and other uses.<sup>433</sup>

And from the interior, *Qamrāṭa* (Cammarata):

*Qamrāṭa* is a large estate with a wide expanse of farmland with many crops...there are orchards, gardens, fruits and abundance.<sup>434</sup>

Idrīsi provides more specificity when describing the agricultural produce of the coastal settlements *vis à vis* those of the interior, perhaps because they were better known to him and because the coastal settlements were more important in terms of exports for the island, as discussed in the previous chapter. In the interior he uses generic terms to describe agriculture, stating there are 'crops' (*ghalāt*) and 'fruits' (*fuākah*). 'Crops' perhaps refers to grain, still the primary Sicilian export in the twelfth century, 'fruits' could have included grapes as well as citrus and mulberries, introduced in the Kalbid period (see Chapter One) though again Idrīsi does not name these specifically.

Idrīsi does not mention livestock in any place on the coast but mentions it a couple of times in the interior, for example at *Munt Albān* (Montalbano). Despite being situated on a precipitous mountain, there is 'no place to rival it' in terms of its livestock. At nearby *Ghalāṭ*

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<sup>433</sup> Idrīsi, *Opus Geographicum*, fasc. 5, p. 593.

<sup>434</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 607.

(Galati), there is livestock as well as flax and honey and finally at *Qal'at As-Şirāt* (Collesano) Idrīsi writes that livestock 'used to wander through' the ruins of the castle:

From *Al-Himār* to *Qal'at As-Şirāt* it is nine miles westward, this is a fortress located at an elevated position, there is plenty of water and farmland; there is a splendid mountain overlooking the place. Its original fort was very strong, the last word in impenetrability; however, it fell into disrepair and livestock wandered through its ruins. The great king Roger had it demolished and erected the fort that is there now.<sup>435</sup>

According to Idrīsi, an important commodity of the interior is wood. For *Bukayr* (Buccheri) Idrīsi writes that there are pine forests known as *Al-B.nīt*, and the settlement of *Ar-Randaj* (Randazzo) has a large amount of wood which is exported 'far and wide'. *Qal'at Abī Shāma* (Buscemi):

...is a fortress, it is dependable as a place of refuge and it is surrounded by woods.<sup>436</sup>

At *Raḥl Al-Mar'a* (?) dairy products and butter are produced, and at *Mīnāu* (Mineo) there are dairy products:

From *Ṭarzī* to *Raḥl Al-Mar'a* it is eighteen Arabic miles. This estate is well-populated, with vast farmlands; it is fertile and produces dairy products and butter.<sup>437</sup>

*Mīnāu* is a pleasant fortress situated in the mountains of *Bizīni* and it is the source of many springs. There is plenty of farmland, fruits and dairy products, and the land has good soil.<sup>438</sup>

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<sup>435</sup> Ibid., p. 620.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid., p. 614.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid., p. 607.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid., p. 615.

On the coast dairy products are not mentioned at all, suggesting these were produced in the inland, pastoral areas.

Mining activity is described by the author at *Masīnā* (Messina), *Ṭabramīn* (Taormina) and *Al-Ḥamma* (Cefalà Diana) although these descriptions are fairly limited:

[At *Masīnā*] in the mountains there is an iron mine and iron is exported to the surrounding countries.<sup>439</sup>

[At *Ṭabramīn*]...there is a gold mine.<sup>440</sup>

[At *Al-Ḥamma*]...there is a mine where two types of millstones are cut – the water stone and the *al-fārsīa*.<sup>441</sup>

The account of agriculture in the coastal settlements is generally much more descriptive and the reader is left with a clear sense of what is available in each place. Idrīsi's description covers foodstuffs such as pasta, commodities such as linen, as well as the fishing industry. He also links the production of food and goods with export markets. At *At-Tarbī'a* (Trabia) pasta is produced for export:

*At-Tarbī'a* and this is one of the most splendid places. There is running water, many mills and wide tracts of farmland. Pasta is produced here which is exported to all parts of *Q.lūria*, as well as to the Muslim and Christian lands, many loads are carried away by ship.<sup>442</sup>

At *Shant Markū* (San Marco) violets are grown all around the settlement and their 'scent perfumes the air'. At *Mīlāṣ* (Milazzo) high quality linen is grown for export and at *Barṭanīq* (Partinico) there is cotton and henna and other 'cotton-like' products. At *Qarnīsh* (Carini)

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<sup>439</sup> Ibid., p. 595.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid., p. 596.

<sup>441</sup> Ibid., p. 602. *Lit.* the Persian. I have not been able to identify this stone.

<sup>442</sup> Ibid., p. 592.

almonds, dried figs and carob are grown and exported. From *Sarqūsa* ‘food’ (*t’ām*) is exported but Idrīsi does not offer specifics about this food, apart from mentioning ‘fruits’ (*fuākah*).

Orchards (*basātīn*) and gardens (*ḥadā’iq*) are often mentioned for the coastal settlements though Idrīsi does not provide specificity on the types of fruit or vegetables being cultivated. Honey is mentioned on a number of occasions, at *Qal’at Al-Khinzāriyya* (?), *Munt Albān* (Montalbano), *Karakant* (Agrigento), *Ṭabramīn* (Taormina), and *Masīnā* (Messina). Interestingly, the only place connected with silk production is *Shant Markū* (San Marco) on the North Coast, although Idrīsi makes no mentions of the royal *ṭirāz* (silk works) that Roger had established at Palermo and where his coronation mantle was made.<sup>443</sup>

The description of *Ṭarābansh* (Trapani) is particularly vivid and demonstrates the diversity and abundance of resources in the settlement:

*Ṭarābansh* is an ancient city situated on the coast and the sea surrounds the town from every direction. You reach the city via a bridge at the eastern city gate and the city’s port is in the south of the city. It is a quiet port without much activity; most boats spend the winter at the port as it is safe with calms waves during the upheavals of the sea. Fish of the finest quality is caught here and the large fish known as tuna is also caught with big nets; there is magnificent coral in its seas and at the gate of the city are salt marshes. The territory of *Ṭarābansh* is vast on and is one of the most abundant areas for cultivating crops; *Ṭarābansh* has large markets and abundant sustenance.<sup>444</sup>

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<sup>443</sup> Hubert Houben, *Roger II of Sicily*, p. 125.

<sup>444</sup> Idrīsi, *Opus Geographicum*, fasc. 5, p. 601.



Figure 31: Salt farms between Marsala and Trapani  
Photo: Katherine Jacka

Idrīsi provides some interesting detail related to the fishing industry and describes both saltwater and freshwater fish. On the coast he states that at both *Mīlāṣ* (Milazzo) and its neighbouring settlement *L.bīri* (Oliveri) there is a large amount of tuna fishing. On the *S.Ila* (Termini) river near *Th.rma* (Termini) a fish called the *R.y* (sardine or pilchard)<sup>445</sup> is caught in the springtime and at the seaport of the river there are very large fish available to catch. At *L.nīni* (Lentini) there are different types of fish found in the river, and these are exported. To the west of *Qaṭāniyya* (Catania), on the *Mūsa* River (Simeto), there are many fish throughout the river of extreme size and excellent taste. In the *Milḥ* River (Salso) near *Linbiyādha* (Licata) there are many fish ‘oily and delicious to eat’. At *Ṭarābansh* (Trapani) tuna is fished using large nets and Idrīsi claims this is the best quality tuna on the island; at *Al-Madārij* (?) tuna is also fished using nets and finally at *Al-Qārūnyya* (Caronia) tuna is fished. Idrīsi here is describing the traditional Sicilian method of tuna fishing ‘*la mattanza*’ (the slaughter) which appears to have been thriving in the twelfth century.

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<sup>445</sup> J.G Hava, *Al-Farā'id Arabic-English Dictionary*, p. 235.

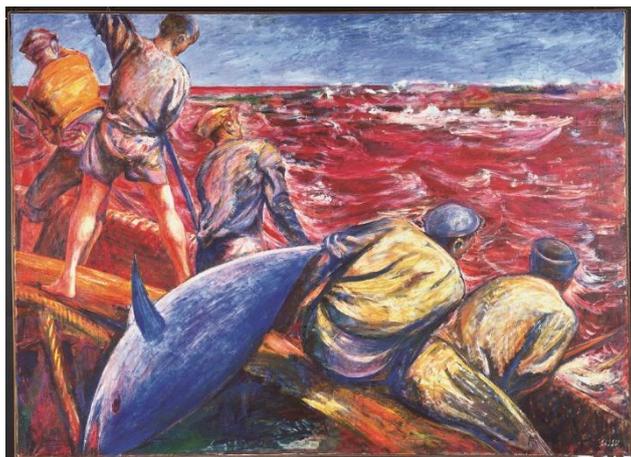


Figure 32: *La Mattanza* by Aligi Sassu, 1951  
Source: Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Genoa

Curiously, Idrīsi mentions vineyards (Ar. *karūm*) on only three occasions, in *Al-Qārūnyya* (Caronia), *Al-Madārij* (?) and *Qīsī* (Capizzi). Sicily had long been a producer of wine<sup>446</sup> and presumably there were more vineyards on the island than Idrīsi mentions. It is uncertain if this omission is a reflection of Idrīsi's religious beliefs or rather that Roger did not want Sicily's wine production highlighted to an Arabic speaking audience.

## 2) Water

Idrīsi closely links agriculture with water and for every settlement described in the *Book of Roger*, fresh water sources are mentioned.<sup>447</sup> This level of detail suggests that this information was to have a practical application in terms of agricultural production. Sarah Davis-Secord has noted that due to '...the historiographical importance of Sicily's agricultural production, its environment, landscape, and fertility have also been perceived as key to the island's role in

<sup>446</sup> Bill Nesto & Frances Di Savino, *The World of Sicilian Wine* (Berkley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013), p. 1.

<sup>447</sup> There are only two exceptions, at *Qal'at Fīmī* and *Jāṭwā* in the interior, in which case Idrīsi states that there are no fresh water sources.

larger economic systems'.<sup>448</sup> Water was and still is a vital component of the economic viability of the island and not surprisingly fresh water sources are a particular concern of Idrīsi in his description of Sicily. If the author's account of fresh water sources is to be believed, water in twelfth-century Sicily is plentiful. This is in contrast to the modern situation where Sicily's rivers are generally 'small, sluggish and unnavigable',<sup>449</sup> and where during the summer months rivers dry up 'to form numerous pools of stagnant water'.<sup>450</sup> On the contrary Idrīsi is effusive in his descriptions of water, often using adjectives such as 'streaming', 'copious' and 'gushing' (Ar. *muttadafiq*) to describe it. Idrīsi includes springs and he explicitly mentions fresh water wells on one occasion at *Marsa 'Ali* (Marsala):

Marsa 'Ali's population drinks from fresh water wells that can be accessed from their houses and from springs that surround the city.<sup>451</sup>

And at *Jaflūdi* (Cefalù):

In the centre of the city there is a fresh water spring that gushes forth and the inhabitants of the castle drink this water which is sweetly cool.<sup>452</sup>

Idrīsi also mentions hot springs, at *Al-Ḥamma* (Cefalà Diana):

This fortress was named *Al-Ḥamma*<sup>453</sup> because of a hot spring that shoots out of a cliff nearby. People bathe in this spring and its waters are of a moderate heat.<sup>454</sup>

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<sup>448</sup> Sarah Davis-Secord, *Where Three Worlds Met: Sicily in the Early Medieval Mediterranean*, p. 18.

<sup>449</sup> Bill Nesto & Frances Di Savino, *The World of Sicilian Wine*, p. 72.

<sup>450</sup> David G. Basile, 'Agricultural Sicily', *Economic Geography*, Vol. 17, 2 (1941), p. 116.

<sup>451</sup> Idrīsi, *Opus Geographicum*, fasc. 5, p. 601.

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 593.

<sup>453</sup> *Lit.* the Geyser.

<sup>454</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 602.

These baths still exist today, part of the *Riserva naturale regionale orientata bagni di Cefalà e Chiarastella* and known as the ‘*Bagni Arabi*’ (Arab Baths) (figure 33) although the buildings surrounding the baths were most probably constructed under the Normans albeit by Muslim artisans.<sup>455</sup>



Figure 33: The so-called Arab Baths at Cefalà Diana  
Source: Assessorato all’Ambiente, Provincia di Palermo

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<sup>455</sup> Assessorato all’Ambiente, Provincia di Palermo, *Riserva naturale regionale orientata bagni di Cefalà e Chiarastella*, [http://www.cittametropolitana.pa.it/pls/provpalermo/V3\\_S2EW\\_CONSULTAZIONE.mostra\\_pagina?id\\_pagina=7184](http://www.cittametropolitana.pa.it/pls/provpalermo/V3_S2EW_CONSULTAZIONE.mostra_pagina?id_pagina=7184) [Accessed 15 October 2018].

Figure 34 displays agriculture and water as mentioned by Idrīsi: figure (a) is the Coastal Settlements while figure (b) is the Interior Settlements. As can be seen agriculture and water are major concerns in Idrīsi's description although again his description of the interior in regards to these two things is less detailed.

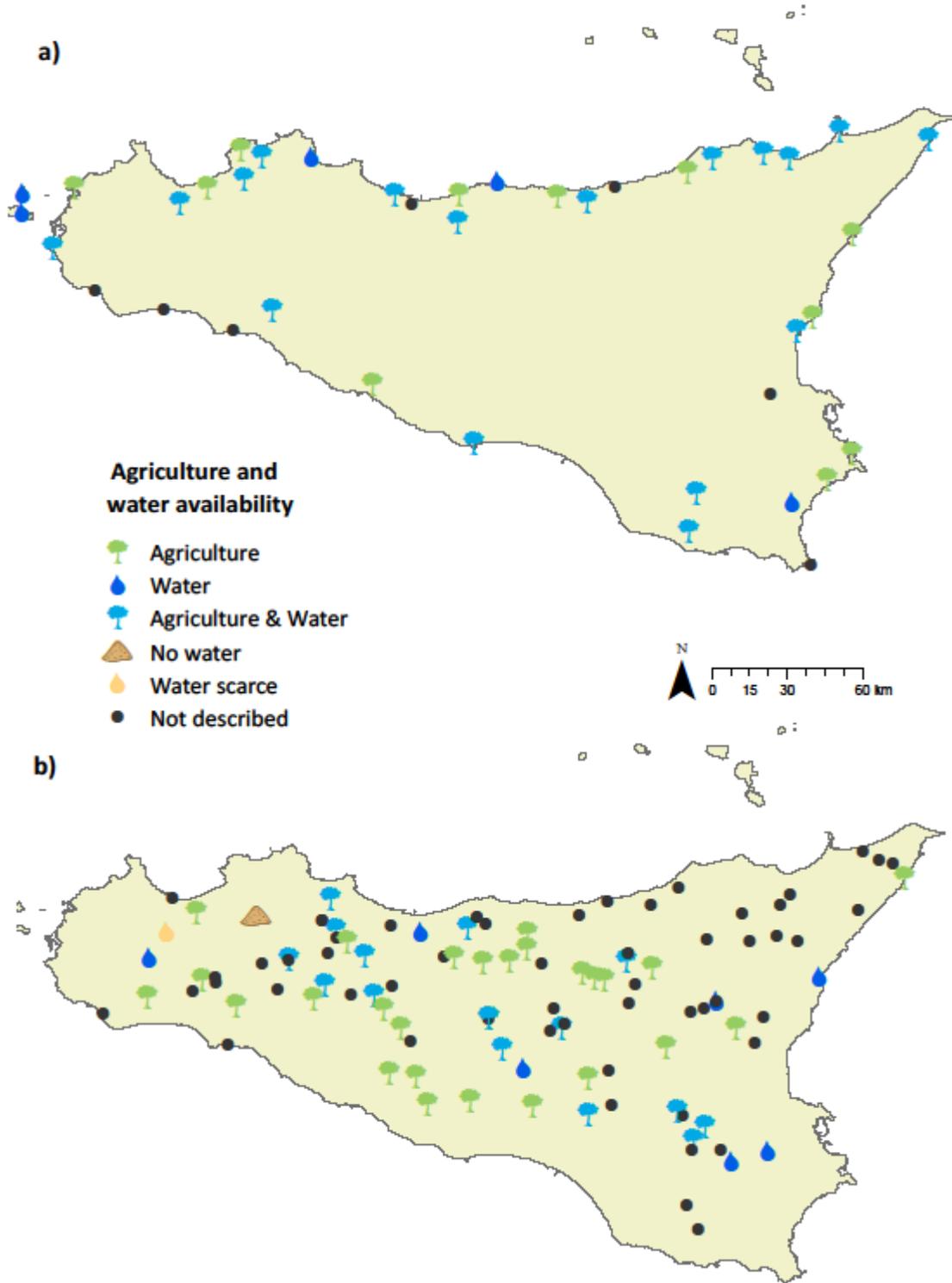


Figure 34a and 34b: Agriculture and Water

Rivers also feature prominently and Idrīsi's description demonstrates how important these sources of water were for local inhabitants.

*Qaṭāniyya*'s (Catania) river is a marvel and presents a curious phenomenon – in some years it floods dramatically and mills are concentrated along its banks; in other years, the river completely dries up and you cannot even find enough water for a drink.<sup>456</sup>

In the following example from *Raghūṣ* (Ragusa) in south-eastern Sicily, Idrīsi makes a connection between the inland town and the coast via the river, as boats take goods from the coast to the inland town to trade:

*Raghūṣ*'s river (which takes its name) flows past the eastern side of the town, at the mouth of the river on the sea there is a good port where boats come to load and unload. There is a market in *Raghūṣ* where people from far and wide come to trade.<sup>457</sup>

In the interior of the island, rivers and their courses are a major concern of Idrīsi. The author is careful to describe the course of rivers, giving distances from various settlements to the river; these descriptions are convoluted and quite difficult to follow but Idrīsi appears to be determined to describe the course of all major rivers. In the example below Idrīsi describes the *Mūsa* river (Simeto), still one of the largest in Sicily:

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<sup>456</sup> Idrīsi, *Opus Geographicum*, fasc. 5, pp. 596-597.

<sup>457</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 599.

The *Mūsa* river comes from four sources. The first of these is the *Jirāmi* river which starts in the mountains of *Al-Qīsī*; the second source also comes from these mountains and its gardens. The *Jirāmi* river flows between the two mountains for two and a half miles, returning to its original course and combining with the second river before proceeding on to *Jirāmi*; between the confluence of the two rivers and *Jirāmi* it is about six miles. The river passes below *Jirāmi* and its mills (on its eastern side) and between *Jirāmi* and the river there is one mile. Between the confluence of the two rivers and *Ḥajar Sārlū* it is eight miles. Located here is *An-Nīqishīn* river and between the *An-Nīqishīn* and the *Jirāmi* it is one big mile. From here the now united river descends altogether to *Shant Fīlib* and *Gh.lyāniyya* and continues to the east of *Gh.lyāniyya* and between the river and here it is one and a half miles. The river passes *Shant Fīlib* on its western side and between here and the river it is half a mile. Then the river descends to *Int.r N.stīri* between *Adhr.nū* and *Shantūrīb*, it passes *Adhr.nū* on its eastern side and between here and the river it is one mile, the river passes *Shantūrīb* on its western side and the distance between the two is one and a half miles. The river then meets the *Mūsa* river at the aforementioned place combining with the river that descends from *Ṭ.rgīn.s* as well as the *Y.lya* and *Inbla* rivers.

From *Ṭ.rgīn.s* to the confluence of the aforementioned rivers it is eight miles, from *Y.lya* to this point it is four miles and from *Inbla* to this point it is five miles. The rivers then combine and become one, descending to *Al-J.rṭa* and continuing to *Bātirnū* and *Sh.nt Nasṭāsyā* in the east and between *Bātirnū* and the river it is half a mile. The river continues along between *Sh.nt Nasṭāsyā* and the *Mūsa* River for two miles. Finally, all the rivers come together – the *Mūsa*, *At-Ṭīn*, *R.nb.lu* and *Karīṭ* near the sea then flow into it.<sup>458</sup>

This rather convoluted description of the course of the Simeto demonstrates the effort Idrīsi must have put into gleaning this information, reliant as he was on informants. The level of detail he provides on the rivers of Sicily certainly suggests that Roger may well have requested a comprehensive account of the rivers of the island, important as they were to survival in the interior and the movement of goods from the interior to the coast for export. Mills<sup>459</sup> are also an oft-mentioned feature in Idrīsi's description and the vast majority of these are on rivers near to the coast, as in the following example of the 'Abās River (Oreto) on the outskirts of Palermo:

Beyond the suburbs to the south there is the 'Abās River and this is a perennially running river which services the mills which meet the needs of the city.<sup>460</sup>

A nineteenth century painting of the Oreto (figure 35) clearly shows that the river was no longer 'perennially running'.



Figure 35: *Das Tal des Oreto bei Palermo* by Bernhard Fries, 1860  
Source: *Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen* (Bavarian State Painting Collections)

<sup>459</sup> The *Domesday Book* also features water mills prominently with mention of several thousand throughout England, see H. C. Darby, *Domesday England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 270.

<sup>460</sup> Idrīsi, *Opus Geographicum*, fasc. 5, p. 592.

Table 5 displays the rivers mentioned by Idrīsi and their Italian name.

Table 5: Rivers		
Arabic Name	Transliteration	Italian Name <sup>461</sup>
عباس	‘Abās	Oreto <sup>462</sup>
السلة	As-S.Ila	Termini
موسى	Mūsa	Simeto
لنتيني	L.ntīni	Lentini
رغوص	R.ghūṣ	Ragusa
الوادي الملح	Al-Wādi Al-Milḥ	Salso
وادي المجنون	Wādi Al-Majnūn	Mazaro
وادي الأمير	Wādi Al-Amīr	Misilmeri
قرليون	Qurliyyūn	Corleone
ريغنو	Rīghnū	San Leonardo <sup>463</sup>
ابلاطنو	Iblāṭnū	Platano
طوط	Ṭūṭ	Delia

<sup>461</sup> The Italian toponyms provided here come from Michele Amari’s *Biblioteca arabo-sicula* and Luigi Santagati’s *La Sicilia di al-Idrīsi ne Il Libro di Ruggero*.

<sup>462</sup> In 1131 George of Antioch ordered a stone bridge be built over the Oreto though Idrīsi does not mention this, see Maria Antonietta Spadaro, ‘Il Ponte del Ammiraglio a Palermo’, [conference paper presented at Convegno WWF: Conosciamo il Fiume Oreto e la sua Valle, Palermo, 27-28 June, 2014] <http://www.wwf-sicilianordoccidentale.it/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Progetto-Oreto-2014-8-relazione-Spadaro.pdf> [accessed 13 September 2018].

<sup>463</sup> This river was previously called the *Azziriolo*, see Luigi Santagati, *La Sicilia di al-Idrīsi ne Il Libro di Ruggero*, p. 100, note 131.

القارب	Al-Qārib	Belice
نهر سلمون	Nahr Salmūn	Carabi
نهر العسل	Nahr Al-‘Asil	Dissueri
نهر الاروا	Nahr Al-Arwā	Eloro
نهر بنتارغة	Nahr B.ntārgha	Anapo
وادي اكريلوا	Wādi Ikrīlū	Dirillo
وادي بوكريط	Wādi Būkrīṭ	Ferro
وادي رنبلو	Wādi R.nb.lu	Gornalunga
وادي الطين	Wādi At-Ṭīn	Dittaino
نهر طرجينس	Nahr Ṭarajīns	Traina
نهر جرامي	Nahr Jirāmi	Cerami
نهر القيسي	Nahr Al-Qīsī	Capizzi
نهر النيقشين	Nahr An-Nīqishīn	Nicosia/Salzo
وادي يلية	Wādi Y.lya	Elia
وادي انبله	Wādi Inbla	Ambola
وادي كريط	Wādi Karīṭ	Ferro/Gornalunga
نهر الباردا	Nahr Al-Bārid	Alcantara

### 3) Trade and Commerce

Another of Idrīsi's main concerns is trade and commerce on the island including commodities traded for export, markets and shipping.

According to Idrīsi, the major trading centres are on the coast, such as *Masīnā* (Messina) which 'is the gathering point of huge ships, travellers and traders from the countries of *Ar-Rūm* and of Islam' and where there is an iron mine where iron is exported. At *Karakant* (Agrigento):

The great ships that come to *Karakant* to collect produce for export must be loaded over only a few days and can barely contain all that is available.<sup>464</sup>

Export products include wood and wood-products as discussed above. At *Liyāj* (Aci Castello) there is pitch, pine tar and timber. At *Ar-Randaj* (Randazzo) there is timber and *Mīlāṣ* (Milazzo) exports very good quality linen. At *L.nīni* (Lentini) fish is exported and at *Māzar* (Mazara) ships load up with 'food and other products' for export. *S.rqūsa* (Syracuse) produces fruit for export in abundance:

*S.rqūsa* has a vast territory, fertile farms and estates. Ships load up with food and other products to export to all countries and regions; the city has gardens which produce fruit beyond all limits.<sup>465</sup>

Markets are often mentioned, especially in substantial settlements such as a *mudun*, *ḥuṣūn* or *qalā'a*. The majority of markets, or settlements with multiple markets, are dotted around the coast. There are a handful of markets mentioned in the interior. At *B.ṭr.liyya*

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<sup>464</sup> Idrīsi, *Opus Geographicum*, fasc. 5, p. 600.

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 597-598.

(Petralia) ‘the market is like markets in big cities’, at *Iblāṭsa* (?) there is a ‘famous market’. At *Nār wā* (Naro) there is a market on a ‘recognised market day’. The description of *Mīlāṣ* (Milazzo) on Sicily’s north-eastern coast is particularly vivid, giving an impression of bustling trade activity:

*Mīlāṣ* resembles a great metropolis in terms of its buildings, its commerce and markets, its commodities<sup>466</sup> and convenience. *Mīlāṣ* is on the coast and the sea surrounds the town on all sides (except the northern side). Travellers come here by land or sea, *Mīlāṣ* exports very good quality linen there are also excellent crops, gushing water sources and a great amount of tuna fishing.<sup>467</sup>

Larger settlements are also commercial centres, hosting not only markets but bathhouses, inns and shops, as in this example of the *Qaṣr* (Kasr) area of Palermo :

Within the first district are found fortified palaces, imposing and noble dwellings, as well as numerous mosques, inns, bath houses and many traders’ shops.<sup>468</sup>

From Idrīsi’s account, all of the major settlements of Sicily appear to have had multiple bathhouses, and smaller settlements at least one, and it is clear that these bathhouses were still very much part of Sicilian life in the twelfth century. Bathhouses were an ‘essential amenity’ of an Islamic city, the place where ablutions were carried out and often adjacent to a mosque.<sup>469</sup> For the ‘inns’ Idrīsi uses two terms: *funduq* (pl. *funādiq*) and *khān* (pl. *khānāt*). According to the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, these two terms are largely interchangeable in their meaning although *funduq* (a word with Greek roots) is used more in North Africa and *khān* in the Muslim

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<sup>466</sup> Idrīsi uses the word *muād* (sing. *māda*) which can mean ‘matter; materials; stuff or commodities’, see *Al-Mawrid Dictionary* (Beirut: Dar Al-Ilm Lilmalayin, 2001), p. 936.

<sup>467</sup> Idrīsi, *Opus Geographicum*, fasc. 5, p. 595.

<sup>469</sup> ‘*Hammām*’ in *EI2*.

East.<sup>470</sup> These were structures that accommodated humans and animals, similar to caravanserais, and mostly frequented by the poor, they may also have hosted prostitutes who would entertain guests for a fee.

These hostelries consist of a court-yard surrounded by buildings on all four sides. The ground floors are generally used to house animals from caravans or owned by passing country-dwellers and also, when necessary, any merchandise stored there until such time as the consignee takes delivery of it. On the upper floor (usually there is only one), small rooms give onto a gallery which encircles the entire building; it is here that people are housed. The gate to the street is large enough to allow fully laden animals to pass through.<sup>471</sup>

Again, according to Idrīsi, these inns seem to fairly ubiquitous in the cities of Sicily under Norman rule. Figure 36 shows a historical painting (19<sup>th</sup> century) of a caravanserai in Turkey. Although not Sicily, the image provides some idea of the type of structure Idrīsi was describing.



Figure 36: *Caravanserai at Mylasa in Asia Minor* by Richard Dadd, 1845  
Source: Yale Centre for British Art

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<sup>470</sup> 'Funduk' in *EI2*.

<sup>471</sup> *Ibid.*

Idrīsi closely links shipping to trade and commerce in his description. Sicily's connection to the sea has always been profound, the sea is the means to export food and to increase the wealth of the island as well as both an opportunity and a challenge regarding Sicily's foreign relations.<sup>472</sup> Idrīsi clearly recognised this fact and is detailed in his description of shipping around the island, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Figure 37 displays Idrīsi's description of trade and commerce around the island. Figure (a) is the coastal settlements and figure (b) is the interior. As can be seen, Idrīsi mentions trade and commerce more frequently in his description of the coastal settlements.

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<sup>472</sup> David Abulafia, 'Medieval Sicily: an Island open on all Sides', p.134.

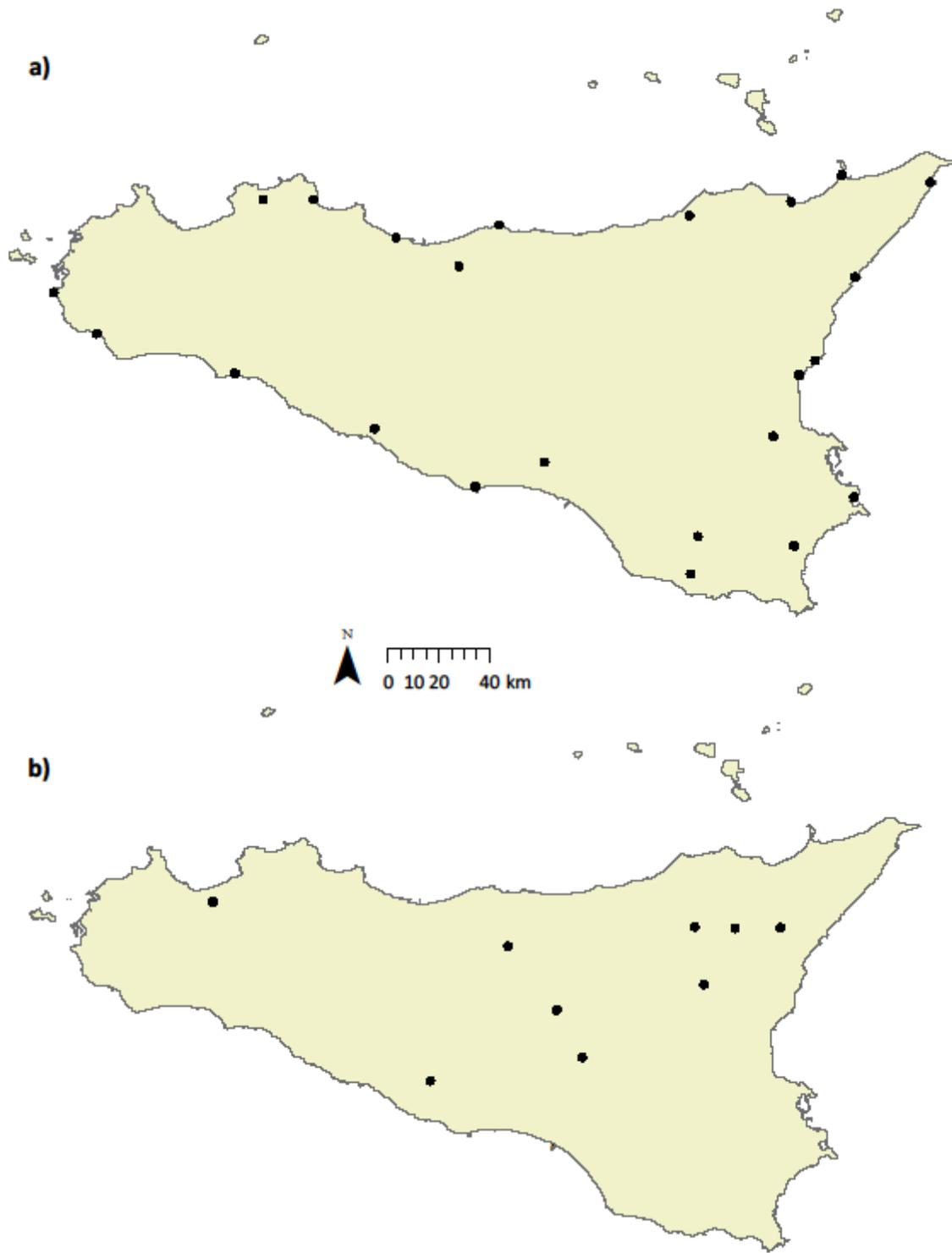


Figure 37 (a): Trade and Commerce Coastal Settlements  
Figure 37 (b): Trade and Commerce Interior Settlements

### **Use of Positive Adjectives in Idrīsi's Description**

In the remainder of this chapter I want to discuss Idrīsi's use of positive adjectives in his description of Sicily's agriculture, water and trade. As already discussed, Idrīsi's description of Sicily goes far beyond any of the texts produced before the twelfth century, Greek or Arabic, in terms of word count (more than 10,000 words compared with Maqdisi's 300) and the sheer amount of detail provided on the island. It is clear that Roger had ordered a comprehensive description of the seat of his kingdom and I argue that Idrīsi's text provides this; however the text needs to be read with caution. It was written by an author who was dependent on his patron for his livelihood, and perhaps his personal safety, given that Idrīsi was not necessarily able to return to Spain or North Africa (see Chapter Two). It was also produced at the end of Roger's life and so has the quality of a panegyric: Roger is praised repeatedly (for more on this, see Chapter Seven) and his island is described with a plethora of positive adjectives, giving an impression of a kind of paradise – stunning, verdant and 'gushing' with water.

While Maqdisi does not use adjectives at all, remaining very neutral in his tone, and Ibn Hawqal uses a large number of negative adjectives, Idrīsi is overwhelmingly effusive in his description of the island. One cannot help but conclude that Roger, or perhaps George of Antioch, had something to do with this. It is clear that Idrīsi, perhaps under orders, was at pains to create a positive impression on the reader, to present Sicily as a kind of paradise. A typical example of the use of positive adjectives is the description of Sicily as a whole:

And we say that Sicily is unique – the island is unparalleled in the beauty and remarkable qualities of its regions and inhabitants. From ancient times travellers have frequented the island, coming from far and wide. All these visitors agree on Sicily's superiority; they laud its worth, wonder at its splendour and pronounce its merits – the

way the island combines within itself diverse attractions and all the bounties of the countries of the world.<sup>473</sup>

As can be gleaned from this example, Idrīsi from the outset appears to be promoting Sicily, proclaiming that it is outstanding in relation to other parts of the world. He is also concerned with fecundity, abundance and water as in the following example of the city of Messina:

The city of *Masīnā* is at the eastern corner of the island and mountains surround the city on the western side. Its coast is delightful and its land fertile; there are many gardens and orchards with abundant fruits, there are gushing rivers with numerous mills upon them. It is indeed one of the most splendid places, the most prosperous, and travel to and from the city is carried on assiduously.<sup>474</sup>

Despite the ‘people-less’ nature of Idrīsi’s account, the author often uses the word ‘civilised’ (*muttaḥaḍur* and *mumaddin*) to describe *mudun* such as Agrigento (*Karakant*) and through this the reader is left with a sense that the larger Sicilian towns are sophisticated and cultured:

*Karakant* is one of the most civilised cities, it is bustling with people who come and go.<sup>475</sup>

Matching this level of sophistication is the prosperity of the island, although Idrīsi is not always specific about the source of this prosperity. He uses the phrase *wa laha ‘aml wāsa’*

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<sup>473</sup> Idrīsi, fasc. 5, p. 588.

<sup>474</sup> Ibid., p. 595.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid., p. 599. The author does mention people here in a general sense but is never specific regarding their language or religion.

repeatedly, which translated directly means ‘it has a lot of activity’, a somewhat indirect way in Arabic of saying that a place is prosperous.

Finally, Idrīsi uses a variety of adjectives which serve to reinforce the security of the island and its settlements, serving to convey to the reader that an attack on the island would be difficult to undertake. Like the positive adjectives used, Idrīsi appears to be sending a message to his reader, and again this was perhaps under Roger’s orders. The following is a typical example of the use of adjectives depicting security, for the city of Taormina on Sicily’s east coast:

*Ṭabramīn* is an impregnable fortress located at a precipitous and lofty position. It is one of the main ancient fortresses of the island and one of the most revered ancient sites.<sup>476</sup>

Table 6 lists the most common adjectives used in Idrīsi’s description, as can be seen they cover four main areas: beauty and goodness, abundance and fecundity, sophistication and civilisation and finally, security.

Table 6: Positive Adjectives used by Idrīsi		
Arabic	Transliteration	English
بدیع	<i>badīa</i> <sup>ʿ</sup>	splendid/wonderful
بهیج	<i>bahīj</i>	pleasant/cheerful
زاهر	<i>zāhr</i>	shining/brilliant
فخیر	<i>fakhīr</i>	good/proud
حسن	<i>ḥasan</i>	good/beautiful
شریف	<i>sharīf</i>	noble
جميل	<i>jamīl</i>	beautiful/lovely
وحدید	<i>waḥīd</i>	unique
خصیب	<i>khaṣīb</i>	prolific/fertile
كثیر الزراعات	<i>kathīr az-zarāʿ āt</i>	abundant crops
عزیر	<i>ghazīr</i>	plenteous/copious/abundant
متدفق	<i>muttadafiq</i>	streaming/gushing

<sup>476</sup> Ibid., p. 595.

متحضر	<i>muttaḥaḍur</i>	civilised/cultured
ممدن	<i>mumaddin</i>	civilised
منيع	<i>munīa'</i>	impregnable/impenetrable
حصين	<i>ḥaṣīn</i>	secure/ impenetrable
شامخ	<i>shāmikh</i>	lofty/high
منيع الحصن	<i>munīa' al-ḥiṣn</i>	impregnable fortress

For each of the one hundred and fifty settlements described by Idrīsi, the author uses a combination of the adjectives cited above to create an impression which is overwhelmingly positive; at no point does Idrīsi use negative adjectives in his description of the island. This is in contrast to other parts of the *Book of Roger*, for example in his description of West Africa (Climate 1, Part 1) where there is much more a sense of sinister danger with adjectives such as ‘lethal’ (*muhlik*), ‘threatening’ (*muhaddad*) and ‘raized’ or ‘ruined’ (*mutahaddim*). Interestingly also, Idrīsi uses no such positive adjectives when describing the other parts of the Norman kingdom such as Calabria, Apulia and Malta (see Chapter Seven) and in these descriptions he is neutral and even detached.

However, Idrīsi’s heavy use of positive adjectives to describe the island must give the reader pause – Idrīsi is at pains to present an overwhelmingly rosy view of Sicilian life, in contrast to other parts of the *Book of Roger*. This fact does not diminish the value of Idrīsi’s description but his account must be read with an awareness of the scholar-patron relationship between the author and Roger II.

## Conclusion

The detailed description of agriculture and commodities, water and trade and commerce provided by Idrīsi in the *Book of Roger* was, like his description of strategic information discussed in the previous chapter, quite unprecedented in previous accounts of the island. Idrīsi was perhaps not overly detailed about the *types* of crops available in each settlement but he

was careful to talk about the quality of the agricultural land for each of the nearly two hundred settlements found in the book, a fact that was no mere accident. Idrīsi was also highly detailed in his description of water, again mentioning fresh water sources for every settlement, as well as the course of rivers. This painstaking detail suggests the importance of water to the agricultural output of the island and therefore to the Sicilian economy.

Trade and commerce are also oft mentioned features in Idrīsi's description. According to Idrīsi, the major trading centres are concentrated around the coast, normally within *mudun*. These are not just points of export but also commercial centres for the local population, containing markets, inns and shops. Idrīsi is careful to describe shipping and ports in these trading and commercial centres, giving some indication of the importance of cabotage to the Sicilian economy.

I argue that again we find in Idrīsi's description of Sicily information that would have proved useful to Roger, this time in acquiring an *economic* snapshot of the island. As discussed at the opening of this chapter, Roger was throughout the 1140s working to ensure the economic future of his kingdom through the encouragement of immigration - and through this the improvement of cultivation around the island - and the establishment of trading relationships with the Italian city-states of Genoa, Venice, and Pisa. As David Abulafia has argued, Roger II was no innovator but rather a pragmatist, recognising that agriculture, trade and shipping were the 'bread and butter' of the Sicilian economy and ensuring that these would continue to flourish well into the future. Although his effusively positive description must be read with some caution, there is no doubt that the data provided by Idrīsi on these fundamental aspects of the Sicilian economy provided a comprehensive account of the status of the entire island, where none had existed before.

I reiterate that the strengths of Idrīsi's account of Sicily lie in the original *strategic* and *economic* information he provided, information that could only have assisted Roger in the busy period of the 1140s when the king was working to reform the state administration, expand the empire and ensure the economic viability of the Norman state. Where Idrīsi's description falls greatly short is in regards to the people and culture(s) of Sicily, areas the author barely touches on. However, I do not believe this was an oversight but rather something that was deliberately ordered by Roger who was at pains to downplay any division on the island, especially to the Arabic-speakers who could access the *Book of Roger*. The final chapter will explore the shortcomings of Idrīsi's description of Sicily and question why his account is so 'people-less'.

### Chapter Seven: A ‘People-less’ Island: Limitations of Idrīsi’s Description

Chapters Five and Six analysed the strengths of Idrīsi’s account of Sicily; they showed that the author’s description focusses primarily on *strategic* and *economic* information which I argue would have proved politically valuable to Roger II in his program of state-building and foreign expansion post-1139. In this final chapter I want to discuss what could be perceived as the shortcomings of Idrīsi’s account. These shortcomings relate to the depiction of *people* and *culture* in Sicily. While in other parts of the *Book of Roger* people are described in some detail, the island of Sicily appears quite *people-less*.

There is one exception to this – Roger II and his father, Roger I who appear prominently in the Sicily description, part and parcel of the island itself. At the beginning of his Sicily description Idrīsi offers a history of the Normans in Sicily in which he highlights the importance of the two Rogers and closely ties these two men to the fate of the island. This emphasis on Rogers I and II and the dearth of information on the population and cultures of the island was no oversight on Idrīsi’s part but rather, I argue, entirely deliberate. Towards the end of Roger’s life, cultural divisions and tensions were increasing in Sicily as Latin speakers from mainland Italy took ever greater control of land and resources. I argue that Idrīsi, perhaps under Roger II or George of Antioch’s instruction, wanted to down-play these divisions by effectively effacing culture from the Sicily description.

This is not to say that there is no mention of culture at all in Idrīsi’s description but rather the choices the author has made about what to include appear designed to present a particular view of the island; for example, terms such as ‘Muslim’ or ‘Islamic’ do not feature at all, despite the fact Sicily was still very much an Arabic-speaking and largely Muslim region in the mid-twelfth century (see Chapter One).<sup>477</sup>

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<sup>477</sup> Alex Metcalfe, *Muslims and Christians in Norman Sicily*, p. 23.

This chapter will also deal with two other factors of Idrīsi's wider description which stand in stark contrast to the Sicily description. Firstly, I will discuss Idrīsi's treatment of Roger's rivals, namely the Byzantine empire, Zirid *Ifriqya* and finally the Papacy in Rome. While Sicily remains people-less, in the description of Roger's rivals, people, culture and religion reappear, demonstrating that these things were of interest to Roger when dealing with 'others'. In addition, there is quite precise information regarding the layout of the cities of Roger's enemies, including measurements of city walls etc. again confirming that the *Book of Roger* had a strategic purpose. Secondly I will examine the 'other' areas of Roger's own kingdom, namely the regions of Calabria and Apulia and the island of Malta. Idrīsi describes these areas in a perfunctory way, listing only major settlements, in stark contrast to the detailed description of Sicily.

Before examining these issues in more detail, I will first trace the inter-confessional tensions that were emerging on the island leading up to Roger's death in 1154 and which culminated in fierce anti-Muslim riots in 1160. It is important to understand these issues in order to comprehend why Idrīsi, or more probably Roger, chose to omit information on the diverse cultures of Sicily in the *Book of Roger*.

### **Inter-Confessional Tensions**

In many ways, the figure that Roger II cut - of knightly stock but raised in Sicily and South Italy - acted as a unifying symbol of the Norman kingdom. Roger was not an enlightened leader in the modern sense but he did, as has been discussed, keep non-Latin advisors and intellectuals close to him – exemplified by the figures of George of Antioch and Idrīsi – and relied heavily on them for advice, guidance and information. As discussed in Chapter One, Roger had more trouble quelling the Papacy and the Latin barons of South Italy than he did with the Muslim,

Greek-Christian and Jewish populations in Sicily. Towards the end of his life cracks were starting to show as Latin immigration to Sicily increased and Muslims became more marginalised. One event in particular stands out as a warning for what was to follow - the brutal death of Roger's close friend Phillip of Mahdia.

Phillip, originally from Mahdia in *Ifriqya*, was a eunuch who was educated in the royal palace and who became a favourite of the king. According to the Latin chronicler, Romauld of Salerno:

King Roger had a certain eunuch called Phillip, whom the king valued and trusted because of his good service to him. Having found him faithful in deed and reliable in carrying out his business, he gave him precedence over everybody in his palace and appointed him as master of his household. As time went on Phillip grew ever more valued and regarded, to such an extent that the king made him admiral of his fleet and sent him with it to Bône, which he took at sword point and sacked, before returning in triumph and glory to Sicily.<sup>478</sup>

Roger clearly relied on Phillip, who was nominally Christian, but who, the Arab chronicler Ibn Al-Athīr maintains, was secretly practising Islam. Unfortunately for Phillip, the 1153 CE expedition to Bône, in modern day Algeria, was a fateful one, and indicated that the situation for Sicily's Muslims was deteriorating. According to Ibn Al-Athīr, once in Bône, Phillip

...enslaved the population and seized everything there, except that he turned a blind eye to a number of *'ulemā* and divines who were thus able to leave with their families and possessions to go to the local villages....He then went back to Sicily where Roger

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<sup>478</sup> Quotation in Hubert Houben, *Roger II of Sicily*, p. 110.

imprisoned him due to his lenient treatment of the Muslims in Bône....This was the first calamity that befell the Muslims in Sicily.<sup>479</sup>

Ibn Al-Athīr goes on to say that Phillip was publically burnt late in 1153, and Roger died shortly after in February 1154. Given Roger's close relationship with Phillip, this was a shocking move on the king's part and a sign that any hint of apostasy was from now on to be severely punished. Roger may also have been responding to pressure from those whom Ibn Al-Athīr describes somewhat vaguely as the 'bishops, priests and knights'<sup>480</sup>, namely the Latin population who had settled on the island.

After Roger's death in 1154, the situation for Sicily's Muslims deteriorated further and the Latin chronicler Hugo Falcandus documented this period in some detail.<sup>481</sup> Events were set in motion by the loss of *Ifriqya* to Almohad forces in 1160 and the blame for this loss was apportioned to the Muslims working within the royal palace (the so-called 'Palace Saracens', discussed in Chapter Two). The new king William I's emīr, Maio, was killed in the street in November 1160 and a few months later the royal palace was attacked; shortly after, William was taken prisoner.<sup>482</sup> The attackers were led by the South Italians Tancred of Lecce and Simon of Taranto and one of the main actions taken by the rebels was to destroy many of the Arabic land register rolls (*dafatīr*) held in the royal dīwān. This move was a calculated one as these registers granted land rights to Muslims and the rebels appeared bent on throwing the system instituted by Roger in the 1140s into disarray. Secondly, and much more tragically, the palace eunuchs were massacred and this violence soon spilled out into the streets where any unfortunate passing Muslim was set upon.<sup>483</sup>

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<sup>479</sup> Ibn Al-Athīr, *The Chronicle of Ibn Al-Athīr*, pp. 63-64.

<sup>480</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>481</sup> Hugo Falcandus, *A History of the Tyrants of Sicily*, pp. 78-111.

<sup>482</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 86-110.

<sup>483</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 109-110.

Although the rebels were ultimately unsuccessful and King William was soon released, it is clear that the protection afforded Sicily's Muslim community under Roger II could no longer be guaranteed. Alex Metcalfe considers these events to be a 'religious pogrom', facilitated by 'popular hostility' and 'inflamed and encouraged by the noble leaders of the revolt'.<sup>484</sup> Given the issues Roger had with the Latin nobility throughout his life, there is no doubt he would have been acutely aware of these simmering tensions before his death, and the very real possibility of violence breaking out. The fact that the rebels destroyed the Arabic language land registers perhaps is symbolic of the shift that was occurring: Sicily was now moving squarely from a majority Arabic-speaking island where Muslims were free to practise their religion, to a Latin Christian one, where diversity was seen as something to be feared and distrusted. Given the death of Phillip of Mahdia and the riots soon after Roger's death, it is not altogether inexplicable that Idrīsi downplays the cultural divisions in twelfth-century Sicily in the *Book of Roger*.

### **People and Culture in Idrīsi's Description of Sicily**

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the only people to feature prominently in Idrīsi's description of Sicily are the 'two Rogers', Roger I and Roger II, and Idrīsi begins his description with a detailed account of their conquest of the island. This account focusses squarely on the two Rogers; and curiously, although Roger I's brother Robert Guiscard was involved in the conquest of Sicily, he is conspicuously absent from this account. This precursor to the Sicily description appears designed to present the two Rogers as the 'saviours' of the island from the 'tyrants' that ruled before, namely the Muslims, although Muslims are never named explicitly. This section can be interpreted as a panegyric to the two Rogers, and clearly

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<sup>484</sup> Alex Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy*, p. 186.

states to the reader that both men fulfilled a specific task in relation to the conquest of the island – Roger I conquered the island militarily and Roger II built the Norman state.

Beginning with Roger I, Idrīsi describes the conquest of the island:

It was in the year 453H [1061 CE] that most of the territory of Sicily was conquered, its tyrannical rulers and armies were vanquished by the greatest, the most gallant, the supreme, the most able, the honourable Roger son of Tancred, the best of the kings of the Franks. Roger did not rest until he had sent scurrying the island's prefects and the armies of the tyrants, mounting raids against them day and night, ultimately casting at them all kinds of death and ruin. Razor-sharp blades and the deadly lance were used until total victory was achieved – he conquered the island place by place and occupied each port in turn and this all took place over a period of thirty years.

Roger I was never a king but Idrīsi uses the Arabic word for king (*malik*) to describe him, he also calls him 'the best of the kings of the Franks', something Roger II may have requested in honour of his father. After Roger I had conquered the island, he then set about dealing with the population, although this 'population' is at no point specifically named:

Once Roger's will had been asserted and the stability of the throne ensured the path of justice was granted to the people of Sicily – he granted them the right to practise their religions and follow their laws; he ensured security in all things – the people's money, themselves, their families and children.<sup>485</sup>

Keeping in mind that this was an Arabic text, which Roger II knew could be accessed by Arabic-speaking Muslims, the choice to mention Roger I's tolerance of the people of Sicily's 'religions', however vague that term may be, is telling – there was clearly a desire to appear as a fair and just ruler and to win a measure of favour with an Arabic-speaking audience.

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<sup>485</sup> Both quotations from Idrīsi, *Opus Geographicum*, fasc. 5, pp. 589-590.

One wonders if, had the *Book of Roger* been composed in Latin, there would have been any such allowances.

Idrīsi goes on, after Roger I's death, Roger II inherited the throne. Roger II's responsibilities were twofold: firstly, the establishment of effective administration of the kingdom and secondly ensuring that all parties came under his rule. These 'parties' are not named specifically but no doubt refer to Muslims and Greeks living in Sicily, Idrīsi writes:

Roger II founded the state administration and embellished the magnificence of the realm, he brought honour to the sultanate, gave all matters his just share of his lucid perspective and good actions and through this disseminated justice, the establishment of security and worthiness to the kingdom. Owing to these actions, the various former rulers of these lands bent to Roger's will. They proclaimed their motto of allegiance to him, and followed him, handing the keys of their lands over to him. All sides came to be part of his kingdom and to come under his protection and mercy. His rule has only increased in prestige and nobility up to the point that we composed this book.<sup>486</sup>

While Roger I was a fearsome and aggressive figure, Roger II is depicted as an astute and pragmatic monarch who wins over his enemies through his 'good actions' and there is conveniently no mention of Roger's very aggressive territorial expansion in the Mediterranean throughout the 1140s. It is clear that Idrīsi is attempting to depict Roger as a statesman rather than an aggressor, in contrast to his father, and again this is probably directed to the Arabic-speaking audience who could understand the text of the *Book of Roger*.

This ends the panegyric to the two Rogers but they are mentioned again at a couple of points in the Sicily description: in *Marsa 'Ali* (Marsala) 'Count Roger I ordered that a strong city wall be erected which brought back the population, markets and tax revenue' while Roger

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<sup>486</sup> Ibid., pp. 589-590.

II constructed the palace in *Balarm* (Palermo) as well as *Qal'at As-Şirāt* (Collesano) where he ordered the old *hişn* demolished and a new *qal'a* to be built.

In terms of the general population of Sicily, as stated above, Idrīsi's descriptions of people are expressed in the briefest terms and there is never any explicit naming of a particular group (Muslim, Greek, Latin etc.) in the Sicilian community: there is absolutely no sense that Sicily is a place of cultural diversity made up of Normans, Lombards, Greeks, Arabs/Berbers and Jews. When Idrīsi does talk about people, he does not mention language or religion but rather whether they are 'settled' (*ahl bāhlu 'āmr*) or 'itinerant' (*ahl bi al-qaşād*) and on a number of occasions Idrīsi mentions that settlements are inhabited by these 'settled people', presumably as opposed to itinerant people. For the town of *Iblāṭnū* (Plātani), located in the *Val di Mazara*, Idrīsi states that the town has both 'settled' and 'itinerant' people.<sup>487</sup> Idrīsi also states that certain places, such as *An-Nīqishīn* (Nicosia), have an 'inhabited quarter' (*rabaḍ maskān*) but no greater detail than this is given. He also uses the adjective 'populated' (*ma 'mūr*) for a number of settlements but again does not go into specifics as to whom this population consisted of.

Cultural features such as religion or ceremony are mentioned on only a few occasions and the descriptions of religious sites are brief. Of the one hundred and fifty settlements described, mosques are mentioned on less than five occasions and churches even less (figure 38). Palermo is an exception, which Idrīsi describes as containing 'numerous mosques'. He describes the cathedral, although he is careful not to emphasise the fact that the site has become a church and in fact refers to it rather brazenly as 'the great mosque' (*al-jama' al-'aṭham*):

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<sup>487</sup> For some reason *Iblāṭnū* is described twice, once as a *hişn* and once as a *maḥal* and with no indication (or awareness) that it is the same place.

The great mosque is to be found here, the mosque was once a Christian church and has returned to that creed. The building delights in the level of its production, its innovation and the originality of its paintings, its embellishments and its inscriptions.<sup>488</sup>

The only other places where mosques are specifically referred to are at *Qaṭāniyya* (Catania) which has mosques both ‘large and small’ and *Buthayra* (Butera) which has ‘mosques for the Friday prayer’. Idrīsi mentions a church on one occasion outside Palermo, at *Shant Markū* (San Marco) on the north coast of the island (although he also mentions a church indirectly at Catania – see below).

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<sup>488</sup> Idrīsi, *Opus Geographicum*, fasc. 5, p. 591.

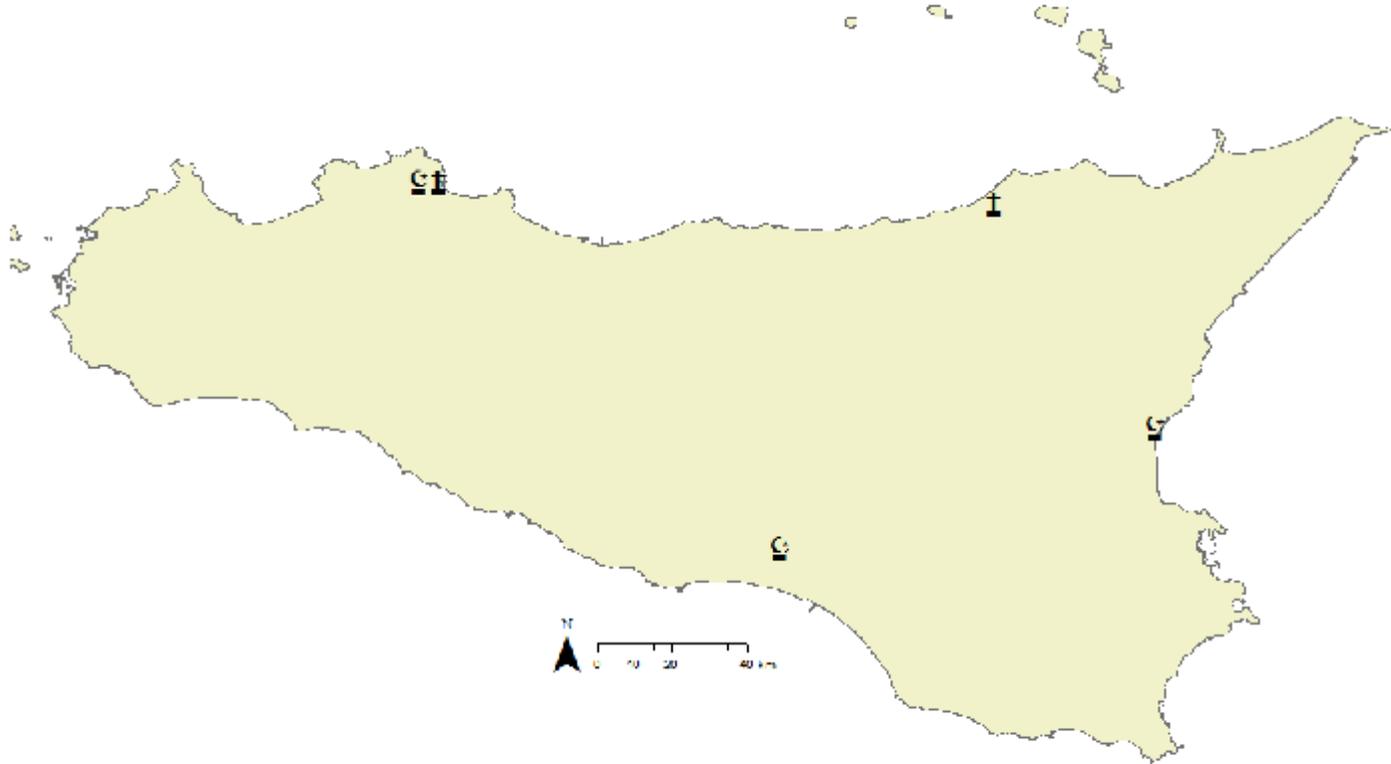


Figure 38: Mosques and Churches

Idrīsi spends a little more time describing popular religious traditions around the island - at *Masīnā* (Messina) there is a mountain called *At-Ṭūr* known in verses as being a place of worship though Idrīsi provides no more detail than this. At *Shakla* (Scicli) there is a spring called *ʿAin Al-Awqāt* (lit. Spring of Hours) which produces water at prayer times (presumably the Muslim *ṣalawāt*) and ceases when it is not the time of prayer.

At *Qaṭāniyya* (Catania):

The elephant for which the town is famous is a stone talisman. In the past it was erected on top of a building outside the city gates but now it has been brought into the city and has been erected on the church of the monks.<sup>489</sup>

This elephant, which was constructed in the Roman period, is still present in the city and carries an obelisk identifying the Egyptian goddess Isis. This has become a heraldic emblem of Catania and still stands in the *Piazza Duomo*,<sup>490</sup> see figure 39.



Figure 39: Elephant of Catania  
Photo: Katherine Jacka

<sup>489</sup> Ibid., p. 597.

<sup>490</sup> Karl Baedeker, *Southern Italy and Sicily*, 15<sup>th</sup> ed., (Leipzig: Baedeker, 1908), p. 390.

If Sicilians themselves are not discussed with any specificity, foreigners are more clearly defined. Idrīsi highlights that Sicily attracts foreigners who come for trade, using plural nouns such as ‘travellers’ (*al-musāfarūn/al-mutajawwalūn*) or ‘traders’ (*at-tijār*) as well as ‘itinerants’ (*al-qāṣidūn*). The coastal cities such as Messina, Syracuse and Agrigento attract the majority of these foreigners, who come from the countries of both *Ar-Rūm* (Byzantium) and the Muslim lands. According to Idrīsi, *Marsa ‘Ali* (Marsala) and *Shakla* (Scicli) receive visitors from *Ifriqya* and *Shakla* also receives visitors from *Q.lūria* (Calabria) and *Mālta* (Malta). Syracuse is particularly cosmopolitan: ‘one of the most famous cities which draws people to it from all civilisations and tribes; merchants come to the city from all regions’.<sup>491</sup>

Idrīsi also talks indirectly about the ‘ancient’ (*azly*) people of the island by way of the sites that were still present at the time he was writing. The author appears to be in awe of these ancient sites, for example at *Th.rma* (Termini):

There are original monuments and ancient buildings including a remarkably constructed amphitheatre which demonstrates the construction abilities of its creators.<sup>492</sup>

In each case, Idrīsi expresses admiration for the level of construction and reverence for the past, as in the case of *Karakant* (Agrigento) where: ‘The city’s ancient monuments attest to its grand past’; although the author never specifies that he is aware of who these ‘ancient’ people were and there is no attempt to provide any history of pre-Norman Sicily. Finally, at least one settlement has been abandoned by its population, at *Qal‘at Al-Balūt* (Caltabellotta):

In the past there were many people in the town but now most of them have gone to *Ash-Shāqa*; there are only a few men remaining who serve to defend the town.<sup>493</sup>

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<sup>491</sup> Idrīsi, *Opus Geographicum*, fasc. 5, p. 597.

<sup>492</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 592.

<sup>493</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 600.

Despite this:

Its surrounding plains are fertile, its farms wondrously good and there are unusual types of fruits, there are springs and rivers with many mills upon them.<sup>494</sup>

This is the extent of the descriptions of people and culture in Idrīsi's account. The author has assiduously avoided talking about religion - although he does mention mosques more than churches - and he provides no specificity as to the people of the island and their cultural background. In Idrīsi's account, Sicily is full of fertile agricultural land, water, fruit, forts and 'ancient' monuments, strongly tied to the figures of Roger I and Roger II but oddly lacking in the colour that descriptions of the people and their customs would have provided. Therefore I argue that, despite the value of Idrīsi's description in terms of *strategic* and *economic* information, his account is not useful in deepening our understanding of the population of Sicily under Roger II, a fact I argue was not an oversight but a deliberate move to downplay emerging inter-confessional divisions.

The 'people-less' nature of Sicily is in contrast to other parts of the *Book of Roger*, particularly in the areas of Roger's rivals where people, religion and culture reappear. This fact demonstrates that Roger *did* have an interest in people. In the following section, I will examine Idrīsi's descriptions of the territories of Roger's enemies – Muslim *Ifriqya*, the Byzantine lands and the seat of the Papacy at Rome - to show how in these descriptions, people appear prominently.

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<sup>494</sup> Ibid., p. 600.

### Roger's Rivals in the *Book of Roger*

In contrast to the people-less nature of Sicily, in Idrīsi's description of the surrounding, mostly hostile regions, many of which the Norman navy was in the process of attacking throughout the 1140s, people reappear.

#### *Corfu and Sardinia*

In 1147, George of Antioch set sail from Otranto with seventy galleys to attack the island of Corfu. The Byzantine historian Nicetas Choniates (ca 1155 - 1217 CE) wrote in his famous twenty-one volume *History* that the island capitulated thanks to George's bribes (and the tax burden of the imperial government), welcoming the Normans as their liberators. However, the city was soon lost by George's forces.<sup>495</sup> Given these events, in his description of the island of Corfu, Idrīsi is careful to provide strategic information about the island as well as its inhabitants:

This is a large island, its length is one hundred miles. There is a well-populated city which is very fertile and well-defended as it is positioned on a lofty peak. The population are ready and able to defend themselves against their enemies.<sup>496</sup>

The island of Sardinia is also described, and although Roger never attacked the island, it remained a threat. A large island not unlike Sicily, Sardinia had had a similar history of invasion, most notably by the Carthaginians, Romans, Byzantines and Muslims.<sup>497</sup> By Roger II's reign the island had broken into four independent monarchies, falling under the sway of

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<sup>495</sup> Niketas Choniates, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, Book II, trans. by Harry J. Magoulias (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1984) [https://archive.org/stream/o-city-of-byzantium-annals-of-niketas-choniates-ttranslated-by-harry-j-magoulias-1984/o-city-of-byzantium-annals-of-niketas-choniates-ttranslated-by-harry-j-magoulias-1984\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/o-city-of-byzantium-annals-of-niketas-choniates-ttranslated-by-harry-j-magoulias-1984/o-city-of-byzantium-annals-of-niketas-choniates-ttranslated-by-harry-j-magoulias-1984_djvu.txt) [accessed 19 September 2018].

<sup>496</sup> Idrīsi, *Opus Geographicum*, fasc. 5, p. 634.

<sup>497</sup> Russell King, *Sardinia*, The Islands Series (Harrisburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 1975), pp. 9-30.

both Genoa and Pisa respectively.<sup>498</sup> Though Roger's relations with Genoa, particularly as regarded trade, were good, there was tension between Roger and the Pisans who were aligned with the German emperor Conrad.<sup>499</sup> As such, any part of Sardinia under Pisan influence would have been reasonably threatening to Roger. With this in mind, Idrīsi's description of the island provides precise strategic information regarding the size of the island, its settlements and its 'savage' people:

The island of *S.rdānia* is large and very mountainous and water is scarce. Its length is two hundred and eighty miles and its width from west to east is one hundred and eighty miles. You cross the island from south to north along a path. There are three regions: *Alqīṭna* (Fausania?) which is in the south and is a well-populated and civilised city, *Qālm.ra* (Cagliari) which is the city that links with the island of *Q.rsh.qa* (Corsica) and the third city is *Q.shīlia* (Castelsardo). The people of *S.rdānia* are of African *Ar-Rūm* Berber origins, they are the most savage of the races of *Ar-Rūm*; they are courageous and determined and they never abandon their weapons.<sup>500</sup>

### *Ifrīqya*

Turning to North Africa, the focus of attacks by Roger's navy throughout the 1140s, we get a sense, for the first time, that Idrīsi is expressing some criticism of the actions of the Normans in the region. As a North African himself, it is understandable that Idrīsi may have been personally affected by these events, feeling some understandable dismay as to the brutality of Norman attacks. The city of Sfax (Ar. *S.fāqs*; in modern day Tunisia) was conquered by Roger's navy in 1148 and Idrīsi expresses a sense of desolation to the once thriving port city.

<sup>498</sup> Alex Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy*, p. 75.

<sup>499</sup> Pisa was a so-called 'Ghibelline' city meaning it supported the Holy Roman Emperor over the Pope see Edmund Gardner, 'Guelphs and Ghibellines' in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 7 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910) <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07056c.htm> [accessed 19 September 2018].

<sup>500</sup> Idrīsi, *Opus Geographicum*, fasc. 5, p. 584.

The beginning of Idrīsi's description of the city appears taken from an earlier geographical account – perhaps those of the eleventh-century of Al-ʿUdhri or Al-Bakri (see Chapter Three) – and the city is thriving:

...Sfax is an ancient and well-populated city, it has many markets and is prosperous. It is surrounded by a stone wall and its doors are made of impregnable iron...its markets are bustling...

In the final sentence Idrīsi adds more recent information and it is clear that Sfax has fallen on hard times under Norman rule:

[Sfax] was conquered by the great King Roger in the year 543 *hijri* [1148 CE], now the city is populated but no longer has the population, markets or trade it had in ancient times.<sup>501</sup>

When describing the city of Bône (Ar. *Būna*), there is a direct criticism of Roger. Idrīsi writes that the city was once doing well:

...The city of Bône used to have delightful markets, assiduous trade and profits...<sup>502</sup>

However, since the city was conquered by 'one of King Roger's men' the city is now in a 'debilitated state' (Ar. *fī ḍaʿaf*) with 'little population' (Ar. *qīla ʿamāra*). Ironically, while Phillip of Mahdia was punished for his 'merciful' attitude to some citizens of Bône, it appears that Idrīsi feels that no such mercy was demonstrated.

The island of Jerba (off the Tunisian coast) was always a difficult place for the Normans to hold. Long considered a last bastion of rebels and misfits, the island was important as a strategic entry point into *Ifrīqya* and as such Roger attacked the island with great ferocity in

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<sup>501</sup> Ibid., p. 280.

<sup>502</sup> Ibid., p. 291.

1135.<sup>503</sup> Referring to this event, Idrīsi writes that the Jerbans are ‘rebellious’ but Roger has successfully defeated these rebels and taken prisoners back to Palermo. Idrīsi also demonstrates the ferocity of Roger’s forces in Tripoli, modern day Libya. Roger:

...enslaved the women and wiped out<sup>504</sup> the men... Tripoli is now under Roger’s control and part of his territory.<sup>505</sup>

In Idrīsi’s description of Roger’s North African possessions, there is the only hint of criticism to be found of the king, and Idrīsi hints as to the terror and brutality of the Norman attacks. While in the Sicily description Roger is shown to be a statesman, in North Africa Idrīsi depicts him undoubtedly as a strongman.

### *Rome and Constantinople*

Moving away from North Africa, I will now examine Idrīsi’s description of the capital cities of his two main Christian rivals – the Papacy and Byzantium. As discussed in Chapter One, Roger’s relations with the Papacy were never straight-forward and throughout his life he struggled for recognition of the Norman kingdom. By 1139 relations between Roger and the Papacy had improved, as Roger was recognised as King of Sicily. As such there is a highly respectful tone in Idrīsi’s description of Rome and of the Pope himself. Idrīsi associates the city very strongly with Christianity, for obvious reasons, and indeed the specificity regarding religion is striking when compared with the lack of such information for Roger’s own kingdom, Idrīsi writes:

The city of *Rūma* (Rome) is the cornerstone of Christianity and it is the principal seat of the patriarchates; there are patriarchates too at *Anṭākya* (Antioch), *Isk.ndria*

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<sup>503</sup> Alex Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy*, pp. 161-162.

<sup>504</sup> Idrīsi uses the verb أفنى (*Afna*) which has quite an extreme meaning: ‘to annihilate, wipe out, exterminate, extirpate, destroy, utterly ruin’ etc., see *Al-Mawrid Dictionary*, p. 143.

<sup>505</sup> Idrīsi, *Opus Geographicum*, fasc. 3, p. 297.

(Alexandria) and *Bayt al-Maqdis* (Jerusalem). The patriarchate of *Bayt al-Maqdis* is the most recent and did not exist at the time of the Apostles but was established later to the glorification of *Bayt al-Maqdis*.

*Rūma* is a great city and it is said that its perimeter measures nine miles. The city has two stone walls, the internal wall's width is twelve cubits and its thickness is seventy-two and the external wall's width is eight cubits and its thickness is forty-two cubits. Between the two walls there is a river that is covered with copper slabs, the length of each slab is forty-six cubits.

The market is located between the eastern and western gates and is within a stone *loggia* and each column is thirty cubits in length. In the middle of the columns there are two columns made from Roman yellow copper and their stems, base and capitals are finished with this copper. The merchants' shops are next to here.

Next to the columns and shops is a river that divides the city between east and west...the Romans tell the date by the river and they tell the date from Year Zero. Boats reach the city along this river with their loads stopping when they reach the merchants' shops.

Inside the city there is a great church built under the names of Peter and Paul the Apostles and they are both there in two sepulchres. The length of the church is three hundred cubits, its width is one hundred cubits and its height is one hundred cubits. Its pillars are made from copper ...in *Rūma* there are one thousand, two hundred churches and its shops and streets are covered in white and blue marble. There are a thousand bathhouses and there is a church which is brilliantly constructed in line with the dimensions of a church in *Bayt al-Maqdis*. There is a pulpit from which the mass is performed which is ten cubits tall and covered with green emeralds. There are twelve statues of gold upon the pulpit and each statue is two and a half cubits and they have

ruby eyes. This church has doors plated in gold although the external doors are plated with copper and another with carved wood.

In *Rūma* there is the castle of the king called the Pope and there is no one who is more powerful than him, they value him like the great and powerful Creator. He rules with righteousness, he deals with grievances, he is a champion of the poor and the weak and he protects the wronged from the wrongdoers. His decisions must be followed by all the kings in *Ar-Rūm* and no one can contradict him. The city of *Rūma* has too many excellent features to sufficiently describe.<sup>506</sup>

Despite the reverence of the description of the pope, there is also quite precise information regarding the size and thickness of the city walls, and although I do not argue that Roger ever intended to invade the city, this information clearly has strategic importance and again is a level of detail lacking from Idrīsi's account of Sicily.

It is also important to note that Idrīsi associates the Patriarch in Rome with those of Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria, something that directly contradicts the other work Roger commissioned, Nilos Doxapatres' *The History of the Five Patriarchates* (see Chapter Two), which argued for the primacy of Constantinople in the Pentarchy. Indeed in Idrīsi's description of Constantinople, the capital of another of Roger's big rivals, Byzantium, there is no mention of the Patriarch based in that city, and we are not given any idea of the religious or cultural aspects of the city. This may suggest that in the *Book of Roger*, Roger is now firmly placing his loyalty in the Latin Christian camp as opposed to Greek orthodoxy.

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<sup>506</sup> Ibid., pp.751-752.

Indeed there were signs of Roger's contempt for the Byzantine emperor, exemplified by his navy's attack on Constantinople in 1149 and the strategic information found in Idrīsi's description of the city would perhaps prove useful if any future attacks were to take place:

The *medīna* of *Al-Q.ṣṭ.nṭia* (Constantinople) is in the shape of a triangle, two parts are on the sea and one part is on land. There is a golden gate and the length of the city is nine miles, it has a secure wall which is twenty one cubits in height...its thickness on the sea side is ten cubits and its thickness on the land side is also ten cubits. The gap between the wall and the sea is about fifty cubits. There are around one hundred doors and the biggest door is golden and it is heavy with iron and gold. You will not see a door so big in any territory of *Ar-Rum*. There is the palace of impressive construction, large and beautifully organised...<sup>507</sup>

As can be seen by the examples cited above, Idrīsi did not hesitate to discuss the people and culture of areas that Roger was in conflict with; for example, while the Sardinians are 'savage', the city of Rome is the most pious and Christian of cities. Roger does not show mercy to his enemies either, exemplified by Idrīsi's descriptions of the desperate state and harsh treatment of the some of the cities Roger's navy conquered, particularly in *Ifriqya*, Idrīsi's birthplace. In contrast to the description of Sicily, in the lands of Roger's enemies, people reappear, and there is a sense of the living and breathing quality to these places. Idrīsi's description of Rome is particularly vivid and gives a sense of the city's magnificence while at the same time showing great respect for the city as *the* centre of Christianity perhaps suggesting that Roger had by this point moved into the sphere of the Christian West.

In the final section of this chapter, I want to examine Idrīsi's treatment of the other parts of the Norman kingdom – namely Calabria, Apulia and Malta. Unlike the Sicily description,

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<sup>507</sup> Ibid., pp. 801-802.

highly detailed and associated closely with the figures of the two Rogers, the ‘other’ areas of Roger’s kingdom are treated very briefly and with a certain measure of detachment. This is a curious fact and one that is not easy to decipher; however, I suggest that Roger did not hold out great hopes that his sons would manage to hold onto to South Italy following his death and therefore Idrīsi was under orders to maintain focus on Sicily as a more secure stronghold for the Norman kingdom.

### **The ‘other’ Norman regions**

In contrast to the close association between the two Rogers and the island of Sicily, in describing other parts of the Norman kingdom, including Calabria and Malta, Idrīsi does not mention the men at all. In fact, Idrīsi’s descriptions of the other parts of the Norman kingdom are strikingly lacking in detail compared with the description of Sicily; and oddly in the descriptions of *Q.lūria* (Calabria) and *Būlia* (Apulia), places that Roger I was deeply involved in conquering, the Normans are entirely absent.<sup>508</sup>

The description of these regions begins in Part III of Climate IV, directly after the Sicily description. Idrīsi describes only the *mudun* of the region, cities such as *Rīu* (Reggio Calabria), *Ṭār.nt* (Taranto), *Adhr.nt* (Otranto) and *B.ndsa* (Brindisi), with distances of an average of seven miles apart. The author does not seem concerned with the categorisation of settlements as he was in Sicily and for each city there is little in the way of sustained description and little use of descriptive adjectives, rendering these descriptions rather flat.

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<sup>508</sup> There is evidence that Roger was interested in South Italy but from a military point of view rather than a geographic, the *Catalogus Baronum* was compiled under Roger’s orders around 1150 and was a register of military obligations in the duchy of Apulia, the principality of Capua and the Abruzzi region, see James Hill, ‘The Catalogus Baronum and the Recruitment and Administration of the Armies of the Norman Kingdom of Sicily: A Re-Examination’, *Historical Research*, Vol. 86, 231 (2013), pp. 1-14.

One exception is the *medīna* of *Tār.nt* (Taranto) which was important as the capital of the Principality of Apulia, conquered by Robert Guiscard for his son Bohemond I in 1088.<sup>509</sup> Idrīsi describes *Tār.nt* as ‘ancient’ (*azly*), with impressive buildings, and then goes on to provide the only strategic information found in the description of South Italy, about *Tār.nt*’s port:

There is a port on the western side of the city which faces the open sea and on the north-eastern side of the city there is a lake along with a bridge, from the bridge to the mouth of the port it is twelve miles; the bridge is located between the open sea and the lake. The length of the bridge goes from the mouth of the port of *Tār.nt* and moves in a southerly direction to the mainland and the distance is three hundred cubits and its width is fifteen cubits.<sup>510</sup>

The reason why Idrīsi provided this quite precise information about the port of Taranto is unclear although it is an unusual port with both an inner (the lake mentioned by Idrīsi) and outer harbour and this may have been of interest to him (figure 40).



Figure 40: Taranto’s Harbour  
Source: GoogleEarth

Idrīsi also provides a more sustained description of the city of Otranto (*Adhr.nt*). Like Taranto it is ‘ancient’ and ‘well-populated’ and strategically placed on the point of the strait that divides the *Baḥr ash-Sham* (the Mediterranean) and the *Baḥr al-Bunduqiyya* (the Adriatic).

<sup>509</sup> Donald Matthew, *The Norman Kingdom of Sicily*, p. 18.

<sup>510</sup> Idrīsi, *Opus Geographicum*, fasc. 5, pp. 630-631.

One aspect Idrīsi is keen to highlight in South Italy is the course of rivers. The author mentions a handful of rivers including the *Agry* (Cavone) and *Ibr.ṭna* (Bradano) rivers, still running in Basilicata and Apulia today.<sup>511</sup> As with the Sicily description, there seems a concern with fresh water sources although there is nowhere near the detail offered by Idrīsi regarding Sicily.

Idrīsi refers to people in South Italy on just two occasions: firstly, he states that *Ṣakhra S.k.n* (Pietro di Roseto) marks the border (*al-ḥudd*) between the Franks (*al-ifrinjiyeen*) and Lombards (*al-ankabradheen*) although the fact that these ‘Franks’ are Roger’s Norman relatives is not commented upon by Idrīsi.<sup>512</sup> Secondly the author states that the people of *B.ndsa* (Brindisi) are Lombards and that they were once subjects of Constantinople. Idrīsi appears unaware that the majority of the cities he mentions in his description of South Italy were part of the Byzantine Catepanate of Italy from the 9<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> centuries CE.<sup>513</sup>

Idrīsi concludes his description of Calabria and Apulia giving an overall summation:

The cities and famous fortresses that have been mentioned are all centres of diverse trade, very fertile, stable and secure. Most of these cities, nay, all of these cities are within the countries of *Q.lūria* (Calabria) and the countries of *Būlia* (Apulia)... *Q.lūria* and *Būlia* are called the ‘two lands’ and the area is spread out over many regions...<sup>514</sup>

In the case of two other significant Norman cities in South Italy - Naples and Amalfi - both conquered by the Normans, Idrīsi gives us minimal detail, in fact Amalfi does not even rate a description but is mentioned in terms of its distance from surrounding settlements. Naples

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<sup>511</sup> See Guglielmo Granacci, *Nuova Guida Ai Fiumi D'italia. Con Itinerari Per Canoisti E Navigatori Fluviali* (Milan: Longanesi, 1990).

<sup>512</sup> Graham A. Loud, ‘How ‘Norman’’, p. 15.

<sup>513</sup> See Vera Von Falkenhausen, *La dominazione Bizantina nell'Italia Meridionale dal IX all'XI Secolo* (Bari: Ecumenica Editrice, 1978).

<sup>514</sup> Idrīsi, *Opus Geographicum*, fasc. 7, pp.771-772.

was hard won by the Normans, not conquered until 1135 CE,<sup>515</sup> and the city's conquest marked a turning point in Roger II's ongoing struggle with the South Italian barons. Nevertheless, Idrīsi provides a minimal amount of detail on the *medina* but does comment that it is a mercantile centre:

Nābil [Naples] is a pleasant, ancient and prosperous city and its markets have abundant merchandise.<sup>516</sup>

So ends the rather perfunctory description of Norman South Italy and I argue that the lack of detail and detachment of Idrīsi's account was perhaps no accident. South Italy was always more precariously held by Roger (see Chapter One) and Idrīsi appears to be attributing less importance to this region than to Sicily.<sup>517</sup> In South Italy there is no mention of Roger I or Roger II, or the Normans generally and there is little concrete detail provided on the settlements of the region. On the other hand, Idrīsi's effusive and detailed description of Sicily is designed to associate the island very closely with the two Rogers and to provide as much detail as possible. As discussed above, there is an argument to be made that Roger perhaps did not hold out much hope in retaining Calabria and Apulia far into the future, and that he believed that the island of Sicily was to become the sole and central seat of his government. Given Roger's issues with the South Italian barons, the Papacy and the Holy Roman Empire outlined in Chapter One, this view was perspicacious.

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<sup>515</sup> See Alexander of Telese in Graham A. Loud, *Roger II and the Creation of the Kingdom of Sicily*, pp. 102-103.

<sup>516</sup> Idrīsi, *Opus Geographicum*, fasc. 7, pp 757.

<sup>517</sup> Jean-Charles Ducène's recent essay demonstrates that the 'Little Idrīsi', the geographical text produced by Idrīsi during the reign of William I (1154-1166), adds new information on Southern Italy, describing all the routes emanating from each locality; Ducène concludes that Idrīsi's description of South Italy in the 'Little Idrīsi' is therefore more 'systematic' than in the *Book of Roger*, see Jean-Charles Ducène, 'Routes in Southern Italy in the Geographical Works of al-Idrīsī' in *Journeying along Medieval Routes in Europe and the Middle East*, ed. by Alison L. Gascoigne et al (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), pp. 143-166.

This view is reinforced by Idrīsi's brief description of the island of Mālṭa (Malta), which had been conquered by Roger I in 1091 and was an important part of Roger II's kingdom, especially as a base of operations for attacks on North Africa.<sup>518</sup> Idrīsi writes:

*Mālṭa* is a big island, there is a safe port which opens to the east. There is a city. There are plenty of pastures, sheep, fruits and a great amount of honey. Between *Mālṭa* and the nearest point in Sicily called *Akr.na*<sup>519</sup> it is eighty miles, and there is no place after *Mālṭa* to east or west until you reach *Iqrīṭsh* [Crete].<sup>520</sup>

This lack of detail is startling - Idrīsi has not even provided the name of Malta's main *medīna*. Again, I reiterate that this dearth of strategic information may have been deliberate on Roger's part: at the end of his life, as the *Book of Roger* was being completed, the king may have been considering the future of the kingdom under the stewardship of his son, William I. I believe there is a case to be made that Roger did not hold much hope for William's ability to hold onto the Norman colonies in North Africa, including Malta. Idrīsi therefore focusses sharply and strategically on Sicily, a vast island that would be much more difficult for Roger's enemies to invade.

The close association of the two Rogers with Sicily is also important, providing a propagandist element to the book. Sicily is depicted as belonging completely to the two Rogers and the fact that Idrīsi does not mention the two men in association with other parts of the Norman kingdom reinforces this point. I argue that the Arabic-speaking audience who could access the book would be left in no doubt as to Roger's claim on the island.

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<sup>518</sup> D. A. Castillo, *The Maltese Cross: A Strategic History of Malta* (Westport: Praeger, 2006), p. 31.

<sup>519</sup> Idrīsi does not mention this place in his description of Sicily.

<sup>520</sup> Idrīsi, *Opus Geographicum*, fasc. 5, p. 588.

## Conclusion

While the description of Sicily found in the *Book of Roger* is rich in detail regarding strategic and economic features such as toponymy, distances, settlements, agriculture, water and trade, the text is markedly lacking in detail regarding the people and culture of the island. This is in stark contrast to other parts of the book where people and culture are greatly emphasised, not least in the areas of Roger's rivals, namely Zirid North Africa, the Byzantine East and the Papal States.

The only people closely associated with Sicily itself are the two Rogers whom Idrīsi depicts as the 'saviours' of the island from the 'tyrants' that ruled before them. This is again in contrast to the descriptions of the 'other' parts of the Norman kingdom, namely Calabria, Apulia and Malta where Roger and his father are not mentioned at all. The dearth of information provided on these places by Idrīsi strongly suggests that Roger anticipated that Sicily would ultimately become the primary base of a Norman state in the Mediterranean.

I argue that rather than being an oversight on Idrīsi's part, the omissions discussed above were entirely deliberate. Given the inter-cultural tensions that were developing in Sicily towards the end of Roger's life, Idrīsi's mandate appears to be not to concern himself with the diverse cultural realities of Sicily in the twelfth century, but rather to depict the island as a prosperous, fecund and impenetrable paradise, empty of people and the divisions that that inevitably brought about.

## Conclusion

The *Book of Roger* has traditionally been regarded by scholars as the project of an ageing king who was simply interested in knowledge for its own sake. This thesis has challenged this long-held view arguing that it greatly underestimates the *strategic* and *economic* value of Idrīsi's text, particularly in regards to the highly detailed description of the seat of Roger II's kingdom, the island of Sicily. The information regarding Sicily found in the *Book of Roger* was unprecedented and provided Roger with a comprehensive view of the state of his kingdom.

As mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis, the year 1139 was a turning point for Roger II as he was finally recognised as King of Sicily after many years of conflict with the Papacy and the barons of South Italy. With the aid of advisors such as George of Antioch, Roger began a comprehensive program of land reform, administered through the *Diwān Al-Taḥqīq Al-Ma'mur*, and staged attacks on Byzantine territory in the eastern Mediterranean and Zirid North Africa that were designed to expand the Norman kingdom and its economy. The year 1139 was also the point that Roger II commissioned Idrīsi to begin working on the *Book of Roger*. I have maintained that this timing was no accident but rather the *Book of Roger* was designed to provide the practical information needed to undertake the activities outlined above.

The sheer volume of information provided by Idrīsi on Sicily adds weight to this argument. I have argued that this information covers two main areas, the *strategic* and *economic*, although in reality these two aspects are not mutually exclusive and can be seen as two sides of the same political coin. The strategic information provided by Idrīsi covers toponomy, distances, settlement types and the ports of the island. The economic information covers agriculture, including mining and aquaculture, fresh water sources including rivers and their courses and finally trade and commerce.

Dealing firstly with the strategic information provided by Idrīsi, the author's description listed one hundred and fifty settlements around the island, including in the interior, an area traditionally overlooked in geographical descriptions of Sicily. The number of toponyms far surpassed any geographic description prior to the *Book of Roger*. Many of the toponyms provided are of Arabic derivation and in many cases Idrīsi's text is the only source we have for the existence of these places. Idrīsi also provided highly accurate distances around the island and it is clear that the author was greatly concerned with precision, as the majority of his distances correspond exactly with the modern distance. He also places his settlements around a day's journey apart, providing an easily navigable itinerary around the island.

Idrīsi provides great detail about the *type* of settlements found on the island and there is no doubt that this would have been very useful information for Roger in his program of land reform, providing the king with a clear picture of the types of settlements on the island. This data also presents a view of the hierarchy of settlements on the island with *mudun* placed at the top due to their importance as trading hubs, followed by *huṣūn* and *qalā'a* for their defensive importance and finally the open settlements, the *arḥul* and *manāzil* which were primarily agricultural centres.

Idrīsi provides a comprehensive list of ports and anchorages of the island, mentioning at least 112 places to drop anchor, each spaced at around six miles apart, a level of detail that was unparalleled in geographical accounts produced prior to the *Book of Roger*. A clear understanding of the ports of the island would no doubt have proved useful both for Roger's navy in their campaigns of foreign expansion but also from a defensive point of view, as these could be seen as 'weak spots' around Sicily's coast. A sound understanding of the ports of Sicily was also linked to the trade of agricultural products and commodities produced in the Kingdom, the cornerstone of the Sicilian economy.

Moving on to the economic information provided by Idrīsi, agriculture is highlighted although it must be said that Idrīsi is never overly specific about what kind of crops are being produced. However, there is no doubt that agriculture is a major concern of Idrīsi's and for every settlement he describes the quality of the agricultural land found there. Idrīsi closely links agriculture with water and for every settlement described in the *Book of Roger*, fresh water sources are mentioned. This included painstaking detail on the course of rivers particularly in the arid interior and this level of detail suggests that this information was to have a practical application in terms of agricultural production. Finally, trade and commerce are discussed at some length and Idrīsi mentions markets, export products including fruit, linen, tuna, iron and wood. The author links trade to shipping and devotes a substantial portion of his description to the quality of various ports and the traders who frequent them; he also mentions routes from the inland to the coast via river.

The fact that Idrīsi's descriptions of the 'other' Norman lands of Calabria, Apulia and Malta are so perfunctory adds weight to the argument that Roger was primarily concerned with Sicily, perhaps because he did not hold out much hope of retaining South Italy and Malta far into the future. It is clear from the attention given to Sicily, and Idrīsi's painstaking attention to detail, that Roger saw the island as the true centre of his kingdom. The fact that Idrīsi draws such a strong connection between Rogers I and II and the island also supports this view.

As has been demonstrated throughout this thesis, Idrīsi's data on Sicily was highly detailed and accurate but the author also was at pains to present the island as a 'harmonious' - read: culture-less paradise. The weakness of Idrīsi's account as a historical source is most definitely in the dearth of information on the population and cultures of the island but I have argued that these omissions may have in fact been deliberate - again reflecting the strategic purpose of the book - designed to downplay divisions just at a time when inter-confessional tensions were on the rise.

Through the in-depth analysis of Idrīsi's Sicily description undertaken in this thesis, the single most important thing I have come to realise is that the *Book of Roger* is no mere 'vanity project', as some scholars have suggested, commissioned by an ageing king keen to bequeath a prestigious artefact for posterity. Rather the book, and in particular the description of Sicily, represents a potent political document, designed to provide Roger II with accurate data on the state of his kingdom. This insight has come through a deep analysis of the Sicily description, including undertaking the English translation (Appendix I) which allowed me to engage with Idrīsi's text on a very intimate level, questioning his use of adjectives and teasing out the nomenclature of settlements in twelfth-century Sicily.

On a broader level, this thesis has argued that Roger's decision to commission the *Book of Roger* – presumably at the urging of a figure such as George of Antioch – was another example of the king's use of cultural appropriation as a weapon against his rivals. This cultural appropriation is a feature of empires: durable multi-ethnic societies, where difference and diversity are seen as assets and although I do not maintain that Roger was working to create an empire *per se*, there is no doubt that the king and his advisors considered the cultural diversity of Sicily to be an advantage. Roger recognised the value of the multicultural environment that existed in Sicily and did not seek to wipe it out; ;on the contrary, he co-opted the cultural forms of the Latin, Graeco-Byzantine and Islamic communities of his own lands and those of the larger Mediterranean and used them to create something unique in Sicily. This trend has been well-documented in scholarship on the material culture of Roger's kingdom, in particular regarding structures such as the *Cappella Palatina*; however, this thesis has argued that the output of original scholarship in foreign languages at the Norman court was equally important to Roger's state-building program. Given the time and attention Roger gave to the *Book of Roger*, at least according to the book's Preface, I would argue this is first amongst these works of scholarship, followed by Nilos Doxaptes' *History of the Five Patriarchates* and the *Madrid*

*Syklitzes*, both written in Greek. All three of these texts served a political purpose and were intended to be used as a weapon against Roger's rivals, in particular the Papacy, Holy Roman Empire and Byzantium.

This thesis has also highlighted Roger's use geography as a tool in state-building. As discussed in Chapter Three geography as a discipline has played an important role in the establishment of empires, serving to both explain the world but also to create it. The genesis of Arabic Routes and Kingdoms literature was brought about by similar conditions to those of Roger in Sicily – like Roger, the early Abbasids were foreigners in a complex, heterogeneous society where an urgent need existed to establish and legitimise their cultural and political authority. The field of geography was well-suited to this purpose, providing the practical tools to govern, namely accurate data on toponomy, settlements, distances etc. as well as presenting an Abbasid-centric world view at the point when when this world was in fact under threat from the advent of rival caliphates in Spain and Egypt. This thesis has argued that Roger II was engaged in a process very similar to the early Abbasids and cleverly recognised the value of the document known as the *Book of Roger* in 'creating' his kingdom.

Before ending this thesis a note on the fate of the *Book of Roger* after the death of Roger II in 1154 CE should be made. As Hugo Falcandus attested (see Chapter Seven), inter-confessional violence erupted in Palermo in 1160, some six years after Roger II's death, and the royal palace was sacked. Many Arabic documents were destroyed, the Palace Saracens massacred and many Muslims attacked in the streets outside the palace. Miraculously, the *Book of Roger* survived this brutal attack although there is no evidence of how this came about. What we do know is that copies of the book are largely traceable to North Africa including the *Bibliothèque Nationale's* MS Arabe 2221, the *Süleymaniye* Library in Istanbul's Ayasofya 3502 and Gugrafiya 705 and the Bodleian's MS Pococke 375 and MS Greaves 42, all copied between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. According to Sayyid Maqbul Ahmad by the

sixteenth century Idrīsi's work was mostly perpetuated by members of the Sharafī al-Sifaqsi family of Tunisia most of whom were born in the city of Sfax.<sup>521</sup> The family created their own maps using the *Book of Roger* as their model. Members of the family lived in Sfax, Kairouan and Cairo and so this may explain the incidence of manuscripts of the *Book of Roger* across North Africa. The only manuscript of the *Book of Roger* to be copied in Europe was MS Arabe 2222, which served as the basis of Jaubert and Amari's translations, copied at Coimbra, Portugal in 1344.<sup>522</sup>

I have no explanation for the appearance of the book in fourteenth-century Portugal but as far as the North African examples go, it seems clear that Sicilian Muslims, perhaps seeing the writing on the wall for Sicily's Muslim community, smuggled the *Book of Roger* out of Sicily and into North Africa. Through their actions an important cultural artefact, significant in Islamic, Norman, and I would argue, world history has been preserved.

The book did not fall into complete obscurity in Europe either. In 1592 an abridged version of the *Book of Roger* was published by the Medici Press (*Tipografia Medicea Orientale*) in Rome, one of the first secular works in Arabic to be published in Europe (figure 41).<sup>523</sup> The *Tipografia Medicea* was a publishing house dedicated to publishing Oriental scientific and religious works, especially in Arabic. This abridged version, which Michele Amari called a 'mutilation', was missing large sections of text, which had been cut 'apparently without any precise motive'.<sup>524</sup> Interestingly, within the Preface all mention of Roger II has been omitted – perhaps an attempt to downplay his importance in the creation of the work.<sup>525</sup>

<sup>521</sup> Sayyid Maqbul Ahmad, 'Geography of Sharif Idrīsi', p. 170.

<sup>522</sup> MS 2222 was acquired for the *Bibliothèque Nationale* in Istanbul in 1741. The last pages contain a chapter by the eleventh-century Persian polymath Al-Biruni, *Tarikh al-Hind* (A History of India). This information was kindly provided by the *Chargée des manuscrits arabes* at the *Bibliothèque Nationale*.

<sup>523</sup> See Alberto Tinto, *La Tipografia medicea orientale* (Lucca: M. Pacini Fazzi, 1987).

<sup>524</sup> 'Idrīsi' in *EI2*.

<sup>525</sup> Idrīsi, *De geographia vniuersali. Hortulus cultissimus, mire orbis regiones, prouincias, insulas, vrbes, earumque dimensiones & orizonta describens* (Romae: Typographia Medicea, 1592).

The work carried the Latin title *De Geographia Universali*, followed by the title in Arabic and the subtitle: *Hortulus cultissimus, mire orbis regiones, prouincias, insulas, vrbes, earumq. dimensiones & orizonta describens* ('Highly cultivated garden, wonderful regions of the world of the world, provinces, islands, cities, and describing their dimensions and horizon).

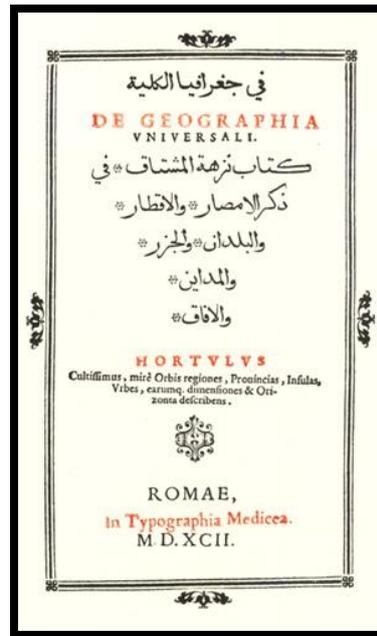


Figure 41: Cover of *De Geographia Universali*  
Source: Università degli Studi di Roma “La Sapienza”

The abridged Medici version of the book was later translated into Italian by a scholar and theologian named Bernadino Baldi around 1600, appropriately making Italian the first foreign language the *Book of Roger* was translated into.<sup>526</sup> Baldi was a renaissance man in the truest sense; born in Urbino, he first studied Latin and Greek before moving onto the University of Padua where he studied philosophy, Greek poetry and mathematics.<sup>527</sup> Baldi later worked at the *Scuola di Urbino* (Urbino School), an institution known for its ‘essential

<sup>526</sup> For information on Baldi’s early life and accomplishments, see Giovanni Ferraro, *Bernardino Baldi e il recupero del pensiero tecnico-scientifico dell’antichità* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell’Orso, 2008), pp. 7-12.

<sup>527</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

role' in the recovery of ancient science and for its 'assimilation and dissemination' of this science.<sup>528</sup> Baldi, like other scholars engaged in similar work in Italy at the time, was not simply a translator, but rather he 'partecipò attivamente a tale processo che fu di recupero e di restaurazione ma anche di analisi, di discussionee, di riformulazione, di adeguamento...' ('He participated actively in the process which sought to assimilate and restore [ancient science] but also to analyse, discuss, reformulate...[this science]'),<sup>529</sup> much as Muslim scholars had done at the *Bayt al-Ḥikma* in Baghdad in the late eighth century (see Chapter Three).

Finally a Latin version based on the Medici text was undertaken in Paris in 1619. The translators were two Maronites being named as Gabriel the Sionite, professor of Syriac and Arabic letters and royal interpreter, and Iohannes the Hesronite, a Maronite priest and royal interpreter in the same languages. This translation was entitled *Geographia Nubiensis*, as a mistranslation in the text attributed the work to a Nubian – in a passage dealing with Nubia, a river is mentioned as passing through 'our' countries as opposed 'those' countries.<sup>530</sup> This Latin translation proved useful for Arabists when used in conjunction with the Arabic text. However, as discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, the modern critical edition of the *Book of Roger - Opus Geographicum* - based on all extant manuscripts of the *Book of Roger* is now the gold standard version of the text and serves as the basis of my own translation (Appendix I).

As discussed in Chapter Seven, following Roger's death in 1154 the situation for Sicily's Muslim, and later Greek, communities deteriorated. Increasingly mosques were converted into churches, more Latin Christian monasteries were established and large-scale Lombard immigration was stepped up. There is evidence that wealthy Muslims were granted

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<sup>528</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>529</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>530</sup> 'Iḍrīsi' in *EI2*.

lands to convert to Christianity to Christianity, which they often accepted, and that poorer Muslims converted to avoid paying the religious poll tax, or *gizya*.<sup>531</sup> It is probable too that these poorer Muslims also converted to avoid harassment by the recent Lombard arrivals as violent, random attacks against Muslims steadily increased. Following the serious outbreaks of inter-confessional violence discussed above, there began a steady flow of Muslims out of Sicily, many settling in North Africa. Indeed another king of Sicily, Frederick II (1194-1250), who is credited as being as 'tolerant' as Roger, oversaw the forceful expulsion over two decades of the remaining Muslims of Sicily to Lucera, in Puglia, beginning in 1224.<sup>532</sup> By the end of the thirteenth century, most evidence of the former Muslim presence had disappeared and the Greek presence presence was soon to follow.

It is telling that this deterioration occurred after Roger's death and serves to demonstrate the importance of his personality in maintaining the multicultural character of island. Roger, unlike his successors, was a product of Sicily at a time when its identity was a blend of Latin, Greek and Muslim and he styled his rule accordingly. Unlike any other European leader of the time, he lived in close quarters with non-Christians, they were his friends and his colleagues, and he depended on and trusted them. Though to his European counterparts this appeared scandalous, it in fact gave him a unique advantage that came to fruition in the later part of his life. Europe, still hampered by its fear of the 'infidel', was at a particularly insular stage in its development, attempting to forge a dubious pan-European identity based on a reaction against non-Christians. Roger, on the other hand, was able to comprehend and to navigate the political and cultural realities of both East and West, and gain what was best from them. This confidence reached its apex from 1139 and continued to his death in 1154. This was the time

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<sup>531</sup> Another significant example of cultural appropriation under the Normans was their imposition of the religious poll tax (*gizya*), based on Islamic models, on non-Christians see Alex Metcalfe, *Muslims and Christians in Norman Sicily*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>532</sup> For more on the Muslim colony at Lucera see Julie Anne Taylor, *Muslims in Medieval Italy, The Colony at Lucera* (Lanham MD.: Lexington Books, 2003).

of his victory over the South Italian barons, his recognition from the Pope, his reform of the state administration and foreign conquests and, as has been demonstrated in this thesis, equal in historical significance amongst these, his decision to commission the *Book of Roger*.

The *Book of Roger* is a fascinating and complex source which is fundamental to the identity of the Kingdom of Sicily, but despite this the text has not been fully problematised by scholars. It is my hope that the research presented in this thesis be considered another part of an ongoing, robust and diverse scholarly conversation regarding this long-neglected and long-misunderstood text.

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## Appendix I: English Translation of Sicily Description

SICILY [Climate IV, Section II]

And what remains now is to describe the great island of Sicily. We will talk about its various regions, describe its localities, place by place, enumerate its glories and present its excellent qualities using in-depth research and with the aid of God most high.

And we say that Sicily is unique - the island is unparalleled in the beauty and remarkable qualities of its regions and inhabitants. From ancient times travellers have frequented the island, coming from far and wide. All these visitors agree on Sicily's superiority; they laud its worth, wonder at its splendour and pronounce its merits - the way the island combines within itself diverse attractions and all the bounties of the countries of the world. The dynasty of its kings is the most noble and their attacks against their various enemies are the most severe. Sicily's kings are the greatest of all kings, their greatness is terrible, their prestige is considerable, their loftiness is immeasurable and of the highest order.

It was in the year 453H [1061 CE] that most of the territory of Sicily was conquered, its tyrannical rulers and armies were vanquished by the greatest, the most gallant, the supreme, the most able, the honourable Roger son of Tancred,<sup>533</sup> the best of the kings of the Franks. Roger did not rest until he had sent scurrying the island's prefects and the armies of the tyrants, mounting raids against them day and night, ultimately casting at them all kinds of death and ruin. Razor-sharp blades and the deadly lance were used until total victory was achieved – he conquered the island place by place and occupied each port in turn and this all took place over a period of thirty years. Once Roger's will had been asserted and the stability of the throne ensured the path of justice was granted to the people of Sicily – he granted them the right to practise their religions and follow their laws; he ensured security in all things – the people's money, themselves, their families and children.

So Roger I lived out his days in this way until he could no longer put off the inevitable and while he was in *M.līto*<sup>534</sup> in *Q.lūria*<sup>535</sup> he died and was buried there in the year 494H [1100-1101 CE]. His son inherited the kingship after him, his namesake the great king Roger II. Roger II founded the state administration and embellished the magnificence of the realm, he brought honour to the sultanate, gave all matters their just share of his lucid perspective and good actions and through this disseminated justice, the establishment of security and worthiness to

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<sup>533</sup> Idrīsi writes *Tanqrīn*.

<sup>534</sup> Mileto.

<sup>535</sup> Calabria.

the kingdom. Owing to these actions, the various former rulers of these lands bent to Roger's will. They proclaimed their motto of allegiance to him, and followed him, handing the keys of their lands over to him. All sides came to be part of his kingdom and to come under his protection and mercy. His rule has only increased in prestige and nobility up to the point that we composed this book.

The afore-mentioned island of Sicily is of pre-eminent importance and its strengths are numerous, its regions are widespread and its virtues innumerable. We will attempt to list the island's virtues and mention region by region but, in the fulfilment of this honourable task, we will have to summarise and express succinctly the island's many excellent features, so we say that:

Sicily, at the time of writing this book, is ruled by the great king Roger and is made up of one hundred and thirty regions, excluding estates<sup>536</sup> and other localities. Firstly we need to describe the main coastal regions of the island, restricting ourselves to these parts until we are satisfied with their description and have returned from whence we began. Then we will examine what is in the centre of the island, from its regions, fortresses, its extensive tracts of land and prosperity,<sup>537</sup> from region to region and place to place, with the aid of God most High.

First is the city of *Balarm* which is the great and beautiful city, the pulpit which stands above all the countries of the world. It is the proudest and most noble city and has been the seat of kings from the present to bygone days. It is the point from which troops and armies have set off to invade and the point to which they have returned, just as they still do nowadays.

*Balarm* is situated on the coast, with the sea to the east and great, towering mountains encircle it. The city's coast sparkles with cheerful radiance. *Balarm* boasts magnificent buildings which travellers to the city wander around wondering at their excellence, their detailed features and the originality of their design.

*Balarm* is divided into two parts, firstly, there is the *Qaṣr*<sup>538</sup> area and next there are the suburbs.<sup>539</sup> The *Qaṣr* area contains the famous ancient castle renowned in each country and climatic zone; the area is made up of three districts. Within the first district are found fortified palaces, imposing and noble dwellings, as well as numerous mosques, inns, bath houses and many traders' shops. The other two districts also have gracious palaces and highly impressive

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<sup>536</sup> Idrīsi uses the plural ضياع (*ḍi'yā'a*) meaning 'estates', similar to *raḥl* and *manzil*. The author writes he is excluding these from his description: these *ḍi'yā'a* may have been lands belonging to the church of which Idrīsi makes no specific mention.

<sup>537</sup> العمل الواسع (*al-'aml al-wās'a*) lit. 'wide work', meaning 'prosperity'.

<sup>538</sup> It. *Cassaro*.

<sup>539</sup> Ar. *Rabaḍ*.

buildings as well as some bath houses and inns. The great mosque is to be found here; the mosque was once a Christian church and has returned to that creed. The building pleases in the quality of its production, its innovation and the originality of its paintings, its embellishments and its inscriptions.

The suburbs are another city altogether and they encircle the *Qaṣr* area on all sides. This area includes the old city which is called *Al-Khālṣa*<sup>540</sup> and this is where the Sultan once lived, particularly during the Islamic period. The port is in *Al-Khālṣa* as well as the arsenal where ships are constructed.

Waters surround and flow throughout the city of *Balarm* and its gushing springs burst forth. The city's fruits are abundant and its buildings and parks lovely. *Balarm* dazzles those who try to describe it, it mesmerises the minds of scholars; the sight of it, in short, seduces all those who see it.

The castle previously mentioned is one of the most indestructible fortresses; it is elevated and impervious to the damage wrought by warfare, it does not sustain even a scratch. At the top of the castle there is a fort recently added by the great king Roger and built using small pieces of mosaic and huge blocks of carved rock. The palace has been fortified in keeping with its artistic arrangement; its towers and bulwarks have been reinforced. The king's palaces and assembly halls have been perfected, and the magnificence of their construction and design, their unique details, are praised by foreigners and travellers who declare that there is no greater city in the world for the graciousness of its villas and palaces.

The suburbs surround the castle that we have previously mentioned; it is a large area with numerous dwellings, inns, bathhouses, shops and markets. There is a wall that surrounds the district with a moat and a trench. Within the district, there are many orchards, wondrous parks and running streams of fresh water which flow down from the surrounding mountains. Beyond the suburbs to the south there is the *ʿAbās* River and this is a perennially running river which services the mills which meet the needs of the city.

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<sup>540</sup> It. *Kalsa*.

In an easterly direction from the city, a day's journey away, is the fortress of *Th.rma* situated on a hillock overlooking the sea. This is one of the most exalted fortresses and its location is amongst the best. There is a wall that surrounds the fortress and there are original monuments and ancient buildings including a remarkably constructed amphitheatre which demonstrates the construction abilities of its creators. In addition there is also a new fortress and two bathhouses side by side, both exemplary, and built in the ancient style.

To the west of *Th.rma* is a settlement known as *At-Tarbī'a* and this is one of the most splendid places. There is running water, many mills and wide tracts of farmland. Pasta<sup>541</sup> is produced here which is exported to all parts of *Q.lūria*, as well as to the Muslim and Christian lands, many loads are carried away by ship.

Near here is the *As-S.lla* River, this river is large and has an abundance of water. In springtime, the fish known as *R.y*<sup>542</sup> is caught here and at the river's port the large fish known as tuna is fished.

About twelve miles away is the fortress of *Būrḡād* and this is an imposing structure with many surrounding buildings as well as a market and other facilities<sup>543</sup> as well as abundant water supplies. There are many mills, orchards, gardens, widespread estates and verdant areas of cultivation. The sea is two miles from *Būrḡād*.

From *Būrḡād* to *Ṣakhrat Al-Ḥadīd* it is twelve miles. This is a small estate and its fort sits atop the rock already mentioned. The rock descends precipitously towards the sea and there is a low stretch of sand on the other side. There are also verdant farms.

From *Ṣakhrat Al-Ḥadīd* to *Jaflūdi* it is an easy day's journey. The fortress of *Jaflūdi* is on the coast and markets, bathhouses and mills are found throughout it. In the centre of the city there is a fresh water spring that gushes forth and the inhabitants of the castle drink this water which is sweetly cool. *Jaflūdi* is built on rocks on the edge of the sea and there is a good port which is visited by ships from every region. This is a well-populated<sup>544</sup> area and there is a fort overlooking the top of an imposing mountain is which hardly ever surmounted due to the difficulty of the ascent.

<sup>541</sup> الاطرية (*al-iṭriyya*) also 'vermicelli', see *Al-Mawrid Dictionary*, p. 123.

<sup>542</sup> Sardine or pilchard, see J.G Hava, *Al-Farā'id Arabic-English Dictionary*, p. 235.

<sup>543</sup> مرافق (*marāfiq*) a rather vague word I have chosen to translate as 'facilities', giving the impression the settlement has everything a traveller may need.

<sup>544</sup> معمور (*ma'mūr*) inhabited, populated, populous, see *Al-Mawrid Dictionary*, p. 1074. Idrīsi uses this word quite often when describing the island but is never specific about who these people are.

From here to the fortress of *T. z'a* it is an easy day's journey and this is an ancient, impregnable fortress. Attached to the fortress is a village and both the fortress and village are situated at the top of an isolated mountain. It is very hard to reach the village and you need to traverse rough terrain and the way is not clear. The land surrounding *T. z'a* has highly fertile soil,<sup>545</sup> a wide arrangement of plots, excellent for farming and other uses. It is about two miles from the sea.

From *T. z'a* to the fortress of *Qal'at Al-Qawārib*<sup>546</sup> it is twelve miles. This is an elevated and very old castle, constructed in ancient times and there is a village that encircles the castle. Its farms are verdant, its crops abundant and water copious. There is a well-frequented port where loads are carried away and ships dock. Between the castle and the port there is a distance of about a mile and a half.

From *Qal'at Al-Qawārib* to *Al-Qārūnyya* there is twelve miles to travel. *Al-Qārūnyya* is the first town in the province of *D.m.nsh.*<sup>547</sup> It is a very ancient settlement but it has a new fort. The settlement has gardens, rivers, vineyards, trees and a port on the coast; from the port a net is used to catch a great amount of tuna. Between the fortress and the sea there is distance of about a mile.

From *Al-Qārūnyya* to *Shant Markū* it is ten miles and this is a great fortress with ancient artefacts. The town has many buildings, markets and bathhouses and all kinds of fruit. There is a plain, a large amount of cultivatable land and plenty of water. Violets are planted all around the town and their scent perfumes the air. There is also a lot of silk here and its coast is good; boats are built there using wood from the surrounding mountains.

From *Shant Markū* to the fortress *Nāṣū* it is ten miles, it is elevated and its territory vast. The area is prosperous and its rivers are gushing, it has gardens and streams. There are crops and mills. Its coast is delightful and its fort is in a pleasant position. Between *Nāṣū* and the coast there is a distance of two miles.

From there to *B.qt.sh* there is a distance of twelve miles, this is an impregnable fortress and its territory is expansive. It has abundant farms, charming dwellings, flowing water, many

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<sup>545</sup> به ارض تربة طيبة (*bihi arḍ tarba ṭayyiba*) lit. its land has good soil.

<sup>546</sup> Lit. Fortress of the Boats.

<sup>547</sup> Ancient name for *Val Demone*, see Michele Amari, *Storia dei musulmani di Sicilia*, I, pp. 467-468.

gardens and sublime countryside. This settlement overlooks the sea and is a mile distant from it.

From here to *L.bīri* it is three miles. This is a delightful estate with a stately and imposing fort situated on the coast. Within the settlement there is a market, bathhouse, houses, vineyards and running water. There are crops and mills and there is also a good port where a lot of tuna is caught.

From here to the castle of *Mīlāṣ* it is twelve miles and this is a large fortress situated at the edge of the sea. The beauty of its aspect, its buildings, its supreme countryside and its impregnable fort make it one of the best places of all, the most beautiful and most elegant. *Mīlāṣ* resembles a great metropolis in terms of its buildings, its commerce and markets, its commodities<sup>548</sup> and convenience. *Mīlāṣ* is on the coast and the seas surrounds the town on all sides (except the northern side). Travellers come here by land or sea, *Mīlāṣ* exports very good quality linen there are also excellent crops, gushing water sources and a great amount of tuna fishing. From *Mīlāṣ* to *Masīnā* it is an easy day's journey.

The city of *Masīnā* is at the eastern corner of the island and mountains surround the city on the western side. Its coast is delightful and its land fertile;<sup>549</sup> there are many gardens and orchards with abundant fruits, there are gushing rivers with numerous mills upon them. It is indeed one of the most splendid places, the most prosperous,<sup>550</sup> and travel to and from the city is carried on assiduously. The arsenal and the main dock for all the maritime states of *Ar-Rūm* are here; this dock is the gathering point of huge ships as well as travellers and traders from the countries of the Christians and Muslims. The visitors to this port are from every corner of the world, its markets are splendid and their merchandise is in high demand. In the mountains there is an iron mine and iron is exported to the surrounding countries. The port is one of the great wonders, spoken about throughout the world; the biggest ships have to dock on the beach and are there unloaded by hand. Located at *Masīnā* are the straits which take you to *Q.lūria*, this stretch of sea is difficult especially when the wind drives against the sea's current. When the

<sup>548</sup> Idrīsi uses the word *muwād* which can mean 'matter, materials, stuff or commodities', see *Al-Mawrid Dictionary*, p. 936.

<sup>549</sup> أرضها طيبة المنابت (*arḍ-ha tayyiba al-munābit*) lit. 'its land is good for growing plants'.

<sup>550</sup> وأكثرها عمارة (*wa akthar-ha a'māra*). This expression literally means 'it has a lot of buildings' but means that the settlement is 'prosperous'. Amari, Rizzitano and Bresc and Nef concur with this translation though Jaubert translates this as 'it has a lot of buildings', see Luigi Santagati, *La Sicilia di Al-Idrīsi ne «Il libro di Ruggero»*, pp. 48-49.

sea enters the straits from both sides at the same time, nothing could save you from disaster save the grace of Allah most high. At its widest point the straits are ten miles in width and at its narrowest, three miles

From *Masīnā* along the coast to *Ṭabramīn* it is a day's journey. *Ṭabramīn* is an impregnable fortress located at a precipitous and lofty position. It is one of the main ancient fortresses of the island and one of the most revered ancient sites. *Ṭabramīn* is on a mountain overlooking the sea, there is a good port which receives visitors from all over and many crops are carried away from this port. There are dwellings, markets and it is the meeting point of caravans and companies before they proceed to *Masīnā*. There are charming estates and fertile agricultural fields.<sup>551</sup> There is a gold mine and the famous mountain *At-Ṭūr*<sup>552</sup> known in verses as being a place of worship. There are rushing rivers, many mills and a small number of gardens. There is a river over which there is an amazing bridge and its construction hints at the skills of its builders and the ability of the Sultan who commissioned it. There is also an amphitheatre which is one of the oldest amphitheatres of *Ar-Rūm* and which attests to the sublime qualities of the king who built it and the greatness of his abilities. There is a gold mine. From here to *Liyāj* it is one day's journey.

*Liyāj* is a settlement on the seaside and it is an old settlement. It has a market, a plain and good-quality farms; the heat means that crops are harvested here before anywhere else on the island. Pitch, pine tar and wood as well as many other products are exported from *Liyāj*.

To the west of *Liyāj* is also the mountain known as *Jabel An-Nār*.<sup>553</sup>

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<sup>551</sup> مزارع طيبة (*mazār 'a ṭayyiba*) lit. 'good fields'; I have chosen to translate this as 'fertile agricultural fields' as Idrīsi is talking about the quality of the fields and their soil.

<sup>552</sup> Idrīsi could be referring to Monte Tauro which overlooks the Greco-Roman theatre in Taormina, see Luigi Santagati, *La Sicilia di Al-Idrīsi ne «Il libro di Ruggero»*, p. 52, note 34.

<sup>553</sup> Lit. the Mountain of Fire (Mount Etna).

From *Liyāj* to the city of *Qaṭāniyya* there is a distance of six miles. This is a beautiful region, known as the ‘region of the elephant’; it is a prestigious place. *Qaṭāniyya* is on the coast and there are bustling markets, splendid dwellings, mosques both large and small, bathhouses, houses and caravanserais.<sup>554</sup> There is a good port which is visited from far and wide and all manner of merchandise is carried away. There are many markets and gardens and *Qaṭāniyya*’s water supply comes from its gushing rivers and springs. *Qaṭāniyya*’s river is a marvel and presents a curious phenomenon – in some years it floods dramatically and mills are concentrated along its banks; in other years, the river completely dries up and you cannot even find enough water for a drink. *Qaṭāniyya*’s territory is vast and the city walls are impenetrable. The elephant for which the town is famous is a stone talisman. In the past it was erected on top of a building outside the city gates but now it has been brought into the city and has been erected on the church of the monks.

To the west of *Qaṭāniyya* is the *Mūsa* River, the great river which flows into the sea. There are many fish throughout the river of extreme size and excellent taste.

The cities of *Ṭabramīn*, *Liyāj* and *Qaṭāniyya* lie at the eastern foot of Jabel An-Nār (which we have already mentioned).

From *Qaṭāniyya* to the fortress of *L.ntīni* it is a day’s journey. *L.ntīni* is a strong fortress and has markets much like a city. *L.ntīni* is six miles from the sea; it is located on the bank of a river which it takes its name. Boats travel up the river with their goods and lower their sails right into the settlement on the eastern side. To the west of *L.ntīni* the countryside is vast and the territory is widely spread out. In *L.ntīni*’s stream there is a great variety of excellent fish which are exported far and wide. In *L.ntīni* there are bustling markets, inns and a large population<sup>555</sup> and from *L.ntīni* to *S.rqūsa* it is a very long day’s journey.

*S.rqūsa* is one of the most famous cities and draws people to it from all civilisations and tribes; merchants come to the city from all regions. The city is on the coast and the sea encircles it from every direction; to come into or leave *S.rqūsa* you must enter through a single door on the northern side of the city. *S.rqūsa*’s praises have been so widely sung it seems unnecessary to describe the famous locale and well-known stronghold any further.

<sup>554</sup> Idrīsi uses the word *khānāt* (sing. *khān*).

<sup>555</sup> *بشر كثير* (*bashr kithīr*) lit. ‘many people’.

In *S.rqūsa* there are two ports the like of which cannot be found elsewhere in the world. One is larger than the other and this one is to the south, the other one is more famous and is to the north. The fountain of *An-N.būdi*<sup>556</sup> stems from a cliff on the edge of the sea and this is a wondrous place. In *S.rqūsa* you find the following, which all rival the best of the world: widespread markets, caravanserais, houses, bathhouses, spectacular buildings and vast squares. *S.rqūsa* has a vast territory, fertile farms and estates. Ships load up with food and other products to export to all countries and regions; the city has gardens which produce fruit beyond all limits. From *S.rqūsa* to *Nūṭ.s* it is a day's journey.

*Nūṭ.s* is one of the most secure fortresses and one of the noblest cities. Its territory is vast and it has many excellent facilities; it has lovely, well-ordered markets and meticulously constructed dwellings. Its rivers are freely flowing, gushing with water. There are many mills and the city is eight miles from the sea. *Nūṭ.s* has well-positioned with widespread lands. It is an ancient fortress. From *Nūṭ.s* to the sea it is eight miles.<sup>557</sup>

Between *Nūṭ.s* and the sea is the estate *Qasbāri*, it is a vast territory with fertile farms.

From *Nūṭ.s* to the eastern edge of the island it is one day's journey. This area is completely deserted and the corner section is called *Marsa Al-Bawāliṣ*.<sup>558</sup>

From *Nūṭ.s* travelling along the coast you reach *Shakla*, it is a fortress atop a mountain, one of the greatest fortresses in one of the best positions. It is about three miles from the sea. It is a noble place, prosperous and civilised. There are markets with goods that come from all over the world. *Shakla* is blessed with abundant opportunity and its gardens produce every type of fruit. People travel by sea to reach *Shakla* from every part of *Q.lūria*, *Ifriqya* and *Mālṭa*<sup>559</sup> as well as other places. Its farms are the best farms, its crops amongst the best and its conditions perfect, its territory vast; there is a gushing river with many mills. There is the spring called 'Ain Al-Awqāt'<sup>560</sup> which demonstrates a strange phenomenon: the spring produces water in the hour of prayers and ceases at other times.

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<sup>556</sup> It. *Fonte Aretusa*, a natural fountain found in Ortygia, see Luigi Santagati, *La Sicilia di Al-Idrīsi ne «Il libro di Ruggero»*, p. 60, note 49.

<sup>557</sup> It is not clear why Idrīsi repeats the distance between *Nūṭ.s* and the sea.

<sup>558</sup> *Lit.* the Port of Al-Bawāliṣ now *Porto di Ulisse*, see Luigi Santagati, *La Sicilia di Al-Idrīsi ne «Il libro di Ruggero»*, p. 64, note 55.

<sup>559</sup> Malta.

<sup>560</sup> *Lit.* the Spring of Hours.

From Sh.kla to *Raghūṣ* it is thirteen miles. This is an impregnable and ancient fortress with an old civilisation. Rivers encircle the town and there are many mills, delightful buildings, and vast squares. There is a fertile plain, wide-ranging and well-suited to growing crops. Between *Raghūṣ* and the sea there is a distance of seven miles. *Raghūṣ*'s river (which takes its name) flows past the eastern side of the town, at the mouth of the river on the sea there is a good port where boats come to load and unload. There is a market in *Raghūṣ* where people from far and wide come to trade. Between *Raghūṣ* and *Buthayra* it is two day's easy journey – it forty-five miles between the two places.

*Buthayra* is an impregnable and elevated fortress, renowned as one of the best rural regions. Its level of civilisation is like that of a large city, its buildings are beautifully constructed, its dwellings wondrous, its markets large and of the best standard. There are mosques for the Friday prayer, a bathhouse and shops. One of the greatest rivers encircles the town and there are gardens on every side with many excellent fruits and many wondrous blessings<sup>561</sup>. Between the town and the sea there is a distance of about seven miles. Between *Buthayra* and *Linbiyādha* it is one day's journey and it is a distance of twenty-five miles.

*Linbiyādha* is a fortress on top of a rock and the sea and river surround it. You cannot enter the place except for one gate at the northern end. There is a port at which boats arrive, taking away loads of merchandise. *Linbiyādha* is well-populated and has a market, its lands are vast and it has fertile farms. The mouth of its river at the sea is called the *Al-Wādi Al-Milḥ*<sup>562</sup> and within its waters there are many plump, tasty fish that are delicious to eat. From *Linbiyādha* to *Karakant* it is one day's journey, it is twenty-five miles.

*Karakant* is one of the most civilised cities, it is bustling with people who come and go. Its fort is supreme and impregnable and it is an ancient settlement famous in all countries. It is one of the most secure fortresses and one of the most glorious territories. Ships from all regions congregate here and the city's buildings are amongst the most splendid of all buildings, they captivate the beholder. There are markets with all manner of goods to trade and buy; there are gorgeous gardens where many types of fruit are available. The city's ancient monuments attest to its grand past. The great ships that come to *Karakant* to collect produce for export must be

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<sup>561</sup> خيرات كثيرة (*khīrāt kithīra*) lit. 'many good things'; I have chosen 'blessings' as a more elegant translation.

<sup>562</sup> Lit. the Salt River.

loaded over only a few days and can barely contain all that is available. There are gardens and famous crops and the city is three miles from the sea. From *Karakant* to *Ash-Shāqa* it is one day's journey along the coast and the distance is twenty-five miles.

*Ash-Shāqa* is a settlement situated on the coast; its position is open and elevated and it has markets and dwellings. At this time, this place is the capital of the regions and populations that surround it. Its port is never too busy and the ships that travel here from *Ifriqya* and *Aṭrābls*<sup>563</sup> are never in great numbers. The territory of *Ash-Shāqa* is the same as that of *Qal'at Al-Balūṭ*.

*Qal'at Al-Balūṭ* is an impregnable fortress, it is in a lofty position and hard to reach. Its surrounding plains are fertile, its farms wondrously good and there are unusual types of fruits. There are springs and rivers with many mills upon them. In the past there were many people in the town but now most of them have gone to *Ash-Shāqa*; there are only a few men remaining who serve to defend the town. It is twelve miles from here to the sea and it is nine miles to *Ash-Shāqa*. From here to *Karakant* it is a long day's journey and from here to *Māzar* it is two day's light journey. Between here and *Māzar* along the coast is a large estate known as *Al-Aṣnām*.<sup>564</sup> *Māzar* is an exalted city and there is no place in all the countries to rival it in terms of the magnificence of its position and the level of its organisation and construction. It has fortified city walls that are very high, excellent houses, a wide alley, streets, bustling markets with many types of products, charming bathhouses, widespread shops and fertile orchards and gardens. *Māzar* is frequented from far and wide by merchants who take away an abundance of goods for export. Its territory is wide and includes many houses and farms. Along *Māzar*'s city walls runs a river known as the *Magnūn River*<sup>565</sup>, boats travel along this river to load up with goods. From *Māzar* to *Marsa 'Ali*<sup>566</sup> there is a distance of eighteen miles.

*Marsa 'Ali* was an ancient city, one of the most noble of Sicily but it was destroyed and abandoned. Count Roger I ordered that a strong city wall be erected which brought back the population, markets and the collection of taxes. *Marsa 'Ali* has a vast territory. People from *Ifriqya* travel here a lot. *Marsa 'Ali*'s population drinks from fresh water wells that can be

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<sup>563</sup> Tripoli.

<sup>564</sup> *Lit.* the Idols, probably in reference to the Temple of Hera at Selinunte.

<sup>565</sup> *Lit.* the Crazy River.

<sup>566</sup> *Lit.* the Port of 'Ali.

accessed from their houses and from springs that surround the city *Marsa 'Ali* has inns, bathhouses, orchards and verdant farms. From *Marsa 'Ali* to *Ṭarābansh* it is a day's journey, the distance is twenty-three miles.

*Ṭarābansh* is an ancient city situated on the coast and the sea surrounds the town from every direction. You reach the city via a bridge at the eastern city gate and the city's port is in the south of the city. It is a quiet port without much activity; most boats spend the winter at the port as it is safe with calms waves during the upheavals of the sea. Fish of the finest quality is caught here and the large fish known as tuna is also caught with big nets; there is magnificent coral in its seas and at the gate of the city are salt marshes. The territory of *Ṭarābansh* is vast on and is one of the most abundant areas for cultivating crops; *Ṭarābansh* has large markets and abundant sustenance. Near to *Ṭarābansh* are the islands of *Ar-Rāhib*, *Al-Yābisa* and *M.līṭma*; each of these islands has a port, wells and wood. People travel to *Ṭarābansh* in winter due to the quality of its port and the mildness of its sea and air at this time.

From *Ṭarābansh* to *Jabel Ḥāmid* it is about ten miles. This is a huge, imposing mountain easy to defend due to the difficulty of ascending it. At the top of the mountain there is level land good for agriculture, with plenty of water and there is a fort without guards looking over it. From here to *Al-Ḥamma*<sup>567</sup> it is a distance of twenty miles.

*Al-Ḥamma* is a towering, impregnable fortress, well-known as one of the finest fortresses. The sea is about three miles to its north. There is a port which has a fort built upon it known as *Al-Madārij*.<sup>568</sup> Boats come and go from the port and tuna is fished using nets. This fortress was named *Al-Ḥamma* because of a hot spring that shoots out of a cliff nearby. People bathe in this spring and its waters are of a moderate heat. There are rivers nearby which have mills and orchards, gardens, buildings and parks as well as lots of fruit. There are vast tracts of land and excellent farms for growing crops. From here to *Ṭarābansh* it is an easy day's journey.

From *Al-Ḥamma* to *Qal'at Awbī* it is ten miles. This is a strong fortress and a vast area of countryside and the land is good for the cultivation of crops, this is an area with many benefits.<sup>569</sup> Between here and the sea there is a distance of about four miles; there is a port and

<sup>567</sup> *Lit.* the Hot Spring.

<sup>568</sup> *Lit.* the Stairs.

<sup>569</sup> كثير المنافع (*kithīr al-manāfa*) *lit.* 'many benefits' or 'advantages', here Idrīsi is talking about the

boats come to load up with a great amount of food including different types of grains. There is a mine where two types of millstones are cut – the water stone and the *al-fārsīa*.<sup>570</sup> From *Al-Ḥamma* to here it is ten miles and from here to *Barṭanīq* it is twelve miles.

*Barṭanīq* is a beautiful region, with a pleasing aspect. There are thriving farms<sup>571</sup> where much cotton is cultivated as well as henna. Water is plentiful and there are many mills. The fortress which is called *Barṭanīq* is in an area called *Al-J.bān*<sup>572</sup> overlooking the town. There is a port about two miles north of the city called *Ar-R.kn*.

From *Barṭanīq* to *Shins* \_\_\_\_\_.<sup>573</sup> *Shins* is a vast estate, situated on the flank of a mountain that overlooks it. It has a wide tract of land, well-suited for growing crops, with excellent pastures and many fruits. The sea is to the north about four or so miles away.

From *Shins* to *Qarnīsh* it is eight miles. This is a beautiful and pleasant region which is very secure. There are many types of fruits here and there is a large market as well as other features of civilised places such as markets, bathhouses and large dwellings. The area produces a lot of almonds, dried figs and carob. Large and small boats load up with these goods, taking them away to a variety of places. Water is plentiful, available all over the town, the bulk of it flowing through to the city's gardens. There is a new fort that sits on a hill overlooking the countryside. The sea is to the north, about a mile away, between here and the great city known as *Balarm* it is twelve miles.

These are the thirty-five regions of note on the coast and together with these there are the interior settlements. The interior settlements are numerous and are made up of fortresses and other settlements. We will mention all these, fortress by fortress, inshallah.

Firstly, we will begin with the area between outside the *Madīna*<sup>574</sup> to *Qaṣryānī* in the middle of the island. From the *Madīna* to *Manzil Al-Amīr* to the east there is a distance of six

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agricultural land and position of the settlement.

<sup>570</sup> *Lit.* the Persian.

<sup>571</sup> رباغ زكية (*rabā' zakky*) 'thriving farms'. *Zakky* in this context means 'thriving', see J.G Hava, *Al-Farā'id Arabic-English Dictionary*, pp. 292-293.

<sup>572</sup> *Lit.* the Cemetary/Graveyard.

<sup>573</sup> Distance missing from all MSS.

<sup>574</sup> Palermo.

miles. *Manzil Al-Amīr* is an imposing and impregnable fortress. It has plenty of water, land and farmland. From there to *Al-Khazzān* it is six miles, this is a fortress on top of a mountain, it is one of the most beautiful fortresses, situated in one of the best spots. It has buildings and mills. From *Al-Khazzān* the river called *Wādi Al-Amīr* rises, then descending along ditches and meeting up with the waters of *Qajāna*. The river continues to the north of *Qajāna*. Between *Qajāna* and *Jifla* it is nine miles. The river arrives below *Marnāw* and continues to the right of *Marnāw* and between *Marnāw* and *Qajāna* there is a distance of one and a half miles. The river then flows below *Manzil Al-Amīr* and continues along its northern side and between *Manzil Al-Amīr* and the river there is a distance of one mile. Between *Marnāw* and *Manzil Al-Amīr* there is a distance of six miles and from there to the sea it is one ‘big’ mile. From *Al-Khazzān* to *Jifla* it is half a day’s journey – it is about ten miles. And like this, from the *Manzil Al-Amīr* to *Jifla* it is about the same distance and it is a day’s journey.

*Jifla* is a pleasant region, a vast territory with estates and houses. Its waters are plentiful emanating from many streams. Its farmland and the confines of the region are vast. From *Al-Khazzān* to *Bīqwā* it is fifteen miles.

*Bīqwā* is an elevated fortress, very well fortified. There is flowing water and lots of arable land, it is one mile from here to the *As-S.lla* River which descends into *Th.rma*. *Th.rma* has continuous farmland; it is an abundant area with a vast territory. From *Bīqwā* to *Bithrāna* it is nine miles.

*Bithrāna* is an impregnable fortress. Surrounding it are farms and crops. Its lands connect with those of *Bīqwā*, mentioned previously.

From *Al-Khazzān* to *Jāṭwā* it is about fifteen miles. The fortress of *Jāṭwā* is elevated – a good position for its protection. It is the epitome of fertility and has a vast territory. There is an underground prison and those who displease the king go there. There is no running water and there is no river nearby.

From *Jāṭwā* to *Ṭarzī* it is nine miles. It is an impressive fortress; it has been well-fortified since ancient times. It has farmland and the northern border of its lands connects with *Jāṭwā* and in the south with the castle of *Qurliyyūn* and between the two there is a distance of

about eight miles. Between *Qurliyūn* and *Qal'at At-Ṭarīq*<sup>575</sup> to the north it is nine Arabic miles and this is three Frankish miles.<sup>576</sup>

*Qurliyūn* is an impregnable fortress, very well-fortified. It has a series of connected buildings and a river runs through it which is named after the town. From *Qurliyūn* to *Rāya* it is eight Arabic miles and between *Qurliyūn* and *Jāṭwā* it is five Frankish miles. Between *Qurliyūn* and *Barzwā* to the east it is ten miles.

*Barzwā* is a strong fortress, well-fortified. It has an inhabited village and running water. It has springs and is surrounded by vast, bounteous farms. From *Barzwā* to *Qaṣr Nūbū* it is about eighteen miles and from *Qaṣr Nūbū* to *Qurliyūn* it is twenty miles. *Qaṣr Nūbū* is a pleasant place; its area has much to recommend it and has farmland, crops and running water. From *Qaṣr Nūbū* to the west to *Rāya* it is about ten miles and from *Barzwā* to *Rāya* ten miles. From *Qurliyūn* to *Rāya* it is eight miles. *Barzwā* is in the north, *Qaṣr Nūbū* is in the east, *Qurliyūn* is in the west and *Rāya* is in the south.

*Rāya* is a noble estate, of excellent quality, there is rich and bounteous farmland.

The *As-S.lla* River – the river of *Th.rma* – emerges at the foot of this mountain called *Rāya* on the western side. The river encircles the mountain then runs in a northerly direction where it meets the waters of *Barzwā* to the east. Between *Barzwā* and the river there is a distance of three miles. The river then reaches the *Marghana* estate in the north and between *Marghana* and the river it is one mile. Between *Barzwā* and *Marghana* it is four miles. Then the river runs under *Bīqwā* on the right-hand side, and it is one mile between *Bīqwā* and the river. Between *Marghana* and *Bīqwā* it is three miles.

Here the *As-S.lla* River meets the *Rīghnū* River, its course begins at the *Z.rāra* mountain at a place called *Al-Ghudrān*,<sup>577</sup> then the water meets with those on the right side of Manzil Yūsuf. The river then flows into the river under *Bīqwā*. The combined waters then flow to the right of *Bithrāna* and between here and the river it is three miles. Between *Bīqwā* and *Bithrāna* it is nine miles. Then the river goes to the right of *Al-Abrajā* and between there and the river it is three miles. Between *Al-Abrajā* and *Bithrāna* it is two miles. The river then flows to the right

<sup>575</sup> *Lit.* the Fortress of the Way/Road.

<sup>576</sup> First mention of 'Frankish miles' as opposed to 'Arabic miles'.

<sup>577</sup> *Lit.* the Swamps.

of *Qaqbash* and between here and the river it is two miles. Between *Al-Abrajā* and *Qaqbash* it is one mile. The river flows to the right of *Th.rma* and between *Qaqbash* and *Th.rma* it is ten miles, at this point the river flows into the sea. Between *Jifla* – which we have already mentioned - and *Khāṣwā* it is two Frankish miles. Between *Khāṣwā* and *Bīqwā* it is two Frankish miles.

*Khāṣwā* is an estate with many farms and bounteous varieties of grains and crops.

From *Qurliyyūn* to *B.ṭ.lāri* in the south it is four Frankish miles. *B.ṭ.lāri* is an ancient fortress, constructed long ago, mountains surround it and there is lots of running water. From *B.ṭ.lāri* to *Qal'at Al-Balūṭ* – which we previously mentioned – it is ten miles and from this fortress to *Ash-Shāqa* it is four Frankish miles, this is twelve Arabic miles.

From *Ṭarzī* to *Rahl Al-Mar'a*<sup>578</sup> it is eighteen Arabic miles. This estate is well-populated, with vast farmlands; it is fertile and produces dairy products and butter. From *Rahl Al-Mar'a* to *Bithrāna* it is one day's easy journey, it is about eighteen miles. To the west of *Rahl Al-Mar'a*, along the *Māzar* road, is *As-Ṣanam*<sup>579</sup> after nine Arabic miles.

*As-Ṣanam* is a large estate comprising many people. It has a fortress which towers over it. There are rows of trees, it is surrounded by orchards and water is plentiful. From *As-Ṣanam* to *Māzar* it is about seven Frankish miles, we have already mentioned *Māzar* for it is a big city. Between *Māzar* and *Al-Aṣnām* it is three Frankish miles.

We return now to *Qaṣr Nūbū* (which we have already mentioned), from which the *Iblāṭnū* River rises, gushing with water. The river then flows to *Qamrāṭa*, then to *Iblāṭnū*, and then to the sea. From *Qaṣr Nūbū* to *Qamrāṭa* it is ten miles. From *Qamrāṭa* to *Iblāṭnū* it is thirty miles, one day's journey. *Qamrāṭa* is a large estate, with a wide expanse of farmland with many crops. It has an elevated fortress which is well-fortified. There are orchards, gardens, fruits and general blessings.

The fortress of *Iblāṭnū* sits in an imposing position, its fortress is splendid and rises upward. Between *Iblāṭnū* and the sea it is about six miles.

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<sup>578</sup> *Lit.* the Estate of the Woman.

<sup>579</sup> *Lit.* the Idol.

Returning back to the fortress of *Jāṭwā* (which we have already mentioned) to *Qal‘at Awbī* it is five Frankish miles. From *Qal‘at Awbī* to *‘Alqama* it is one and a half Arabic miles.

*‘Alqama* is a large estate, there are farms and it is fertile. It has a permanent market with artisans and industry. *Mīrjā* is one mile northward.

*Mīrjā* is a small, strong fortress. There is a village, houses and it is fertile in places. From here to the fortress *Al-Ḥamma* it is one Frankish mile. We have already mentioned *Al-Ḥamma*. From *Al-Ḥamma* to *Al-Madārij* it is two Frankish miles.

The fortress of *Al-Madārij* is the most secure of all castles in terms of construction and position; it has a trench encircling it which is cut into the mountain. You gain access to the fortress by crossing a wooden bridge, which can be drawn up or down whenever it is desired. There are orchards and vineyards, and various fruits. There is a narrow port. From *Al-Madārij* to *Qal‘at Awbī* it is three Frankish miles, we have mentioned this place previously. From *Qal‘at Awbī* to *Barṭanīq* it is three Frankish miles, we have already mentioned *Barṭanīq*. From *Barṭanīq* to *Jāṭwā* it is eighteen miles and we already mentioned this place too.

Returning now, we say that from *Al-Ḥamma* to *Qal‘at Fīmī* it is about eight miles.

*Qal‘at Fīmī* is an ancient fortress, still in good condition. It has a village, wooded fields<sup>580</sup>; its water is not abundant. From *Qal‘at Fīmī* to *As-Ṣanam* it is twelve miles, we have mentioned this place. From *As-Ṣanam* to *Raḥl Al-Qā‘id*<sup>581</sup> it is ten miles. Accordingly from *Raḥl Al-Qā‘id* to *Al-Aṣnām* which is on the sea it is ten miles. The *Ṭūṭ* River rises from *Jabel Hajar As-Ṣanam* and passes *As-Ṣanam* on the western side then flows to the sea, coming out near *Māzar*.

We’ll return now and say that from *Māzar* to *Qaṣr Ibn Mankūd* it is fifteen miles. From *Qaṣr Ibn Mankūd* to *Balaja* it is four miles to the north-east. From *Balaja* to *Manzil S.ndī* to the north-east it is fifteen miles, from *Manzil S.ndī* to *Qaṣr Ibn Mankūd* it is six miles. From

<sup>580</sup> حروث مشاجر (*ḥarūth mushājer*) lit. ‘tree-ed fields’.

<sup>581</sup> Lit. the Estate of the Leader/Commander.

*Manzil S.ndī* to *Raḥl Al-Armal*<sup>582</sup> it is nine miles north-west. From *Manzil S.ndī* to *Qal'at Mūrū* it is nine miles and from here to *B.ṭ.lāri* it is six miles to the east.

*Qaṣr Ibn Mankūd* is a vast and remote estate. It has gardens and farmland surrounding it on all sides. It has a rock that protects it.

*Balaja* is a strong fortress, impregnable and well-protected. Mountains surround it on all sides and its fort protects it. There are trees surrounding it and a small amount of farmland. The *Al-Qārib* River is nearby. This river begins north of *Qurliyyūn* in the mountains that surround the town to the north. The river then flows eastward and then turns westward arriving on the western side of *Manzil S.ndī*, the river then flows between the mountains in a southerly direction and to the east of *Balaja*. The river continues southward, coming out at the sea near *Al-Aṣnām*. The course of this river from its beginning to its end at the sea is fifty miles and from this river to the *Salmūn* River<sup>583</sup> it is five miles and it is a river that comes from a small mountain. From the *Salmūn* River to *Ash-Shāqa* it is twelve miles and from *Ash-Shāqa* to *Iblāṭnū* it is seventeen miles.

*Iblāṭnū* is a noble place, well-fortified. There is farmland, crops and many bounties; there are many orchards and trees. It has both settled and itinerant people. The *Iblāṭnū* River flows along its eastern side.

From *Iblāṭnū* to *Ghardhūṭa* to the east \_\_\_\_\_,<sup>584</sup> this is a substantial settlement. There are many orchards and trees and excellent farmland. From *Ghardhūṭa* to *Suṭayr* you go north \_\_\_\_\_;<sup>585</sup> mountains surround *Suṭayr* from all sides, it is well-populated and frequented by travellers. It is nine miles between these two places. From *Manzil Suṭayr* to *Hiṣn Qamrāṭa* (which we have already mentioned) it is eighteen miles to the north.

*Karkant* to *Al-Minshār* to the north east is eighteen miles. This is a fortress on the top of a precipitous mountain. It is inhabited by settled people, there is a lot of farmland and it is very fertile. From here to *Al-Qiṭā'* to the south it is ten miles.

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<sup>582</sup> *Lit.* the Estate of the Widower.

<sup>583</sup> *Lit.* the Salmon River.

<sup>584</sup> Distance missing from all MSS.

<sup>585</sup> Distance missing from all MSS.

*Al-Qiṭā'* is an elevated settlement, situated on a mountain. There are crops, and lots of farmland and it is abundantly fertile. All benefits and advantages are combined. From *Al-Qiṭā'* to *Karkant* it is twelve miles to the west and from *Al-Qiṭā'* to *Iblāṭnū* it is twenty miles to the north. From *Karkant* to *Nārḡā* it is twelve miles, this is to the east. *Nārḡā* is a lovely estate; there are busy markets with active industry, there is a market on a recognised 'market day'. There are continuous tracts of farmland, one connected to the other, as well as much produce. From *Nārḡā* to *Al-Qiṭā'* in the north it is ten miles. From *Nārḡā* to *As-Sābūqa* in the east it is twelve miles, it is the same direction to *Al-Qiṭā'*. From *Al-Minshār* to *As-Sābūqa* it is eleven miles in a south-easterly direction.

*As-Sābūqa* is an elevated fortress and it is well-populated.<sup>586</sup> There is farmland and different types of crops, its blessings are infinite. From *As-Sābūqa* to *Qal'at An-Nisā'*<sup>587</sup> it is twelve miles along the *Karkant* road. From *Nārḡā* to *Qal'at An-Nisā'* to the north-east it is twenty-one miles.

*Qal'at An-Nisā'* is a well-built fortress overlooking a continuous series of buildings. It has excellent facilities, crops, trees and fruits and the *Al-Milḡ* River flows nearby to the east. From *Qal'at An-Nisā'* to *Qaṣryānī* it is eighteen miles. This is a city at the top of a mountain and it is one of the most impregnable castles. Its territory is vast and its buildings numerous; there are charming, well-ordered markets, and houses of excellent construction. There are manufactured goods as well as trade. It has a wide surrounding territory and its farms are fertile, its crops plentiful. The air is cool and the facilities of the town replenish those who pass through it. In summary, this is one of the most secure regions that God has created, both for its situation and the solid quality of its construction. Along with its impregnability, and despite its mountainous position, there is farmland and running water. It has a superb castle, in an imposing position and it is not possible to overcome or defeat it. Eighteen miles north from *Qaṣryānī* is *Maḡkān*. From *Maḡkān* to *Qaṣr* \_\_\_\_\_<sup>588</sup> it is twenty-five miles south-east and from *Maḡkān* to *Suṭayr* to the west it is twenty-five miles. From *Suṭayr* to *Karkant* it is thirty-six miles, this is a long day's journey. Going from *Suṭayr* to *Ghardhūta*, which we have already mentioned, then to *Al-Minshār*, then *Al-Qiṭā'* and then *Karkant* \_\_\_\_\_.<sup>589</sup> From *Suṭayr* to *Qaṣr Nūbū* to the north it is twenty-four miles, we have already mentioned these fortresses previously in this book. From *Karkant* to *Qarqūdhī* to the east it is eighteen miles and from *Qarqūdhī* to *Nārḡā* it is twenty-four miles, from *Nārḡā* to *Karkant* it is twelve miles and from *Nārḡā* to *Qal'at An-Nisā'* twenty-one miles and from *Qal'at An-Nisā'* to *Qarqūdhī* to the south it is twenty-five miles.

*Qarqūdhī* is a lovely region atop one of the most inaccessible mountains. It has fertile land and agriculture.<sup>590</sup>

Near to *Qarqūdhī* on its eastern side is the *Al-Milḥ* River. The source of this river runs from *Shu 'arā' Nizār* which is above *Jifla* and between there and *Jifla* it is one and a half miles. The river continues south in front of *Jifla* and between here and the river it is one mile. The river then passes by *Al-Ḥamma*, then from there goes just to the right of a estate called *Ḥ.rāqa*, and between here and the River it is 'a stone's throw' and between here and *Al-Ḥamma* it is six miles. Up to this point the river's water is sweet, then it flows until it reaches the territory of *Maḥkān*, flowing to its right, but before this the river flows through a swamp and its water becomes salty. The river then continues on to the west of the territory of *Qaṣryānī* and then to the east of *Qal 'at An-Nisā'* for around five miles, then goes two miles east to *Al-Ḥajjar Al-Mathqūb*.<sup>591</sup> The river then flows to the east of *Qarqūdhī*, which we mentioned previously, and between there and the river it is about nine miles. Then the river branches off to the west and flows near to *Linbiyādha*, then southward, flowing into the sea at a very short distance from *Linbiyādha*.

From *Qarqūdhī* to *Buthayra* to the south it is twelve miles through the mountains, if you don't go through the mountains it is twenty-four miles; we mentioned *Buthayra* previously. From *Buthayra* to *Linbiyādha* it is nineteen miles, we mentioned *Linbiyādha* previously as one of the coastal cities. Between *Buthayra* and *Sh.lyāṭa* it is twelve miles to the north-east. *Sh.lyāṭa* is an estate on a level piece of land. Its rivers are gushing, its farmland is fertile, its bounties are plentiful and it has a large amount of crops. The *Al-'Asil* River<sup>592</sup> flows in the western part of *Sh.lyāṭa's* territory and between *Sh.lyāṭa* and *Iblāṭsa* northward it is ten miles. The *Al-'Asil* River rises from *Iblāṭsa*.

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<sup>590</sup> زراعات (*zarā'āt*) agriculture; farming; husbandry; growing; raising, see *Al-Mawrid Dictionary*, p. 204. I have chosen 'agriculture' as the correct translation as this is closest Idrīsi's meaning.

<sup>591</sup> *Lit.* the Pierced Stone.

<sup>592</sup> *Lit.* the Honey River.

*Iblāṭsa* is a secure fortress with surrounding territory, its farmland is bounteous.<sup>593</sup> There is a famous market here, many crops, trees and fruits. From here to *Qarqūdhī* to the west it is around fifteen miles. From *Iblāṭsa* to *Al-Ḥajjar Al-Mathqūb* it is about the same distance, *Al-Ḥajjar Al-Mathqūb* is a strong fortress, its territory is vast, it is well-populated and there are copious amounts of water. From *Al-Ḥajjar Al-Mathqūb* to *Qaṣryānī* it is about twelve miles, from *Al-Ḥajjar Al-Mathqūb* to *Sh.lyāṭa* it is twenty-five miles and between *Al-Ḥajjar Al-Mathqūb* and *Qal‘at An-Nisā’* to the north-west it is seven miles. Between *Sh.lyāṭa* and *Ḥiṣn Al-Janūb* which is called *Qal‘at Al-Khinzāriyya*<sup>594</sup> it is ten miles, this is a strong fortress on the side of a forbidding mountain. Its excellent territory is vast and farmland plentiful and widespread, there is lots of honey here. Between here and *R.ghūṣ* it is twenty-five miles.

*R.ghūṣ* is a pleasant estate, well-constructed, elevated and very secure. It is on a river which is its namesake, between here and the sea it is twelve miles. *Shakla* is twelve miles to the east. Between *Shakla* and *Mūdhiqa* it is eight miles and from *R.ghūṣ* to *Mūdhiqa* it is five miles to the north.

*Mūdhiqa* is located between impenetrable mountains; it is a bounteous place with plentiful crops. Between *Mūdhiqa* and *Qal‘at Abī Shāma*<sup>595</sup> to the north it is sixteen miles, between *Abī Shāma* [sic] and *R.ghūṣ* it is fifteen miles to the south and between *Qal‘at Abī Shāma* and *L.ntīni* it is twenty-four miles.

*Qal‘at Abī Shāma* is a fortress, it is dependable as a place of refuge and it is surrounded by woods; both the *Al-Arwā* and *B.ntārgha* Rivers start in its mountains. The *B.ntārgha* River goes to *Sarqūsa* and the *Al-Arwā* goes to the sea via the southern corner of the island. Between *L.ntīni* and *Bizīni* it is twenty-five miles south-west, from *R.ghūṣ* to *Bizīni* it is twenty miles, between *Sh.lyāṭa* and *Bizīni* there are twenty-five miles. *Bizīni* is at the foot of a mountain; its farmland is of good quality. Two rivers rise from its mountains – they come out separately and then join together at some distance from *Bizīni* progressing through the mountains, through the forest to the sea; this river is called the *Ikrīlū*. Between *Bizīni* and *Abī Shāma* there are fifteen miles. Between *Abī Shāma* and *Nūṭ.s* it is thirty miles and between *Nūṭ.s* and the sea in the direction of *Mālṭa* it is twenty miles. Between *Nūṭ.s* and *B.ntārgha* it is nineteen miles.

<sup>593</sup> Idrīsi describes the settlement of *Iblāṭsa* twice.

<sup>594</sup> *Lit.* the Fortress of the Pigs (or Boars).

<sup>595</sup> *Lit.* the Fortress of Abi Shāma.

*B.ntārgha* is surrounded by *Sarqūsa*'s mountains. The river that is its namesake starts in the area of *Qal'at Abī Shāma*. Between *B.ntārgha* and *Sarqūsa* to the east it is nineteen miles and between *B.ntārgha* and *L.ntīni* it is twelve miles west. Between *B.ntārgha* and *Qal'at Mīnāu* to the south-west it is twenty-four miles. *Mīnāu* is a pleasant fortress situated in the mountains of *Bizīni* and it is the source of many springs. There is plenty of farmland, fruits and dairy products, and the land has good soil. Between *Mīnāu* and *Bizīni* it is fourteen miles southward. From *Mīnāu* and *Qal'at Al-Khinzāriyya* it is ten miles to the west and from *Mīnāu* to *Qal'at Al-Fār*<sup>596</sup> it is three miles to the north. Between *Mīnāu* and *Manzil Abī Khalīl*<sup>597</sup> it is nine miles. *Manzil Abī Khalīl* is prosperous, its farmland is continuous and there is a mountain to the south where the *Būkrīṭ* River begins. Between *Manzil Abī Khalīl* and *Qal'at Al-Khinzāriyya* it is nine miles to the south and between *Manzil Abī Khalīl* and *Qaşryānī* it is twenty-four miles. *Mīnāu* is eighteen miles east along the mountain road.

*Bukayr* is an estate situated on a plain. It is a well-populated place with a good yield of crops and an abundance of fruit. To the west, *Bukayr* connects to the pine forest known as *Al-B.nīṭ*. From *Bukayr* to *L.ntīni* to the north it is twenty miles and from *Bukayr* to *Abī Shāma* to the south it is seven miles, the two territories are contiguous.

From *Qaşryānī* to *Iblāṭsa* to the south it is twenty miles.<sup>598</sup> *Iblāṭsa* is a fortress between *Qal'at Al-Khinzāriyya* and *Qal'at Al-Ḥajjar Al-Mathqūb*, between *Iblāṭsa* and *Al-Ḥajjar Al-Mathqūb* it is fourteen miles. Between *Iblāṭsa* and *Sh.lyāṭa* to the south it is twelve miles and between *Manzil Abī Khalīl* and *Bātirnū* it is twenty miles. Between *Abī Shāma* and *Balansūl* it is two miles. Between *Balansūl* and *Qīrī* it is twenty-two miles. From *Iblāṭsa* to *Aydhūnī* it is nine miles to the north. The *R.nb.lu* River begins at *Aydhūnī* and then flows eastward where it meets the *Būkrīṭ* River that we mentioned earlier. The two rivers then flow into the *At-Ṭīn* River eight miles from where the two rivers first met. Moving towards the sea, the Rivers combine with the *Mūsa* River, becoming one and flowing into the sea.

Between *Aydhūnī* and *Qaşryānī* it is fifteen miles north-west. From *Aydhūnī* to *Manzil Abī Khalīl* it is around ten miles and from *Qaşryānī* to the north to *Ṭābis* it is ten miles. *Ṭābis* is a splendid and elevated fortress. There are farms and water. The *At-Ṭīn* River begins here and flows to the east until it meets the *Mūsa* River near the sea. From *Ṭābis* to *Jūdhiqa* it is twelve miles to the east and from *Aydhūnī* to *Jūdhiqa* it is also twelve miles, northward.

*Jūdhiqa* is a large estate with a great number of people. Its farmland is extensive and there are many useful crops. From *Jūdhiqa* to *Malja' Khalīl* [*Manzil Abī Khalīl*] to the south it is thirteen miles and from *Ṭābis* to the north to *Shant Fīlib* it is eleven miles and from here to *Shantūrīb* it is fifteen miles. *Shantūrīb* is a lovely place with many advantages and its crops are wide-spread. It is well-populated in all directions and its lands stretch far and wide. It is east of *Shant Fīlib*. *Shant Fīlib* is one of the loveliest and most noble places; it has amongst the largest amount of crops and abundance of any place. Between *Shantūrīb* and *Adhr.nū* it is thirteen miles northward. Above *Adhr.nū*, the *Ṭ.rjīns*, *J.rāmi* and *Al-Qīsī* Rivers (and other smaller rivers) meet.

*Adhr.nū* is a lovely estate; it is like a small city, located on a high rocky point. There is a market and a bathhouse and a good fortress, there is plenty of water and it is situated on the southern foot of *Jabel An-Nār*.

From *Adhr.nū* at the foot of the mountain to *Bātirnū* it is six miles.

*Bātirnū* is an impenetrable fortress, its facilities are numerous. There are fruits, grapevines and gardens; it is a lovely fort overlooking its territories. Between here and *Nasṭāsyā* it is seven miles south-east. Between *Nasṭāsyā* and the sea it is twelve miles and between *Nasṭāsyā* and *L.nṭīni* to the south it is nineteen miles and between *Nasṭāsyā* and the *Mūsa* River it is two and a half miles

The *Mūsa* river comes from four sources. The first of these is the *Jirāmi* river which starts in the mountains of *Al-Qīsī*; the second source also comes from these mountains and its gardens. The *Jirāmi* river flows between the two mountains for two and a half miles, returning to its original course and combining with the second river before proceeding on to *Jirāmi*; between the confluence of the two rivers and *Jirāmi* it is about six miles. The river passes below *Jirāmi* and its mills (on its eastern side) and between *Jirāmi* and the river there is one mile. Between the confluence of the two rivers and *Ḥajar Sārlū* it is eight miles. Located here is *An-Nīqishīn* river and between the *An-Nīqishīn* and the *Jirāmi* it is one big mile. From here the now united river descends altogether to *Shant Fīlib* and *Gh.lyāniyya* and continues to the east of *Gh.lyāniyya* and between the river and here it is one and a half miles. The river passes *Shant Fīlib* on its western side and between here and the river it is half a mile. Then the river descends to *Int.r N.stīri* between *Adhr.nū* and *Shantūrīb*, it passes *Adhr.nū* on its eastern side and between here and the river it is one mile, the river passes *Shantūrīb* on its western side and the distance between the two is one and a half miles. The river then meets the *Mūsa* river at the aforementioned place combining with the river that descends from *Ṭ.rgīn.s* as well as the *Y.lya* and *Inbla* rivers.

From *Ṭ.rgīn.s* to the confluence of the aforementioned rivers it is eight miles, from *Y.lya* to this point it is four miles and from *Inbla* to this point it is five miles. The rivers then combine and become one, descending to *Al-J.rṭa*<sup>599</sup> and continuing to *Bātirnū* and *Sh.nt Nasṭāsyā* in the east and between *Bātirnū* and the river it is half a mile. The river continues along between *Sh.nt Nasṭāsyā* and the *Mūsa* River for two miles. Finally, all the rivers come together – the *Mūsa*, *At-Ṭīn*, *R.nb.lu* and *Karīṭ* near the sea then flow into it.

We will return now and say that from *Bīqwā* to *Bithrāna* it is nine miles and from *Bithrāna* to *S.qīfīyya* it is five miles. From *S.qīfīyya* to *Qal'at Abī Thūr*<sup>600</sup> to the east it is six miles. *Qal'at Abī Thūr* is an impenetrable fortress; it is well-populated and has good farmland and many crops.

From *Qal'at Abī Thūr* to *Būlis* in the south it is five miles. *Būlis* is high up on a peak and is one of the most beautiful spots. It has fertile farmland. From *Būlis* to *B.ṭr.liyya* to the east it is six miles.

*B.ṭr.liyya* is a noble fortress, very secure, it has widespread farmland and its products are numerous. There is a market and a fort; the market is like markets in big cities. From *B.ṭr.liyya* to *M.qāra* it is eight miles, it is a populated fortress with many houses, plentiful farmland and facilities.

From here to *Isbr.l.kna* it is ten miles to the south, this is a large estate. Everything is good here whether it be land or agriculture and its lands are widespread. From *Isbr.l.kna* to *Qamrāta* it is twenty-three miles, we have already mentioned *Qamrāta*. From *Isbr.l.kna* to *An-Nīqishīn* to the east it is twelve miles.

*An-Nīqishīn* is one of the greatest of all fortresses. It has a village and farmland all around it. From *An-Nīqishīn* to *Ṭarajīns* it is twelve miles north-east. *Ṭarajīns* is a fortress much like a city; it is surrounded by farms and buildings. From *Ṭarajīns* westward to *Jirāmi* it is eight miles. *Jirāmi* is an estate at an elevated position on a rock. It is well-populated and its farmland is fertile and there is plenty of fresh water. From *Jirāmi* to *Qīsī* it is nine miles northward.

*Qīsī* is fortress of robust structure. It has many vineyards and a profusion of excellent attributes, from *Qīsī* to *Jārās* it is fifteen miles westward. *Jārās* has an abundance of fruits and its farmland is excellent. It has a sizeable village and it is well-populated. *Jārās* is situated between towering mountains and a succession of peaks. Between *Jārās* and *B.ṭr.liyya* it is about ten miles and between *Jārās* and *Ruqqa Bāsīlī*<sup>601</sup> northward it is nine miles. *Ruqqa Bāsīlī* is a lovely place, its agricultural lands are verdant.

From *Ruqqa Bāsīlī* to *Al-Ḥimār*<sup>602</sup> \_\_\_\_\_<sup>603</sup>, *Al-Ḥimār* is an estate at the top of a mountain ten miles westward. From *Jārās* to *Al-Ḥimār* it is thirteen miles and from *Al-Ḥimār* to *Būlis* it is six miles south-west.

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<sup>601</sup> *Lit.* Basil's Rock/Fortress.

<sup>602</sup> *Lit.* The Donkey.

<sup>603</sup> Distance missing from all MSS.

From *Al-Ḥimār* to *Qal'at As-Ṣirāṭ*<sup>604</sup> it is nine miles westward, this is a fortress located at an elevated position, there is plenty of water and farmland; there is a splendid mountain overlooking the place. Its original fort was very strong, the last word in impenetrability; however, it fell into disrepair and livestock wandered through its ruins. The great king Roger had it demolished and erected the fort that is there now. From *Qal'at As-Ṣirāṭ* to *Jaflūdi* on the sea it is eight miles. Between the two is *Q.rṭr.sh*, this is a small fortress with many advantages. From *Qal'at As-Ṣirāṭ* to coastal *Th.rma* it is fifteen miles westward and one mile to the north. From *Ruqqa Bāsīlī* to *Ṭ.z'a* which we mentioned before it is ten miles to the north.

We will return now and say that from *Ṭarzī* to *Minyāj* it is twenty miles. The latter is known as *Ghīrān Ad-Daqīq*,<sup>605</sup> this is a well-populated village on a level piece of land, there is a market and commerce, this is a fertile place, its blessings are extensive. *Minyāj* is located at the northern corner of the mountain called *Jabel An-Nār* and between the two it is nearly five miles. It is located on a river which is about three miles distant and here there are excellent mills. From *Minyāj* to *Adhr.nū* (along the road that runs beside the *Mūsa* River) it is twenty miles, we mentioned *Adhr.nū* before. From *Minyāj* eastward to *Ar-Randaj* it is ten miles. *Ar-Randaj* is at the bottom of the mountain previously mentioned. This is a village resembling a small city, its market bustles with traders and artisans. There is a great amount of wood here which is exported far and wide. From *Ar-Randaj* to *Qaṣṭalūn* it is twenty miles and between the two there is a fortress resembling an estate called *Al-Madd*.

*Ḥiṣn Qaṣṭalūn* is elevated and has many facilities. It is well-populated and has markets where you can buy and sell. From here to the village of *Maṣqala* \_\_\_\_.<sup>606</sup> *Maṣqala* is located on the side of the mountains that faces the sea, this village is well-populated and at the top of a tall mountain, water flows through the middle of it. From here to *Ṭabramīn* on the coast it is six miles. Between the two is *Al-Bārid* River<sup>607</sup> which comes out from the tall mountains to the west of *Minyāj*, flowing eastward continuously until it reaches the sea; the full course of this river is eighty miles.

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<sup>604</sup> *Lit.* the Fortress of the Road.

<sup>605</sup> *Lit.* the Caves of Flour.

<sup>606</sup> Distance missing from all MSS.

<sup>607</sup> *Lit.* the Cold River.

From *Ar-Randaj* to *Munt Albān* it is twenty miles. This is a fortress located between imposing mountains, difficult to scale. There is no place to rival it in terms of its livestock, honey and other bounties. From *Munt Albān* to *M.nj.ba* \_\_\_\_\_.<sup>608</sup> From here to *Ghalāṭ* to the west it is ten miles. This is an impregnable fortress between imposing mountains, it is well-populated, there is farmland, livestock and a great amount of flax is cultivated using irrigation. From here to the church of *Sh.nt Mārku*<sup>609</sup> it is seven miles north-west. From *Shant Mārku* to *Fīlādint* it is five miles and from here to *Al-Qārūniyya* it is fourteen miles. *Al-Qārūniyya* is a fortress on top of a mountain, overlooking the sea. From this place tuna is fished, there are vineyards and buildings. From here to *Qal'at Al-Qawārib* it is nine miles. Between *Qal'at Al-Qawārib* and the sea it is two miles. From *Qal'at Al-Qawārib* to the port of *Ṭ.z'a* is seven miles and from *Ṭ.z'a* to *Jaflūdi* it is twelve miles.

We'll return now and say that from *Masīnā* to *Qal'at Ramṭa* it is nine miles. From *Qal'at Ramṭa* to *Munt D.fr.t* it is four miles southward. From here to *Mīlāṣ* it is fifteen miles northward and from *Munt D.fr.t* to *Mīq.sh* southward it is fifteen miles and this place is between *Masīnā* and *Ṭabramīn* and it is a difficult road.

From *Lūghārī* to *B.rbl.s* it is fifteen miles north-west and *Munt D.fr.t* to *B.rbl.s* it is twenty miles westward.

*B.rbl.s* is a well-built fortress with wide squares, its people make a good living. From *B.rbl.s* to *Al-Madd* it is five miles southward. From *B.rbl.s* to *Munt Albān* it is twelve miles and like this from *Munt Albān* to *Al-Madd* it is ten miles.

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<sup>608</sup> Distance missing from all MSS.

<sup>609</sup> Idrīsi describes *Shant Mārku* as a *qal'a* in the coastal itinerary and as a *kanīsa* (church) in the interior.

Here Sicily has been described and there is no island in the sea that has a greater number of regions or which can rival it in terms of its civilised settlements. All that remains is to list the island's ports, port to port, and distances between them, both in miles and day's journey, with the aid of God most high. So we say: From *Balarm* to *B.rqa* along the beach it is five miles. From *B.rqa* to *Marsa Aḡ-Ṭīn* it is five miles and from here to *Ghāla* it is two miles. From *Ghāla* to *Al-Jazīra* it is four miles. From there to *Marsa Qarnīsh* it is six miles. From there to *Al-Q.rṭīl* which is below *J.nsh* it is three miles. From here to *Sāqiyyat J.nsh*<sup>610</sup> it is three miles and from there to *Al-Q.rṭīl* which is between it and *Barṭanīq* it is three miles and from the beach that is below *Barṭanīq* it is one and a half miles. From there to *Qal'at Awbī* River it is five miles and from there to the *Al-Madārij* River it is a quarter mile. From *Al-Madārij* to *Jabel Shant Bīṭū* it is twelve miles. From *Jabel Shant Bīṭū* to *Ṭarābansh* it is twenty-five miles and from *Ṭarābansh* to *Marsa 'Ali* it is twenty-five miles. From there to *Ar-Rās* which is between *Marsa 'Ali* and *Māzar* it is twelve miles, from *Māzar* to *Rās Al-B.lāṭ* it is six miles and from there to *'Ayūn 'Abās*<sup>611</sup> it is six miles. From *'Ayūn 'Abās* to *Al-Aṣnām* it is four miles and from there to *Tarsat Abi Thūr*<sup>612</sup> it is six miles. From *Tarsat Abi Thūr* to the *Al-Qārib* River it is six miles and from there to *Anf An-Nasr*<sup>613</sup> it is six miles.

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<sup>610</sup> *Sāqiyya* can mean 'rivulet; irrigation ditch or canal; waterwheel', it is not clear which one Idrīsi intends, see *Al-Mawrid Dictionary*, p. 619.

<sup>611</sup> *Lit.* 'Abās's Springs.

<sup>612</sup> *Lit.* Abi Thūr's Anchorage.

<sup>613</sup> *Lit.* the Nose of the Eagle. *Anf* also means 'point', making this 'Eagle Point', see J.G Hava, *Al-Farā'id Arabic-English Dictionary*, p. 15.

From *Anf An-Nasr* to *Ash-Shāqa* it is six miles and from there to the *Albu* River it is eight miles. From the *Albu* River to the mouth of the *Iblāṭnu* River it is nine miles. From the mouth of the *Iblāṭnu* River to *Tarsat ‘Abād*<sup>614</sup> it is six miles. From *Tarsat ‘Abād* to *Al-Ukhtīn*<sup>615</sup> it is nine miles, from there to *Karkant* it is nine miles, from *Karkant* to the *Al-Z.kūji* River it is three miles. From there to *Hajr Ibn Al-F.ta* it is nine miles and from there to *B.sw.rīyya* it is eighteen miles. From *B.sw.rīyya* to *Al-Milāḥa*<sup>616</sup> it is three miles from here to *Linbiyādha* it is three miles. From *Linbiyādha* to the *Al-Milḥ* River it is one mile and from the *Al-Milḥ* River to *Marsa Ash-Shulūk*<sup>617</sup> it is eight miles. From there to *Marsa Buthayra* it is eight miles and from *Marsa Buthayra* to the *As-Swāri* River it is twelve miles. From the *As-Swāri* River to the *Ighrīqu* River<sup>618</sup> it is twelve miles. From the *Ighrīqu* River to *Jazīrat Al-Ḥammām*<sup>619</sup> it is twelve miles and from there to the *K.rni* River it is seven miles. From the *K.rni* River to the *R.ghūṣ* River it is twelve miles. From the *R.ghūṣ* River to *Jarf At- Ṭiḥ*<sup>620</sup> it is four miles and from there to *Marsa Shakla* it is four miles. From *Marsa Shakla* to *Ghadīr Ash-Sh.rshūr* is two miles and from there to *Marsa Ad-D.rmān* it is four miles. From *Marsa Ad-D.rmān* to *Marsa Ash-Shajara*<sup>621</sup> it is one mile. From *Marsa Ash-Shajara* to *Jazīrat Ak-Karāth* it is three miles. From *Jazīrat Ak-Karāth* to *Marsa Al-Bawāliṣ* it is three miles and from *Marsa Al-Bawāliṣ* to *Jazīrat Al-J.rmān* it is eight miles. From *Marsa Al-Bawāliṣ* to *Karam Ar-R.nbūḥ*<sup>622</sup> it is three miles and from *Karam Ar-R.nbūḥ* to *Qarṭīl Bāshnu* it is three miles. From *Dakhlāt Al-Q.ṣā ‘ā*<sup>623</sup> it is six miles. From *Dakhlāt Al-Q.ṣā ‘a* to *Marsa Al-Ḥammām* it is six miles and from *Marsa Al-Ḥammām* to *Dakhlāt Ibn D.kni* it is six miles and from here to *Al-Qāṭa* it is six miles. From *Al-Qāṭa* to the *Qasbāri* River it is twelve miles and from the *Qasbāri* River to *Marsa Al-Ḥadhāq*<sup>624</sup> it is six miles and from there to *Al-Ank.na* it is six miles. From *Al-Ank.na* to *Anf Al-Khanzīr* it is eight miles and from there to *Sarqūsa* it is six miles. Then to *Khandaq Al-Gharīq*<sup>625</sup> it is six miles and then to *Jazīrat M.smārit* it is four miles, then to *Aksīfu* it is four miles. From *Aksīfu* to *Ras Aṣ-Ṣalība*<sup>626</sup> it is six miles and from here to the *Zīdūn* River it is six miles, then to *Ar-R.kn* it is six miles from there to the *Lentīni* River it is three miles. From the *Lentīni* River to the *Mūsa* River it is three miles and then to *Qaṭāniyya* it is six miles. Then to *Al-Ink.na* it is three miles then to *Jazā ‘ir Liyāj* it is three miles and then to the *Liyāj* River it is three miles. To *Shunt Sh.qla* it is six miles and then to *‘Ain Al-Qaṣb*<sup>627</sup> it is three miles. Then to *Qarṭīl M.sq.la* it is three miles and then to the *Al-Bārid* River it is nine miles, then to *Al-Qaṣūṣ* it is three miles. Then to *Al-Anbāsi* it is five miles and then to *Ad-Daraja*<sup>628</sup> it is ten miles and from here to *Shunt Bālmī* it is five miles and from *Shunt Bālmī* to *Al-Ajāṣa* it is six miles and from here to *Ad-Daraja Al-Waṣṭa*<sup>629</sup> it is six miles. From here to *‘Ain As-Sulṭān*<sup>630</sup> it is two miles and from here to *Ad-Daraja Aṣ-Ṣughīra*<sup>631</sup> it is two miles. From *Ad-Daraja Aṣ-Ṣughīra* to *Hajr Abi Khalīfa* it

is three miles and from here to *Shunt Iṣṭ.fīn* it is three miles. From here to *Ath-Thalāth Kinā 'is*<sup>632</sup> it is seven miles and from here to *Masīnā* it is six miles. From *Masīnā* to *Al-Fāru* it is twelve miles and to the *'Abūd* River it is twelve miles. To *Mīlāṣ* it is twelve miles and to *Ar-Rās* it is six miles. From *Ar-Rās* following the gulf it is twenty five miles to *Libīri* and to *Rās D.ndāri* it is three miles. To *B.qṭ.sh* along the gulf it is four miles and to *Rās Khaly* it is two miles. To *Marsa Dālya* it is four miles and to *Jaflūdi As-Ṣughra* it is three miles, to the beach of *'Alq.māra* it is twenty-six miles. To *Al-Qārūnyya* it is twelve miles and to *Qal'at Al-Qawārib* it is six miles then to *Ṭ. z'a* it is six miles. To *Anf Al-Kalb*<sup>633</sup> it is four miles and along the gulf *Jaflūdi* it is eight miles. To *Hijr 'Amār* it is two miles and to *Anf Al-Ākher*<sup>634</sup> it is four miles, to *As-Ṣakhra* it is six miles and to the *As-S.wāri* River it is three miles. To *Ash-Shabaka*<sup>635</sup> it is three miles and to the village of *As-Ṣabr*<sup>636</sup> it is six miles. To the *Al-Amīr* River along the gulf it is two miles and to the capital *Balarm* it is six miles.

We have described the island of Sicily and now to describe its shape: Sicily is shaped like a triangle and at the eastern point is the city of *Masīnā* and from here to the *Jezīrat Al-Arnib*<sup>637</sup> is two hundred miles and from *Jezīrat Al-Arnib* to *Ṭarābansh* it is four hundred miles and this is in the southern corner of the island and the third part of the island, from *Ṭarābansh* to *Al-Ḥ.rāsh* to and *Al-Fāru* it is two hundred and fifty miles and here we finish our discussion. We have completed part two of climate four, thanks be to Allah, and now we go on to part three inshallah.

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<sup>632</sup> *Lit.* the Three Churches.

<sup>633</sup> *Lit.* the Point of the Dog.

<sup>634</sup> *Lit.* the Last Point.

<sup>635</sup> *Lit.* the Window.

<sup>636</sup> *Lit.* Patient/forebearing. Often used as a boy's name so this village may be named after someone.

<sup>637</sup> *Lit.* the Island of the Rabbit.