Fall 11-15-2021

Beauty, Real or Apparent: Christian Kings, Muslim Artisans, and the Development of an Imperial Image Through the Silk and Horticulture Industries in Sicily. (ca. 1090-1190)

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Recommended Citation

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This thesis is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication:

Approved by the Thesis Committee:

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INDUSTRIES IN SICILY. (CA. 1090-1190)

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THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts
History

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

December, 2021

Acknowledgments

Without Dr. Sarah Davis-Secord's guidance there would have been two-thousand words about the origin of the word "vermicelli" in this thesis. In other words, thanks for the focus and the long conversations about all things medieval Sicily. A thanks to Dr. Michael Ryan, who listened to my rants about religion, pragmatism, and theory, and challenged my perspectives time and time again throughout the development of the piece. Dr. Justine Andrews taught me about studying materialism in Mediterranean islands between religious communities, and her guidance during a summer reading course contributed significantly to the strength of my argument. Finally, there would not be any Latin translations or mechanics of medieval studies to speak of without the guidance and skills offered by Dr. Timothy Graham.

No project of any magnitude could be finished without the support of those close to us. Despite the abnormal experiences of the past year, if nothing else, we have experiences. For those that are good, for long (and likely one-sided—thank you for listening) conversations about history, and for the constant words of affirmation and focus you each have provided, I am indebted to my friends Graham Abney, Chris Forestiere, Jonathan Wright, Mel Vigil, Hero Morrison, Jess Cochran and everyone else who joined in along the way.

Finally, thanks to my family for calling me every day and reminding me why I wrote this thing.

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ABSTRACT

In the wake of the Norman conquest of Sicily in the second half of the eleventh century, the Mediterranean island housed a diverse collection of Greek, Latin, and Muslim communities. Norman kings chose Palermo to become the seat of Latin-Christian Sicilian government for its productivity and strategic location and included the island into the complex world of self-fashioning politics and exchange. For Sicilian and 'foreign' Muslims alike, the imperious pose Roger II and his successors held created a precarious balancing act between the real and imagined worlds of Sicily. The content of this thesis is primarily concerned with the impact of skilled Muslim artisans on the landscape and prestige economy of Sicily. It seeks to demonstrate how ideology colored the interactions of Christian and Muslim communities in Sicily with hues of skewed systems of power and dependency. The appropriation and use of Muslim images and their artisanal products typifies the performance of religiopolitical imperial posturing in Sicily characteristic of Roger's reign and the lives of his successors. The *dīwān* records, travelogues, and biographies produced during the reign of Roger and his successors

illuminate the role of Muslim silk weavers and other artisans in the development of the

Norman Sicilian administrations Mediterranean Empire.

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Introduction

In 1147, King Roger II of Sicily (r. 1130-1154) kidnapped Muslim silk workers from al-Madhiya, Thebes, and Corinth to bolster the ranks of his royal silk workshop. In Palermo, the capital of Roger's kingdom, he ordered these newly acquired workers to weave and teach new weaving techniques to the community of artisans who already occupied Palermo's silk industry. Roger's kidnapping, like the acquisition of Greek administrators in the 1130s, demonstrates the Mediterranean king's mission to create an empire that encompassed the Mediterranean world. Alexander of Telese (d. 1143), a biographer of Roger's early years as monarch, described how at the king's coronation "it seemed then to everyone observing, just as if all the riches and honors of this world were present."[1] By acquiring the goods of the world, Roger took on seemingly early acts of 'Imperial posturing' through the industries of Sicily and its Muslim community artisans. For twelfth century rulers the silk robes worn by the members of a king's court might indicate the "self-fashioning sovereignty" of that king and extend the sacral significance of silk to that king's image.[2] For Roger, Muslim silk weavers, gardeners, and the development of a Muslim artisanal identity would bolster his imperial goals.

For Sicilian and 'foreign' Muslims alike, Roger II and his successors maintained a precarious balancing act between the real and imagined worlds of Sicily. As the predominant religious community on the island, Sicilian Muslims provided the bulk of the workforce, including skilled occupations like silk weaving, gardening, and fishing,

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[1] Alexander of Telese, *Ystoria Rogerii regis Sicilie Calabrie atque Apulie,* ed. Ludovica de Nava, (Rome, 1991). II, 4. *aspicientibus tunc universis ita videbatur, ac si omnes huius mundi opes honoresque adessent.*
[2] Cecily J. Hilsdale, "The Thallasal Optic," in *Can We Talk Mediterranean? Conversations on an Emerging Field in Medieval and Early Modern Studies,* ed. Brian A. Catlos and Sharon Kinoshita (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 23-24.

and inevitably worked under Roger's rule. However, as the Norman administration cemented itself and some attempts to 'latinize' and 'Christianize' the island were spearheaded by the church, specific roles and skills became associated and attributed to Muslim households specifically. The Norman implementation of a *jizya* tax, and *jara'id* records that listed Muslim villeins across the island indicate the growing tendency to do so, and religion and service became tied together in the imperial prestige economy promoted to the Mediterranean by the Norman administration. While the content of this thesis is primarily concerned with the impact of skilled Muslim artisans on the landscape and prestige economy of Sicily, I intend to demonstrate how ideology colored the interactions of Christian and Muslim communities in Sicily with hues of skewed systems of power and dependency.

The history of Sicily during the Norman occupation draws historians with a broad array of intellectual pursuits. For the most part, questions of economy and trade are raised by its relatively central position in the Mediterranean "trunk routes" of twentieth century historiography. Additionally, social and cultural histories have aimed to pin down the complexities of Norman social institutions in a region occupied by a seemingly diverse set of the big three monotheistic religions and variety of ethnic identities. However, while these subjects have remained mutually exclusive and separated to some degree in the eyes of premodern historians, religious identity and economic prestige existed under Norman rulership together and more often than not overlapped in the records of the institutions of the Norman kings.

In the eleventh century, a thriving Mediterranean economy connected North Africa, western Europe, the Levant, Iberian Peninsula, and the Greek provinces of the

Byzantine Empire. At its center, the island of Sicily provided one noteworthy avenue of exchange, with a diverse population, agricultural productivity, and protected port cities. Palermo, the city that the Aghlabid dynasty of the ninth century instituted as a capital for their newly established emirate, reimagined and redefined the role of Sicily in Mediterranean trade. As part of the *dar al-Islam* (the House of Islam), the city became a cultural center for a Muslim community that controlled the island for two-hundred years. Norman conquerors later chose Palermo to become the seat of Latin-Christian Sicilian government for its productivity and strategic location and included the island into the complex world of self-fashioning politics and exchange. The Norman palace in the city contains the Cappella Palatina, a chapel that combines the artistic influences of the three cultural groups who exerted influence over the island. Gian Luca Borghese argues that "Palermo derived an essential part of its identity from the sea" and the urban environment that dominated the decision-making of Sicily assumed its identity as a node between the nutrient-rich volcanic soil and the diverse merchants of the sea.[3]

This thesis will explore the reciprocity and imperial posturing of Roger II and Sicilian Muslim artisans in three parts to build a frame for understanding a few aspects of Christian and Muslim negotiations. The first section evaluates the question of interreligious interaction in the Mediterranean and seeks to deconstruct the overwhelming emphasis placed on the Iberian Peninsula and the paradigms generated by scholars of the region. While the issue of *Convivencia* is ever unavoidable in the study of interreligious communication, negotiation, and violence in the Mediterranean, by taking a closer look at

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[3] Gian Luca Borghese, "The City of Foreigners: Palermo and the Mediterranean from the 11th to the 15th Century," in *A Companion to Medieval Palermo: The History of a Mediterranean City from 600-1500,* ed. Annliese Nef; trans. Martin Thomas, 325-348, (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), 325.

the foundations of this "all-encompassing" theory, the goal is to reevaluate and reapply certain aspects of theory surrounding religious motivations for action to the Sicilian context. The second section dives into the relationship between economic prestige and religious servitude by examining the community of silk-weavers and embroiderers who worked both in the royal *tirāz* and in the countryside of Sicily. Under the watch and control of a small Norman aristocracy, Muslim artisans made the multilayered silk industry of the island a productive and representative part of Sicily's economy and the Norman authorities relied heavily on the skills of silk workers to develop their imperial image. Similarly, the third and final section explores the impact of gardeners and Muslim artisans on the landscape of Sicily, and how gardens, irrigation, and architecture framed their role in development of Sicily's visage in the eyes of communities from around the Mediterranean. Like Charlemagne's peaches, but with imagery and production inextricably tied to the Muslim community of Sicily, the Sicilian sour orange and its orchards provide a dynamic venue for developing our understanding of an everchanging physical landscape through shifting imaginations about the Mediterranean world.

In the ninth century (c. 827), the Aghlabid amir, Ziyādat Allāh I, sent a general to Sicily to assist a Greek rebellion against Constantinople loyalists with raids, but he did not expect to redefine the urban landscape of the island. By 830, and after a great deal of struggle, a mostly voluntary military force made up of Arab, Andalusian Hawwārah Berber, 'Zanatah' Berber, and black Sudanese soldiers conquered Palermo from the Greeks and settled there, placing the second most important ninth-century Sicilian city into the hands of the amir. Contrary to the simple raids and pressure that the ruler imagined to maintain a Muslim presence, the Aghlabids established a foothold in one of

Sicily's most valuable ports.[4] While the Byzantine empire still held Syracuse, the new

Muslim authorities redefined the trade-network of Sicily, and rearranged its focus to the

western Mediterranean, where amphorae from Palermo for transporting foodstuffs

reached "Tunisia, Sardinia, Campania, Liguria and Provence."[5] Additionally, its marginal

position on the edge of the powerful Fatimid dynasty made Sicily a valuable staging

ground for raids into Calabria in Southern Italy to protect shipping lanes, attain loot, and

extort tribute from the Greeks.[6] However, these distinctions between eastern and western

power in Sicily were not well-defined and Sicily provided a "zone of contact and

conflict" that expelled any sense of a rigid boundary. Instead, the presence of Byzantine

Greeks and Aghlabid authorities made Sicily a sort of permeable 'frontier' for the

Fatimid Caliphate and Constantinople.[7]

As an island on the margins of the *dar al-Islam*, the importance of the region to

the Fatimid caliphate can be found in an economic context. The great majority of

connected and wealthy Sicilian cities, like their neighbors in Southern Italy, had large

ports or rested no more than fifty miles from the coast. As such, after 1130, long distance

trade flourished and Amalfitan, 'Saracen' (from Tunisia and Alexandria), Venetian,

Genoese, and Greek merchants (from Constantinople) all appear in the charters and pacts

of the Kingdom of Sicily.[8] However, the strength of the Sicilian network and its position

as one of several pathways between North African, Greek, and western European polities

had become firmly established with the redefinition of the market in the ninth century.

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[4] Leonard Chiarelli, *A History of Muslim Sicily* (Malta: Midsea Books, 2011): 26-32.
[5] Borghese, "The City of Foreigners," 326.
[6] Chiarelli, *A History of Muslim Sicily,* 78.
[7] Sarah Davis-Secord, *Where Three Worlds Met: Sicily in the Early Medieval Mediterranean* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2017), 76.
[8] Oldfield, *City and Community in Norman Italy,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 247.

Goods from Sicily, Cairo, and Ifrīqiya (also known as the Maghrib) saturated a network that connected North Africa to western Europe, reaching as far as *al-Andalus*.[9] By the time the Norman aristocracy had consolidated its control over the island, Sicily was already seen by its contemporaries as a wealthy region due to its profit-based urban economy and fertile land for valuable crops.[10]

In the eleventh century, the Norman conquest of Sicily provides a chronological node for the first phase of major change toward the controlled community of urban Sicily that the Normans harnessed for their wealth and dynamic trade networks. For a time, the Kalbid dynasty provided a firm hand to consolidate the control of the *dar al-Islam* over the island. However, internal conflict and contact on mainland North Africa split the interests of urban elites in Sicily, and pressure from the Zirid dynasty in North Africa brought violent negotiation and lack of a centralized authority to the island. Concurrently, Robert Guiscard swore fealty to Pope Nicholas II in 1059 with a promise to conquer Sicily and to become the "future Duke of Sicily."[11] Robert and his brother Roger I gathered an invasion force that began a three-decade struggle for the island's fortresses and cities. While the pro-Norman late eleventh-century chronicler Amatus of Montecassino would have his readers believe that this was due to interreligious warfare, the brothers were very much aware of the potential economic prospects of conquering Sicily.[12] Additionally, the existence of a Muslim colony in the Reggio region and the possibility that Salerno owed annual tribute to Muslim Sicilians shows more

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[9] Davis-Secord, *Where Three Worlds Met,* 165-67.
[10] Oldfield, *City and Community,* 246.
[11] Graham A. Loud, *The Age of Robert Guiscard: Southern Italy and the Norman Conquest,* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), chapter 4.
[12] Davis-Secord, *Where Three Worlds Met,* 177.

interconnectivity than the zealotry of polities that the Christian author suggests. Indeed, the Muslim colony near Reggio contributed soldiers to the army of the brothers as they crossed the strait to Messina.[13]

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[13] Loud, *The Age of Robert Guiscard,* chapter 4.

Part 1: Paradigmatic Breakdown

The rhetoric of pro-Norman chroniclers tended to omit the presence of Salernitan and Messinian Muslim mercenaries in Roger I's army. William of Apulia completely ignored the participation of Muslims in Roger or his brother Robert Guiscard's armies. Instead, he intended to produce a rigid religious boundary between the Latin Christians and Sicilian Muslims. Joshua Birk expresses how, in order to create a diabolic and dividing image of Sicilian Muslims, William recalled an alleged speech by Robert Guiscard; writing, "[Palermo] is hostile to God, ignorant of divine worship, and ruled by demons."[14] The deliberate removal of the large contingent of Muslim Sicilians in Robert's army most likely developed from a political slant intended for William's patron, Roger of Borsa, as the Crusades became a prominent part of the experience of Southern Italy.[15]

The capital for the new kingdom, Palermo, with immediate proximity to Roger's Muslim subjects in the western half of Sicily and the "ancient trunk routes" of the Mediterranean, provided the perfect space for Roger to perform imperial sovereignty. Alexander of Telese wrote that the city "Palermo, the capital of Sicily, might be suitable to become the foundation and head of the kingdom itself, which once in ancient times, is said to have had a few kings over this same province, which afterwards, with more years having elapsed, has remained without kings until now with the hidden judgement of God

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[14] Birk, *Norman Kings of Sicily and the Rise of the Anti-Islamic Critique: Baptized Sultans,* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 39.

[15] After the involvement of Normans in the First Crusade, Southern Italy became a crucial launching point for crusaders for the following century. While it is too deterministic to suggest that William of Apulia was aware Southern Italian ports would become this staging ground, the region clearly played a major part in Crusade narratives. Davis-Secord, *Where Three Worlds Met,* 216-7.

disposing."[16] Here Alexander infers, with a Christian ruler in the new throne of Palermo, God no longer had to play a hidden role in Sicily. Due to his belief that the city suffered an absence of monarchy for a period of time—that is the two-century period of Muslim dominion between Greek and Norman control—Alexander imagined these ancient kings to be from the Greek emperors' patronage of the island, but he does not elaborate beyond the "ancient times" nor the "few kings over this same province." Regardless, the foundations of Roman, Greek, Aghlabid, and Khalbid rulers in Palermo certainly lent a degree of gravitas to Palermo's pedigree and blended the sense of dominion over Muslims with the foundations of an 'ancient' Christian kingdom.

Contemporaneous with Alexander's narrative, Arabic epithets and titles adopted for the new kingdom shifted drastically from the titles used by Count Roger I, and by the Hauteville predecessors, to epithets that invoked God's authority. The inscriptions and signatures on coins and documents demonstrate a transition from transliteration of the Latin *dux* (*al-dūqa*) and *comes* (*al-qūmis*)—before 1130—to translations of Christian regal and authoritative titles after Roger II's coronation. Roger II took on the titles "Roger the glorified king," "Roger the powerful through God," or "Roger the Sultan of Sicily" to demonstrate his divinely ordained leadership over Sicily.[17] Even nineteenth century historian Michele Amari attached the title "Sultan" to Roger II and Frederick II as a rhetorical flourish to connect their images to the Arabic language and seeming Islamophilic rule present in the contemporary polemics against the two.[18] This

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[16] *Alex. Tel.* II, 1. *caput Panormus Siciliae metropolis fieri deceret, quae olim sub priscis temporibus, super hanc ipsam provinciam reges nonnullos habuisse traditur, quae postea, pluribus evolutis annis, occulto Dei disponente iudicio nunc usque sine regibus mansit.*
[17] "Rujār al-malik al-muᶜaẓẓam," "Rujār al-muᶜtazz bi-llāh," or "Rujār sulṭān Ṣiqillīya." Jeremy Johns, *Arabic Administration in Norman Sicily: The Royal Dīwān* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 268.
[18] Michele Amari, *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia,* vol, 3. pt, 2, (Florence, F. Le Monnier, 2002), 246.

appropriation of Arabic language signifies how Norman propaganda combined administration with Roger II's imperial performance. Eva Hoffman suggests that Roger's appropriation of Arabic language could be used to demonstrate how "Roger's control and mastery extends to the language and culture of his adversaries."[19] The title "Roger the powerful through God," written in Arabic, further exemplifies how the new kingdom worked to develop an image of Roger as a ruler over all peoples.

Accusations of Islamophilia in Sicily and Catalonia reveal a tendency for kings through the eleventh century to tie their proto-imperial ventures with notions of religious servitude. Imperial ambition, informed by this relation between non-Christian servitude, appropriation of language, and dominance "over all peoples," gave fuel to detractors of high medieval rulers in Sicily and Catalonia. In the historical record, Roger's rhetorical dominance over the Muslim and Arabic speaking community of Sicily drew contemporary complaints of Islampophilia. However, similar accusations levelled at Roger's contemporary (and loose relation through his cousin Maud), Ramon Berengeur IV (1131-1162), blended accusations of Islamophilia with overstepping imperial ambition..[20] With anti-Islamic polemic becoming "ideologically central" after the year 1000, David Nirenberg argues that "Christian kingship, and even Christendom itself, could be self-consciously understood as depending on the services of non-Christian peoples."[21] Even the role of "Last World Emperor" did not assume the destruction of non-Christian peoples, nor mass systems of conversion. Just as Nirenberg suggests, a

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[19] Eva R. Hoffman, "Pathways of Portability," in *Art History* 24, no. 1 (2001): 32.
[20] Hussein Fancy, *The Mercenary Mediterranean: Sovereignty: Religion, and Violence in the Medieval Crown of Aragon,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 6.
[21] David Nirenberg, *Neighboring Faiths: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in the Middle Ages and Today,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 20, 26.

great degree of this role focuses on the "reclaiming of lands" and the placement of non-Christian peoples into roles of servitude.[22] In the thirteenth century, Frederick II would adopt these trends himself, and shared in the polemical accusations of Islamophilia that came with these familiar ambitions.

Fig. 1. Roger's Silver *Ducalis.* (Sarah Davis-Secord, "The Past, Present, and Future Norman Rule in Apulia." In *Rethinking Norman Italy: Studies in Honor of Graham A. Loud.* Edited by Joanna H. Drell and Paul Oldfield. [Manchester University Press, 2021] 284-304.)

Liam Fitzgerald believes that the development of "cultural syncretism" undoubtably presented Roger II as both a spiritual and political monarch over Sicily. By looking at the coins—a concave silver ducalis—distributed by Roger II's mint, Fitzgerald offers an interpretation that the images on the coins from 1140 (three years after

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[22] Whalen, *Dominion of God: Christendom and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages,* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2009), 59.

Alexander's death and the conclusion of his biography) formed a subtle, if not subliminal, imperial sovereign message to anyone who found themselves in possession of the coins. On one side Roger is depicted holding a *globus cruciger* and the obverse side shows an image of Christ Pantokratar. These iconographs signified Roger's imperial aspirations by invoking imagery most often connected to the Latin imperial throne of the Holy Roman Empire.[23] Additionally, the image of Roger itself shares a striking resemblance to the image of Christ on the other side. William Tronzo offer that unlike the christomimetic themes of Byzantine art that created a degree of separation between Christ and emperor, "Norman design stresses the extremity of the christomimetic theme," where Roger's hair, beard, and garments bore so many likenesses to Christ that the two are nearly indistinguishable.[24] Thus, the Norman king created a "unique visual language" that demonstrated his aspirations toward absolute monarchical power, at least in his own kingdom.[25]

The Issue with Convivencia

Over a century ago in 1915, Charles Homer Haskins called the Kingdom of Sicily "The first modern state," and his view of Norman controlled Sicily has left its mark on modern perceptions of the island's past as a tolerant and blended polity.[26] When examining the beautiful architecture of Palermo's medieval churches, with elements of Latin Christian, Greek Christian, and Muslim art, it is easy to imagine the cooperative

[23] Liam Fitzgerald, "Imperial Iconography on the Silver Ducalis: Cultural Appropriation in the Construction and Consolidation of Norman Royal Power," in *Designing Norman Sicily: Material Culture and Society,* ed. Emily A. Winkler, Liam Fitzgerald, and Andrew Small, (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2020), 119.
[24] William Tronzo, "Byzantine Court Culture From the Point of View of Norman Sicily: The Case of the Capella Palatina in Palermo," in *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204,* ed. Henry Maguire, (Washington D.C, 1997), pp. 101-114.
[25] Fitzgerald, "Imperial Iconography on the Silver Ducalis," 120.
[26] Charles Homer Haskins, *The Normans in European History,* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1915), 233.

effort of a 'mixed' Sicilian community.[27] However, while the reductive conclusion that suggests cultures in Sicily syncretized or blended remains appealing and proliferates an idyllic imagination of the region, the impression of Muslim culture on Norman funded architecture and art coincides more directly with negotiations of power and agency. Joshua C. Birk demonstrates how the Norman invaders of Sicily, with a limited tradition of administration and little to legitimize their claims to lordship, deployed Sicilian Muslims as soldiers, administrators, and artisans, to "distinguish themselves from their foes and rivals."[28] The figures at the center of this story, King Roger II and his successors William I (r. 1154-1166) and William II (r. 1166-1189), left a legacy of controlling Arabic-speaking Muslim communities that carried over into the political mentality of the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II. Through eleventh and twelfth-century Sicily, Latin Christian authorities negotiated and enforced a controlled Muslim community within Palermo and urban Sicily. The authorities used these communities to project wealth and power for their Mediterranean kingdom in its infancy. However, it is certainly tempting to sway toward the narrative that promotes a kind of Sicilian *Convivencia*.

To a certain degree, *Convivencia* has become a totalitarian paradigm of premodern Mediterranean interreligious contact. As Herbert Marcuse claims in his critique of advanced industrial civilization, *One-Dimensional Man*, a totalitarian concept does not assume a "terroristic political coordination," but can come about via a "non-terroristic" coordination of thought.[29] In a piece dedicated to reassessing *Convivencia,*

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[27] The UNESCO World Heritage Centre wraps the title of the sites from Norman controlled Sicily into a succinct "Norman-Arab" box that assumes an assimilation of culture or cultural syncretism. While from an architectural standpoint the buildings include artistic trends from Greek, Latin, and Muslim premodern entities, such a laconic title problematizes the historical avenues of analysis.
[28] Birk, *Norman Kings of Sicily,* 5.
[29] Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society,* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), 3.

Jonathan Ray expressed his scholarly anxieties that "this term [*Convivencia*] has been embraced and distorted by an ever-widening group of academics, journalists, and politicians, a phenomenon that increasingly challenges historians of medieval Spain to its original context."[30] While this statement can certainly be seen as an attempt to close ranks and gatekeep among scholars of 'traditional' Iberian history, it is telling about the blend of broad appeal and malleability of the term. *Convivincia* is often too malleable for proper historical study and is deeply dredged in an optimistic and positive image of Iberian interaction. Though not a deliberately totalitarian idea, *Convivencia* encompasses such a broad set of historical trends, that it does not have the same sense of interpretive urgency that it held at the time of María Rosa Menocal's publication of *Ornament of the World* in 2002.

The foundations of *Convivencia* are inherently political, which as a historical framework is neither entirely taboo or uncommon, but its institutional basis becomes increasingly outdated with the passing years and less applicable to modern interpretations of the premodern past. Américo Castro, in an effort to explain the "enigma" of modern Spain, "which seemed at the time so helplessly out of step with the rest of Europe," looked to the period of time when the Muslims, Jews, and Christians began to live in the same villages and cities of the peninsula.[31] He sought to find the influences of Muslim and Jewish culture on Castilian culture, so he could establish Spanish history as one of cultural contact. Castro's positive view of intercultural community in Spain has led to optimistic assessments of the Iberian history in public spheres. *Convivencia* grounded

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[30] Jonathan Ray, "Beyond Tolerance and Persecution: Reassessing Our Approach to Medieval *Convivencia,*" in *Jewish Social Studies,* vol. 11, no. 2, (2005): 1.
[31] Kenneth Baxter Wolf, "*Convivencia* in Medieval Spain: A Brief History of an Idea," in *Religion Compass,* vol. 3, (2009): 73.

Spanish character in pluralism and resistance to community intolerance.[32] There is something to be said for the encouragement of toleration wrought by studies of *Convivencia.*

The optimistic approach to interactions between Muslims, Jews, and Christians are most often identified in the period of the Umayyad caliphate in *al-Andalus.* Menocal published *Ornament of the World* in the wake of horrific acts of violence in the United States against Muslims, as a misinformed retaliation for the destruction of the World Trade Center's twin towers on September 11, 2001. While she had been working on the book prior to the violence against Muslim communities, she found the book's message even more prescient upon its release. The lesson Menocal believes we learn from *Convivencia* in Andalusia, is that "The vision of a culture of tolerance recognized that incongruity in the shaping of individuals as well as their cultures was enriching and productive."[33] The idyllic view of tolerance and syncretism built into this premise is a tempting notion for scholars of Iberia concerned with demonstrating or portraying the diversity of the medieval past, when it so often is misinterpreted and misappropriated to justify violence. However, Brian Catlos contends that "Tolerance is hardly regarded as a virtue today, let alone in the Middle Ages" and he is not entirely wrong.[34] Most egregiously, in the context of studies of the Middle Ages, "toleration" can potentially signal a eurocentric or imperial narrative with the contextually dominant group acting "tolerant" toward another.

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[32] Fancy, *The Mercenary Mediterranean,* 144.
[33] María Rosa Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain,* (New York, Boston, and London: Back Bay Books, 2002), 11.
[34] Brian Catlos *Kingdoms of Faith: A New History of Islamic Spain,* (New York: Basic Books, 2018), 428.

Catlos offers that these contacts are neither examples of tolerance nor of violent

rigidity; instead, abstract religious and ideological motivations for modes of religious

transgression in the high Middle Ages "can hardly be interpreted as causes or

determinants for events." [35] Instead, interaction between Christian and Muslim

communities, despite religious attachments to identity, prioritized self-interest over faith.

He calls for a restructuring of the *Convivencia* framework that emphasizes the self-

interest and convenience of social integration between ideologically and culturally

different peoples. Indeed, Hussein Fancy believes Catlos is correct not to overemphasize

"religion or identity" and risk "dissolving agency and contingency."[36] Instead, Catlos

proposes that rather than thinking of Iberian intercultural contact as an "ideal of

tolerance"—a theme Menocal relies heavily on— "it is better to think of it as a land of

conveniencia or "convenience… for their [Iberian Christians, Muslims, and Jews] own

perceived benefit."[37]

On the other hand, rather than suggesting subtle alterations, Castro's own

conception of *Convivencia* frequently comes under fire throughout the historiography.

Robert I. Burns questioned the applicability of Castro's framework due to the exceptional

nature of the narrative. When investigating the context of the intermingling of Muslim

and Christian communities in Valencia, and its "operational" nature, he wrote that

Castro's

> 'living together' and 'intermingling' unduly stress the interchanges and
> assimilations, because his focus is on literature, high culture, and those areas
> where borrowing and influence are most free. Was the association essentially a
> parallelism then, as some prefer, with each faith society exclusivist and in recoil,

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[35] Brian Catlos, *Victors and the Vanquished: Christians and Muslims of Catalonia and Aragon, 1050-1300,* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 85.
[36] Fancy, *Mercenary Mediterranean,* 107.
[37] Catlos, *Kingdoms of Faith: A New History of Islamic Spain,* 429.

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the main interaction really external in each society, a reluctant concession to specific practicalities? Such a view, though it has much truth in reflecting the intent and self-perception of each of the opposed societies, is false to the manner in which colonial situations work themselves out, and it ignores too much evidence of deeper assimilations.[38]

Commenting on these sides of the *Convivencia* debates, and perhaps anticipating the range of many arguments over how historians should interpret interactions between faithful communities, Burns' provides an observant analysis of *Convivencia.* His dissection of the two extreme ends of the debate, challenging the over-generalizations of both and providing commentary on their problems, demonstrates a reluctance to participate in the conversation. While it may indicate a deconstruction of the paradigm, Burns' assertion is more non-committal than argumentative, and he simply seems intrigued by the possibilities behind both ends.

Similarly, Hussein Fancy rejects notions that *Convivencia* sufficiently covers interactions between religious communities in the Iberian Peninsula. Taking a more committal stance against each side of *Convivencia* than Burns, he blames the separation between Castro and Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz—who saw toleration and *Convivencia* as a negative value—for the bitter and deadlocked debates which "continue to trouble the study of medieval Iberia." Additionally, Fancy believes that no scholarly discussion to this point "has managed to dislodge these debates" from the historiography.[39] To a certain extent, Fancy's frustrations with the historiography of *Convivencia* and these debates about interaction mirror Marcuse's frustration that critical ideas can become a totalitarian

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[38] Robert I. Burns, *Society and Documentation in Crusader Valencia: Diplomatarium of the Crusader Kingdom of Valencia The Registered Charters of its Conqueror, Juame ,* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985), 189.
[39] Fancy, *Mercenary Mediterranean,* 144.

premise that dominate novel critical thought.[40] Regardless of which extreme one chooses

to argue for, they are limited by the premise itself, and *Convivencia* has come to

dominate any discussion of Iberian interaction. In contrast with Catlos, Fancy's book,

Mercenary Mediterranean, contests the idea that self-interest and pragmatism are

somehow divorced from a person's religion.[41] These over-secularizations of human

decision making in historical narratives deserves a reevaluation, as it undervalues

peoples' personal beliefs about the machinations of the world. Fancy carefully navigates

a position that, as we will see, looks toward new frameworks for Iberian studies. Mirella

Cassarino has taken a similar approach in the contextual realm of urban Sicily. Regarding

Palermo, she argues that the multi-ethnic Muslim Sicilians "thus came to be enclosed in a

regime of coexistence" that included violence and contact between "multicultural and

pluri-confessional groups."[42] The kingdom of Sicily could use the newly enclosed

community to establish sovereignty as an infant kingdom in a 'hardly idyllic' format.

However, Sicily was a part of the *dar al-Islam* for two centuries before the invasion. The

Muslim community that came before these Christian kings established the economic and

urban landscape that compelled the Normans to invade as Muslim political power waned

in the region. For Sicily, Convivencia's value as a paradigm is lost when historians rely

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[40] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man,* 1.

[41] Fancy, *Mercenary Mediterranean,* 107.

[42] Cassarino, "Palermo Experienced, Palermo Imagined," in *A Companion to Medieval Palermo: The History of a Mediterranean City from 600-1500,* ed. Annliese Nef, (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), 92. The phrase 'Muslim Sicilian' will be applied to the complex ethnic identities of the Muslim community of the island for this paper to both address a sense of unity applied by the sources and its application in the scholarship. As such, it is important to address that the sources that referred to the group as 'Muslim Sicilian' are generally from a Christian author or from Muslim authors writing almost one hundred years after the events described, and I am not trying to omit the reality of the complexities that Leonard Chiarelli and Alex Metcalfe address.

too heavily on the political foundations and regionally charge narratives found in studies of the Iberian Peninsula.

Periodization of Irrationality

In *Periodization and Sovereignty*, Kathleen Davis posits periodization's role as a political tool for constructing "modern" political sovereignty. In other words, borrowing from the post-colonial thought of authors like Dipesh Chakrabarty and Talal Asad, Davis challenges the divide between the "premodern" and "modern" worlds established by foundational western authors, like Max Weber and Henri Pirenne, and asks "why… do the monoliths medieval/religious/feudal and modern/secular/capitalist (or 'developed') survive, and what purpose do they serve?"[43] While Pirenne brought a wider scope to premodern Mediterranean studies and explored the movements of people, he blamed the spread of Islam for what he believed to be a stagnation of economic interaction in the Mediterranean in the ninth century. He considered the conquests by the growing caliphate the cause for a transition from a western Roman sea to a "Muslim Lake" and claimed that "the classic tradition was shattered because Islam had destroyed the ancient unity of the Mediterranean."[44] This narrative adopted the orientalism of the 1930s and assumed a certain "barbarity" of letting religion dictate political decisions; an idea often found in the secularization of modernity argued for at the time in the wake of works like Weber's. Davis' book provides the counterpoint that reconsiders religious thought in both the premodern and modern worlds, where "There can be no neutral discussion of 'religion' or the 'secular,' anymore than there can be of the 'medieval' or 'modern.'"[45] Dated

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[43] Kathleen Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 2.
[44] Henri Pirenne, *Muhammed and Charlemagne* (reprint: Martino Fine Books, 2017), 185.
[45] Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty,* 77.

perspectives like Pirenne's emphasize the "irrationality" of the premodern world, a notion previously propagated by the work of Max Weber.

Max Weber's *entzauberung,* or "disenchantment" theory, placed the European printing press at the center of a subconscious push toward "enlightenment" and secularization.[46] Disenchantment assumes a transition from an irrational world to a rational one, where magic and faith lose their potency for establishing historical agency in the past. However, ideological and religious thought continue to permeate modern politics, and Davis asserts that "Just as sovereignty is irreducible to pure rationality, so too, modern politics depend upon theological-political precedent for political representation."[47] This previously held premodern/modern divide demonstrates the tendency among Christian, white, and European historians over the last century to define sovereignty through "secularism" as key for modern politics, as

> The belief in a break between a medieval and a modern (or an early modern) period ever more intensively assumes world-historical implications for categories such as sovereign state and secular politics—That is, categories with both ideological and territorial stakes—and for exactly this reason the "Middle Ages" like "modernity" before it, has been vaulted from a European category to a global category of time.[48]

It has even been suggested by Gil Anidjar that "secularism is a name Christianity gave itself when it invented religion, when it named its other or others as religion."[49] This is an idea perhaps best illustrated by the French government banning Islamic women from wearing hijabs due to discretely Christian "values."

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[46] Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion,* trans. Ephraim Fischoff, (Beacon Press, 1993).
[47] Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty,* 14.
[48] Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty,* 5.
[49] Anidjar "Secularism," 62.

Premodern historians have overcompensated for dated narratives with their attempts to correct past wrongs—perpetrated through a lens of modern secularization in opposition with premodern superstition—and have developed an over-secularized narrative. In other words, debates over faith in premodern history are plagued by a binary understanding of religion and pragmatism. There is a tendency these historians of religious and cultural interaction to devalue the role of religion in the past (including in 'modernity') in the name of secularization and pragmatism. This, even in the United States whose inhabitants continue to argue whether they are "one nation under God" or "one nation indivisible" despite the diverse array of religion and ideology. To a certain degree, such suggestions are a response to the oversaturation of histories of the premodern world that emphasized "irrational" religious motivations in a supposedly hyper-religious society. It is noble cause, perhaps (like Menocal's), to reevaluate and problematize the interreligious communication in the past. However, the desire to attribute pragmatism to decision making in the Middle Ages obscures a facet of human engagement with the world; that is, the inseparable nature of ideology and action.

Convivencia, ultimately, is characterized by a discomfort with the potential for uncoordinated chaos as an aspect of human action. Rather than looking to identify a structural standard and its exceptions, as *Convivencia* lends itself toward, historians can look to the relationship between hyper-specific actions and the broader context's impact on the mode of thinking associated with those actions. Frameworks for understanding causes and consequences do not need to attach wholly to one extreme or another, nor do they need to fall in a non-committal middle space. Instead, they can accept the reality that a chaotic collection of people, with drives along the spectrum of self-interested

pragmatists and religiously charged zealots, or abstract and practical thinkers, all make decisions and potentially impact the decisions of others. To borrow from Albert Camus' absurdist philosophy, ethics are not based on "an ideal importance of [one's] basic principles," but on the "norm of an experience that it is possible to measure."[50] As such, the pressures of societal norms and one's individual experience will impact their communication with the world. For example, take away the setting and context of Marie Kelleher's *The Measure of Woman*, and one is left with the bones of a framework that analyzes the relationship between individual action and societal expectation.[51]

To the credit of these scholars and Iberian scholarship over the last thirty years (perhaps to contend with my own evident cynicism), historians of the premodern Mediterranean have been eager to offer alternative explanations that go beyond *Convivencia* and address themes that include networks of communication outside of the regional constrictions of Iberia. Unlike the subtle and over-secularizing *Conveniencia* proposed by Catlos to alter *Convivencia,* scholars call for reconfiguring our historical questions and constructing new avenues of analysis. At the beginning of the 1990s, David Nirenberg responded to developing analyses of persecution in the Mediterranean, an attempt to broaden understandings of religiously charged violence with psychoanalytic influences and budding anthropological works. John V. Tolan, concerned with understanding how Christians saw Muslims around the Mediterranean (intensely focused on the Iberian Peninsula) published *Saracens* in 2002, and addressed how theologians

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[50] Albert Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus," in *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays,* trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1964): 61.
[51] See Marie Kelleher, *The Measure of Woman: Law and Female Identity in the Crown of Aragon* (Philadelphia and Oxford: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 12, for a succinct description of how women in the Catalonian context balanced societal expectations with agency in the courts of the Crown of Aragon.

sought to "limit the place of Muslims in Christian Society."[52] Finally, Hussein Fancy's

critique of *Convivencia* turns to a proposal for a new mode of thought which leaves

Convivencia in favor of an imperial history that reimagines the interaction between

sacred and secular in the Crown of Aragon. From here, there is potential to establish a

framework not clouded by the political and densely packed conversation of Castro's

Convivencia.

   At the conclusion of the 1980s, R.I Moore challenged the assumption that

"violence and persecution" in the twelfth century was simply the proliferation of a

societal "norm."[53] Adopting a Foucauldian framework of power dynamics, Moore

proposed that European Christian society "became" a persecuting society, in lieu of the

previously held assumption, because of social anxiety about the potential for undermining

authoritative figures with subversion. For Moore, Christian officials feared

"contamination" from Jews and Lepers.[54] This approach emphasized a reactionary

development of a persecuting society, as opposed to a society that persecutes. The

proximity of the book's narrative to Catalonia, focusing on persecutions near Toulouse,

presented intriguing questions about European persecution in the Iberian Peninsula.

However, Nirenberg found Moore's work too heavily weighted with "collective images,

representation, and stereotypes of the 'other'" and criticized the "fundamental continuity"

of *Persecuting Society's* framework.[55]

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[52] John Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), xvii.
[53] R.I Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society,* 4.
[54] Ibid, 161.
[55] Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence,* 5.

The applications of these new frameworks, and the conversations between them may answer to what degree Iberian paradigms are applicable to broader contacts and similar networks of contact. As a historical analysis of intolerance by Christians against Jews within the networks of Catalonian communities, Nirenberg found that frustrations and anxieties levelled against the monarchy of the Crown of Aragon instigated the violence against Jewish communities in the thirteenth century. He saw the Jewish community's status as *servi regni* to be a "protected status," and suggested that violence against Jewish communities acted as a "release valve" for tension caused by the previously mentioned anxieties with the monarchy. Thus, the attacks were not "irrational" and religiously charged attacks against a non-Christian community per se, but a direct attack against the authority of the king.[56] While there are problems of over-secularization and over-emphasis on the political interests of Iberian mountain communities, Nirenberg's framework might prove useful for evaluating similar instances of intolerance and violence done by Christians to Jews in the Mediterranean.

John Tolan's book, *Saracens*—so titled to bring attention to growing polemic against Muslims in Christian governed lands from 1000—introduced new readers to the fairly underexplored question of "medieval orientalism" and nuanced scholars' understanding of how Christians perceived non-Christians in the premodern world.[57] Granted, "Saracens" approaches the study from a Eurocentric perspective, and scholars lose the reciprocal communications between Christians and Muslims that one may find in more recent studies that emphasize diversifying our scholarly languages to add depth of analysis to our fields. Historians of alternative regions in the Mediterranean are quick to

[56] Ibid, 43.
[57] Tolan, *Saracens,* 280.

adopt these methodologies and theories from Iberian studies. Joshua Birk, for example, employs David Nirenberg's "release valve" paradigm to develop the argument of his book, *Norman Kings of Sicily and the Rise of the Anti-Islamic Critique.* He claims that the Muslim community of Sicily held a similar status to the Jews in the Crown of Aragon as "*servi regni.*"[58] Similarly, he adopts the work of Tolan to establish a sense of the developing polemical image of the "Saracens." In concert with each other, Birk introduces his book with a relatively compelling push toward Mediterranean trends of cultural interaction built upon the historiography of the Iberian Peninsula. He promises to reveal how attacks against the Muslim of Sicily behaved much in the same way as the persecutions in Nirenberg's work.

Birk's introduction indicates a desire to turn these frameworks from a regional Iberian or Sicilian history into a much wider Mediterranean one. He further draws lines between similar themes through Iberia, Sicily, the 'Crusader States,' and the maritime republics.[59] Certainly, it is a noble attempt to conceptualize intolerance and violence between religious communities in a way that embraces Nirenberg's intense rationalism, and Tolan's evidence toward the popularization of theological polemic. However, the lines that Birk draws are reductive for analysis of moments of rigidity between Mediterranean communities. Why is this the case? The position of Muslims in Sicily was vastly different from that of the Jewish community in the Crown of Aragon. While Muslims in Sicily under Norman authority did indeed get listed and exchanged via grants and charters as villeins, they made up the majority of the population of the island well

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[58] Birk, *Norman Kings of Sicily,* 15.
[59] Ibid, 11-12.

into the beginning of the thirteenth century.[60] As Birk himself investigates, and as Jeremy

Johns has made clear with his reading of the Royal *Dīwān's* court documents, Sicilian

Muslims occupied a wide variety of occupations. While some of these occupations, like

the gardeners and silk-workers of the kingdom were tied to Muslim identities in Sicily,

the diversity of the community swerves away from reductive comparisons to a

community with separate geography beliefs, roles, and regions. Indeed, the specific role

of non-Christians in Sicily demonstrates the difference of their experience between the

Iberian Peninsula and Sicily.

Similarly, there is a tendency among historians of the Iberian peninsula with

focuses on the Crown of Aragon, Castilian kingdoms, and *al-Andalus* alike, to claim that

their histories reflect broader trends of exchange and interaction. In the introduction of

The Measure of Woman, Kelleher explains that the presence of laws from the *ius*

commune—a combination of Roman and Canon law—in codes found in the Crown of

Aragon indicate the influence of the Mediterranean on Catalonian law. More convincing

than Birks's loose connections of communities in diverse contexts around the

Mediterranean, Kelleher provides a concrete basis for her connections to the

Mediterranean.[61] Fancy, ties the performance of imperial posturing in *The Mercenary*

Mediterranean to a "deep Mediterranean tradition." He invokes the name Frederick II,

but does not pursue the issue at great length. These connections to the Mediterranean and

others like them force readers to wonder to what degree Iberian history is connected to

broader global trends. It seems in some cases that allusions to global trends are used

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[60] Alex Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy,* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 142.
[61] Kelleher, *The Measure of Woman,* 6.

simply to broaden the appeal of an author's book, or are meant to convey a broader connection, but the evidence itself does not tell the whole story.

Looking forward to possibilities for dramatic shifts in the history of interaction, Iberianists are quick to adopt histories with familiar themes of contact and exchange. D. Fairchild Ruggles and Olivia Remie Constable take the plunge from Iberian focused studies into the Mediterranean Sea with studies that encapsulate landscape and spaces of exchange in the premodern past. These projects have proven very fruitful for the development of premodern studies as they stand today. Combining architecture and literary culture, both of these authors demonstrated a propensity for taking the valuable scholarly skills from the histories of interaction presented via their previous studies on the Iberian Peninsula. In their studies, the trends concerning the interaction between communities become clearer, and readers are given an opportunity to explore the liminal spaces of the Mediterranean.

Olivia Remie Constable wrote how in the *funduqs* and *fundaci* across the Mediterranean the "sacred and profane" might come into contact.[62] She wondered if commercial and sacred institutions were more likely to cross boundaries in these spaces and explored the variety of perceptions of hostels around the Mediterranean that could not agree whether they were corrupting places or stopping points "travelers part of pious deeds."[63] The most fascinating aspect of Constable's project, which opened up the field of communicative spaces to more scholars as they explored the many facets of interactive networks, came from Constable's tendency not to shy away from the somewhat chaotic

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[62] Olivia Remie Constable, *Housing the Stranger in the Mediterranean World: Lodging, Trade, and Travel in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages,* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 29.
[63] Ibid, 48.

and complicated elements of her study. Indeed, while *funduqs* provided these communicative spaces, they also could be used to restrict and regulate interaction between travelers.[64] This history helps historians to conceptualize liminal spaces beyond the overbearing framework of *Convivencia,* and develop more complex understandings of interaction between travelers and the communities that they visit.

Like Constable, D. Fairchild Ruggles does not shy away from the messy and complicated aspects of a broad history. Her book, *Islamic Gardens and Landscapes,* explores the trends and patterns between styles of gardens found in regions connected to the *dar al-Islam* Christian authorities in contact with these regions. Rather than simply approach the history of Islamic gardens through the frame of social history or archaeology, Ruggles borrows from a variety of theoretical frameworks—namely environmental, architectural, and social models—to emphasize the position of gardens in both space and time. For example, she synthesizes archeology, treatises on botany, and poetry (just to name a few) to express the feeling, presence, and practical and symbolic purposes of gardens in the *dar al-Islam*. Ruggles' work expands from an immense knowledge of architecture, water resources, and of course, gardening, that demonstrates the interconnectivity of spaces and the shifts that occur as with varying degrees of interaction in these spaces.

Where them are we left in terms of the conversation between the Iberian Peninsula and the Mediterranean? Evidently, valuable work has been done to tell the stories of intercultural exchange, and the depth of these studies and their conversations with each other has created a deep foundation for future studies. But the problem of

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[64] Ibid, 27.

creating a connection between nuanced paradigms of Iberian history and carefully

avoiding the potential for over-generalizations remains. Indeed, we have the work of

preeminent scholars who have been toeing the line between deep Mediterranean networks

and religious interaction to guide us. Marie Kelleher's upcoming book on Barcelona

appears to be working toward the ritualistic violent action of young Christian men against

the Jews of the community, with limited oversight or prevention from the municipal

authorities. While it is not entirely clear to what degree this book may be connected to

Mediterranean trends, the interactions between the communities of Barcelona will likely

prompt compelling new questions about interreligious contact and exchange.

Between the saturation of Iberian studies and the training provided to new

medievalists, it is unsurprising that burgeoning premodern historians will attempt to

apply Iberian frameworks to a broader context, but we must tread carefully. The hyper-

regional differences of the Mediterranean's "microecologies" are telling of the potential

for falling into ill-fitting comparisons and over-generalizations about how a community

interacted with and perceived the world. Looking to Camus, we must remember how a

historical person's experience influences their ethics and imagination about the world.

Mediterranean history is, at its core, driven by analyses of fragmentation, porousness,

communication, and other dynamic forms of interaction. With the historiography's

wealth of scholarship, fearsome debates, and ever-growing efforts toward diversifying

and expanding, the directions that Iberian may take are indeed, very exciting. That is to

say, so long as we continue to deconstruct and evaluate the theories and methodologies

used to create narratives in the field, it can grow efficiently and be used to reflect on

human experiences of interaction.

For twelfth century Sicily, we find the weaknesses in *convivencia* and its lack of applicability to non-Iberian contexts. Instead, the foundations built by scholars of the Iberian Peninsula can be broken down and restructured as guides for analyzing intercultural permeability and rigidity. Sicily offers a compelling site for attempting to apply Iberian paradigms due to the large Muslim populations of both regions, but the diverse roles of Muslims and differences between Muslim communities in the Iberian Peninsula and Sicily demonstrates the interaction between macro and micro scale interactions that effect cultural interaction. In other words, new theories are required for interacting with the ideology of Sicily and the Mediterranean's past, but we can learn from the examples provided by authors in similar, though not altogether the same fields. I am not so bold to offer an entirely new paradigm for interpreting the relationships of Muslims and Christians in the island communities of the Mediterranean. To do so would defeat the purpose. Instead, I urge that by engaging with the relationship between the real and imagined world surrounding the artisanal industries of skilled Muslim laborers in Sicily, we can catch glimpses of how ideology and lived experience informed the decisions and relationships of religious communities in the Mediterranean.

Part 2: Loom, Glorious Loom

Sicilian Muslim Silk-Workers and the Performative Prosperity of the Norman

Kingdom of Sicily in the Twelfth Century

Multicultural architecture, art, and artisanal products of twelfth century Sicily have been the concern of scholars for over a century. The landscape and material produced by the subjects of Norman kings clearly did not skip the notice of Mediterranean travelers. When Iberian geographer and traveler Ibn Jubayr (1145-1217) shipwrecked in Sicily while returning to *al-Andalus* from Hajj in the 1180s, he wrote how Palermo

> is the metropolis of these islands, combining the benefits of wealth and splendor, and having all that you could wish of beauty, real or apparent, and all the needs of subsistence, mature and fresh, It is an ancient and elegant city, magnificent and gracious, and seductive to look upon. Proudly set between its open spaces and plains filled with gardens, with broad roads and avenues, it dazzles the eyes with its perfection. It is a wonderful place, built in the Cordova style… The king, to whom it is his world, has embellished it to perfection and taken it as the capital of his Frankish Kingdom—may God destroy it.[65]

Travel logs like Jubayr's describe the landscape of Sicily, with cities like Palermo combining elements of the island, as a place of exceptional beauty. Beyond the urban landscape, Jubayr adds that on a special religious occasion "the Christian women of this city follow the fashion of Muslim women… they go forth on this Feast Day dressed in robes of Gold-embroidered silk, wrapped in elegant cloaks, concealed by colored veils, and shod with gilt slippers."[66] As a clear display of prosperity, silk informed Jubayr's opinion of the island's wealth.

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[65] Muhammed ibn Ahmad ibn Jubayr, *Rihlat Ibn Jubayr [The Travels of Ibn Jubayr]*, trans. R. J. C. Broadhurst, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1952), 348.
[66] Ibid, 350.

The history of silk in Norman Sicily is consistently the domain of economic and art historians. Traditionally, these histories focus on the material record; some of which is now on display at The Imperial Treasury of Vienna. This record includes luxury royal silks like Roger II's coronation mantle, and William II's alb and stockings. Eva R. Hoffman offers that silks (like the mantle) are agents of self-definition.[67] Additionally, medieval Mediterranean economics has focused on the movement of materials, and except for more recent work, has often overlooked or failed to address "by whom" the creation and movement of these materials was made possible. Further still, traditional paradigms of religious power dynamics and labor have neglected to engage with the complexity generated by an entirely different religiopolitical *mentalité*. Rather than assume a universal paradigm for evaluating the connections between people and their products, it is perhaps best to invoke Albert Camus' notion of the absurd that "a person defines themselves by their own make-believe as well as by their sincere impulses."[68] In other words the thoughts and actions of the people involved in historical trends determined their interactions in the environment offered to them.

As Ibn Jubayr noted, the elite fashion for women on feast days included wearing silks in a style which he identified as traditionally Muslim. In the twelfth century, Sicily produced its own silk for courtly and domestic use, alongside trade. Such an endeavor required many skilled weavers to provide a wide array of silks including those at the courtly level, and those for daily use. In Sicily, as was the case across many regions of the Mediterranean, these skilled workers came from Muslim communities with deep traditions of weaving silk. As such, the Norman kings of Sicily employed Muslim silk

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[67] Hoffman, "Pathways of Portability," 21.
[68] Albert Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus," 11.

workers to generate this commodity which resembled, to an extent, Mediterranean capital

and prosperity. As such, Roger II and his successors mobilized Muslim Sicilian silk-

workers to perpetuate an image of self-sovereignty and prosperity in the Mediterranean.

The Christian kings' dependency on the Muslim community and relegation of that

community to a servile position prompted limited negotiations of status by Muslim

skilled laborers and their community at large. The Norman plan becomes clearer by

highlighting the significance of the silk-workers and their industry, engaging with the

Norman King's purpose for mobilizing silk-weaving traditions, and discussing the

negotiations of status by a Muslim community under Christian authority in the medieval

Mediterranean.

After the conclusion of Sicily's conquest by Norman barons in the early 1090s,

when they replaced two centuries of Muslim authority with a new Christian aristocracy,

scholars have pointed to the scarcity and dwindling existence of sources that address the

Muslim community of the island. However, the work of Jeremy Johns, Alex Metcalfe,

Sarah Davis-Secord, and Timothy Smit has reilluminated a historiography left poorly

addressed since the nineteenth century work of Amari. Their studies of the jarā'id (tax

records written in Arabic for the estates speckled across the rich Sicilian farmlands),

travel logs like that of Ibn Jubayr and Benjamin of Tudela (1130-1173), and the chronicle

of Hugo Falcandus (a pseudonym for a mysterious court writer), contribute valuable

analyses regarding this Muslim community.

Studies concerned with the economic role Sicily played in the interconnected

networks of Mediterranean trade generally focus on the production of materials. Even the

following pages place heavy emphasis on the materials related with the Muslim

community of Sicily. However, historians of the Mediterranean have overlooked the role of labor and the inextricable ties to social history wrought by economic and quantitative analysis. While scholars use quantitative analysis of occupational identity in the premodern *dar al-Islam* and northwestern Europe to establish economic success by identifying the numbers of laborers associated with high ticket commodities, Maya Shatzmiller encourages historians to address the social attributes of occupational classification to develop a "history from below."[69] For the most part, studies of social difference and occupational identity in Sicily focus on the luxury goods, high class architecture, and legal declarations of the Norman authorities. But, the workers behind these materials and their occupations are tied directly to their perceived faith and position under the new aristocracy. As such, the role of Muslim skilled laborers in developing the landscape and goods that Roger II and his successors would use to demonstrate wealth and power—a kind of prestige economy—provides valuable examples of social interactions for historians to establish the status of those non-Christian workers placed in servitude by Christian kings.

Jeremy Johns opens the door for historians of premodern Sicily to engage with the divisions of labor in the Muslim communities of Sicily. The acknowledgement of religious and linguistic differences in Sicilian labor and production attributes dynamic social classifications for the analysis of negotiations of status. Occupational identities are related directly to the records of the royal diwān through the degrees of separation generated through linguistic differences. Roger II's practice of kidnapping and inviting skilled foreign notaries, like George of Antioch, and skilled artisans like the silk workers

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[69] Maya Shatmzmiller, *Labor in the Medieval Islamic World,* 3.

from his North African campaign is a testament to the awareness of occupational identities and the prestige economy. While the kidnapped Greek administrators and silk-workers are the most commented on subjects of Roger's vested interest in skilled writers and artisans, Ibn Jubayr notes his grandson William II's interests in astrology and other sciences, a trait which he supposedly inherited from Roger.[70]

For a brief period after the Norman conquest, for example, Greek replaced Arabic as the preeminent language for the documentation of the royal administration until the introduction of the Cefalu *deperdita,* which included name-lists written in Arabic with interlinear Greek transliteration.[71] Roger II's administration appears to have spearheaded a deliberate transition back to Arabic as a part of the royal readministering of grants. Indeed, Arabic name-lists became the standard for new charters and grants for the administration of Sicily and demonstrate the thorough collection of family names and their occupations for court records. For example, by the 1140s Arabic was used to record the villeins and tracks of land that powerful administrators endowed to the church. In 1143, George of Antioch gifted the estate of Rahl al-Sha'rani near Misilmeri, and ten households of Muslim villeins to the church of *Santa Maria dell'Ammilagio* with the occupations of those households listed alongside their names in Arabic. Additionally, Roger II's *'alama* was included to bolster the legitimacy of the endowment with the signature of the king.[72] As such, the value of the Muslim households' labor could be determined in the exchange and recorded by the church and the king.

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[70] Ibn Jubayr, *Travels*, 341.
[71] Johns, *Arabic Administration in Norman Sicily*, 93.
[72] Jeremy Johns and Nadia Jamils, "Signs of the Times: Arabic Signatures as a Measure of Acculturation in Norman Sicily," in *Muqarnas,* vol. 21, (2004): 182.

Muslim Labor in Norman Sicily

The Norman Arabic administration began to redraw the borders for charters and

redistribute grants and charters to the new Norman aristocracy and Christian churches.

This land distribution became an integral part of the King's plans to assert his immediate

authority over Sicily and create a powerful base for his Mediterranean operations.

Following the conquest of the island by his father and the period of relative restlessness

under the regency of Adelaide del Vasto, there was more than a symbolic necessity for

Roger II to "divide the spoils" between the church and his Norman vassals if he wanted

to cement his position as king.[73] In an article dedicated to two seemingly incompatible

Arabic charters granted under the Norman administration, Alex Metcalfe and Jeremy

Johns raise valuable questions about the operations of the royal *dīwān* during a period of

uncertain sovereignty. Christian landholders, namely the monks of Chùrchuro,

demonstrated an uneasiness about receiving a charter with the signatures of the Muslim

officials of the administration without the royal seal.[74] These anxieties, not simply limited

to an anti-Muslim stance among Christian church officials, indicate how the early days of

the *dīwān's* bureaucracy required the immediate oversight of royal authority.

Until recently, scholarship on how the urban landscape of Sicily portrayed the

relationship between Sicilian Muslims and the Christian monarchy has focused on the

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[73] Jacka, "The True Nature of His Lands': Strategic Information on Sicily in the Book of Roger," in *Designing Norman Sicily: Material Culture and Society,* ed. Emily A. Winkler, Liam Fitzgerald, and Andrew Small, (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2020), 66.

[74] Jeremy Johns and Alex Metcalfe, "The Mystery at Chùrchuro: Conspiracy or Incompetence in Twelfth Century Sicily?" in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London,* vol 62. no. 2, (Cambridge University Press, 1999): 242. Johns and Metcalfe explore the arguments about two documents, allegedly copies of the same original document, that granted two different land boundaries to the monks of Chùrchuro, a region in Iato. The argument about the content of the documents will not be considered in depth here, but the authors contribute to our knowledge of the roles of Arabic administrators and anxieties about the royal *dīwān* in socio-cultural negotiations.

architecture of the Capella Palatina in Palermo. Sicily's relatively central location in the

Mediterranean sea led to Dalu Jones' assertion that the island rested at the center of a

triangle of exchange between Cairo, Spain, and Constantinople, and thus its artistic forms

demonstrated Christian, Muslim, and more generally Mediterranean motifs in concert

with each other.[75] Furthermore, Lisa Reilly offers that the boundaries between Christian

and Muslim styles, whether sacred or secular, were blurred because the architecture of

the Capella Palatina indicates a blending of seemingly Romanesque imagery, Greek

murals, and Muslim structure.[76] These emphases on acculturation through the art of Sicily

encourage historians to reconsider the degree of rigidity between Christian and Muslim

communities on the island. However, such interpretations obscure the clear

acknowledgment of religious difference in the administration of the island.

For Norman Sicilian kings, images, structures, and language were inextricably

connected to Christian and Muslim identities. While Jeremy Johns expresses that royal

usage of Sicilian Arabic script shares influences with Fatimid Arabic and likely does not

necessarily represent the style that Sicilian Muslims might use. Following Johns, scholars

contend that Arabic script demonstrates a uniquely Sicilian style, as opposed to poorly

done Fatimid style.[77] Regardless of the origin of the script, either way, the Arabic script

was connected to the Christian perception of Islam. While some may argue that

pragmatic concerns like the availability of workers should take precedence over ideology

in studies of Sicilian intercultural concerns, Herbert Marcuse might refute: "to impose

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[75] Dalu Jones, "Romanesque East and West," 283.
[76] Reilly, 45.
[77] See Tronzo, "Byzantine Court Culture From the Point of View of Norman Sicily;" Isabelle Dolezalek, *Arabic Script on Christian Kings: Textile Inscriptions on Royal Garments from Norman Sicily* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2017) for a discussion of how the Arabic inscriptions in Sicilian textiles demonstrated unique tendencies and styles for writing Arabic, with limited Fatimid influence.

Reason upon an entire society is a paradoxical and scandalous idea."[78] Subversive

religions "are rather the ceremonial part of practical behaviorism, it's harmless negation,

and are quickly digested by the status quo as part of a healthy diet."[79] As such, Sicilian

Muslims artisans played an essential role in the Norman imaginary and chase for

ambition and prestige.

The jarā'id remain our most valuable source for naming and identifying the

Muslim community of Sicily after the Norman conquest and establishment of the

Kingdom of Sicily. Greek administrators compiled these registers in Arabic (and often

with Greek transliteration) to record the population for efficient taxation by the Norman

aristocracy. The *jizya*, a tax named after Muslim administrative taxation of People of the

Book, included taxation of ratib (established), nash (new generation), and tarīy

(newcomers) Muslims on the island with assorted standing and privileges.[80] Listing

Muslims and Jews with Arabic names, the jarā'id provide insight into the geographical

dispersion of non-Christian communities across Sicily. With such a wealth of census

information, it should be no surprise when Metcalfe suggests that "Muslims probably

comprised the majority of the population [of Sicily] until the 1220s."[81]

Additionally, and more importantly for this study, titles written alongside the

names of villeins with skilled professions, such *al-jannān* (the gardener) which "likely

referred to someone who cultivated land that could be described as a gardens or orchards,

a farmer of crops such as date palms or citrus fruits."[82] *Al-hammār* (the mule-driver), and

[78] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man,* 7.
[79] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man,* 14.
[80] Jeremy Johns, "The Royal Dīwān," *Arabic Administration in Norman Sicily: The Royal Dīwān* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 18.
[81] Alex Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy*, 142.
[82] Timothy Smit, "This Island of Many Natural Riches and Many Peoples: Geography, Population, and the Economic Identities of Norman Sicily" (Unpublished manuscript. 2014), 10.

al-qattān (a maker of cotton), appear with a rich diversified community of craftspeople.[83]

This large Muslim community provided vital industries for the success of Sicily's

economy like fishing, agriculture, and textiles as well as "skilled artisans, merchants, and

products for export."[84] These artisans and their products varied by households, titles, and

Sicilian heritage under the re-privileging project of the new crown and its bureaucratic

royal dīwān.

In the *jarā'id, al-harīrī* or (the silk-worker), *al-tarrāzī* (the embroiderer), and *al-jannan* (the gardener) are the most common professional titles listed for regions scattered

across the Sicilian hinterlands.[85] David Abulafia describes these silk-workers and

gardeners as part of "an accumulation of small-scale enterprises of great variety," which

for him somewhat devalues the significance of the Sicilian silk-trade, but for others

reveals the depth of Sicilian silk-production.[86] Indeed, the variety of silk industries under

Norman kings included urban workshops where eunuch pages worked as embroiderers

and dyers for luxury court silks which could be worn by those in court or used as

expensive and portable gifts.

While the majority of the villeins listed in these rurally focused documents are

Muslim, silk-labor was not technically limited to Muslims. Benjamin of Tudela gave

Jewish craftspeople a preeminent role in the Sicilian silk industry relative to the Muslim

silk-workers, writing that "[Jews] did almost all of the work in textile dyeing and silk."[87]

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[83] Ibid, 10-12.
[84] Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy,* 142.
[85] Smit, "This Island of Many Natural Riches and Many Peoples," 12.
[86] David Abulafia, *Two Italies, The Two Italies: Economic Relations Between the Norman Kingdom of Sicily and the Northern Communes,* (London, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 47.
[87] Benjamin of Tudela, "Letter from Palermo," *The World of Benjamin of Tudela: A Medieval Mediterranean Traveloque*, (Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1995), 282.

However, he witnessed very few cities in Sicily, and did not provide much detail, if any at all, on the estates in the Sicilian countryside, which the jarā'id most helpfully documented. Similarly, the Islamic dating on the inscription of Roger II's coronation mantle suggests that the court silk-workers, the most obvious example of urban silk workers, were Muslims.[88] Additionally, it is likely that Benjamin's reports are greatly exaggerated due to his focus on the Jewish communities during his travels and the Muslim workers mattered very little to him beyond his image of Sicily as an "island of many natural riches and many peoples."[89] Certainly, the presence of Jewish silk-workers does not contradict the assertion that Christians mobilized the artisanal traditions of non-Christian communities.

After the Norman conquest of Sicily concluded in 1097, the island underwent a major upheaval in religiopolitical power as the papacy sanctioned a new kingdom to be created under the authority of King Roger II, who intended to appropriate the Muslim community to legitimize his rule. Roger began a series of one-sided negotiations of agency with the Muslim community of Sicily. Paul Oldfield expresses how royal officials from Roger II's court appeared as a "consistent, but not overwhelming presence" in the urban environment and the "actual nature of their presence was not overly intrusive for the urban population."[90] This is a similar system to how the Aghlabid, Fatimid, and Kalbid dynasties practiced fairly loose control over rural Christian polities excepting an annual tribute. During periods of unrest, like the Fatimid invasion of Sicily in the early tenth century, many of these Greek Christian communities ceased payments due to a lack

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[88] Clare Vernon, "Dressing for Succession in Norman Italy: The Mantle of King Roger II," *al-Masaq: Journal of the Medieval Mediterranean* 31 (2019): Pt. 1.
[89] Benjamin of Tudela, "Letter from Palermo," 278.
[90] Paul Oldfield, *City and Community,* 94.

of direct control.[91] Yet, the central urban nodes of power and the rural communities of

Sicily did not exist in a vacuum of mutual exclusivity, and the presence of Norman

administrators allowed them to impress their will upon urban and rural regions across

Sicily and Southern Italy. The growing historiography of intercultural exchange, trade,

and power in Sicily provides rich engagement with the center of the Mediterranean. Yet,

alongside the authoritative projects of Johns, Metcalfe, Davis-Secord, and Smit, a great

deal remains to be said about the community and its skilled laborers. Silk workers played

a significant role in the Sicilian economy and in the Mediterranean trade to the extent that

Sicily became recognized for its production of silk.

Sicilian Silk

In the twelfth century, Mediterranean silk production and trade was not wholly

exceptional for Sicily, Egypt, or Tunisia (though regional variation exemplifies the

uniqueness of each) .The caliphate and emirates of the *dar al-Islam* brought silk and

innovative agricultural practices into *al-Andalus* and Sicily. Meanwhile, the Byzantine

Empire introduced raw silks and cloths to Sicily and sericulture to Calabria and Apulia.[92]

The demand for silk in the Mediterranean outweighed the production and supply and

drove the royally encouraged practice of sericulture and silk-weaving into Latin-Christian

held territory. A broad corpus of economic Mediterranean histories engage with the

questions raised by the evidence of silk-production in these various regions. David

Jacoby, in his work on the Mediterranean silk economy, offers the critique that

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[91] Chiarelli, *A History of Muslim Sicily,* 67.

[92] For demand, see Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 111-112; for the dispersion of silk production, sericulture, and exchange, see David Jacoby, "Silk Economics and the Cross-Cultural Artistic Interaction: Byzantium, the Muslim World, and the Christian West," in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 58 (2004); In Calabria, across the tumultuous strait from Sicily, Greek monks cultivated a wide variety of agricultural products including, but not limited to, mulberry trees and the silkworms who consumed the leaves. See Abulafia, *The Two Italies*, 36.

quantitative scholarship "fails to reflect the broad qualitative spectrum of silk fabrics and the wide social framework within which they circulated," and urges new scholarship to consider the "social, economic, and aesthetic variables" together.[93] In raising these concerns and suggesting new avenues for research, Jacoby's 2004 work helps to reimagine the deep historiography of the Mediterranean textile trade.

Scholars of the Mediterranean trade often consider the sericulture and silk industry of Sicily a prevalent yet inconsistent and non-lucrative endeavor. Alongside dominant trade goods like grains, fruits, and metals, Abulafia suggests that the silk trade, a relatively small-scale enterprise for the island, focused on unprocessed goods and that Sicilian silk lacked major significance as a Mediterranean commodity.[94] However, Abulafia undervalues the significance of the Sicilian silk trade by falling victim to the scarcity of the sources and neglecting a qualitative analysis of the records in a way that mystifies the experience of Muslim workers. While the scarcity of sources concerning silk manufacturing make the commercial value of silk difficult to trace, a wide range of references to silk in travelers' accounts, merchant letters, and geographies point to the relatively unexplored significance of silk production in Sicily and demystifies the role that Muslim workers played in the economy. Additionally, these sources rectify the common misconception that silk was not worked in Sicily before the Norman royal workshops.

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[93] Jacoby, "Silk Economics," 197.
[94] As an economic work of the nineteen seventies, *Two Italies* seeks to answer the 'Southern Question' which examined Sicily and Southern Italy as regions that had failed to follow the pattern of 'renaissance' in Northern Italy and France. As such, for Abulafia, the failure of the silk-industry supports his idea that medieval trends impacted the seemingly negative trends toward 'progress' of the region: Abulafia, *The Two Italies,* 40, 47.

Scholarship like Abulafia's has often overlooked the significance of silks outside of the luxury trade and royal production.[95] Low and medium quality silks encompassed the greater amount of silk production in Sicily than the luxury silks more commonly examined. Indeed, *al-harīrī* produced finished clothes and fabrics, not only for Sicily's inhabitants who travelers observed wearing silk veils and dresses, but as trade goods destined for Ifrīqiya in return for pepper and flax.[96] Unfortunately, the utilitarian purpose of such silks caused their wear and degradation over time and the material record only shows the luxury silks which were stored carefully or used sparingly for coronations.[97]

Evidence found in the Cairo Genizah suggests that silk, and the cheaper variety of silk called *lasīn,* were commodities commonly found in the cargo holds of merchant ships that made stops in Palermo.[98] While Abulafia has questioned the value of the silk included in these routes, records of purchase and merchant letters include the movement of raw silk and silk products from Sicily to regions across the Mediterranean. Their presence on these records and the presence of silk in France and *al-Andalus* with probable origins from Sicily point to an interest in the types of silk provided by Sicilian workers. One account sheet recorded a haul of hides and textiles that included one silk wrap, nineteen pounds of silk worth two-hundred and six quarter-dinars, and an

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[95] This conversation belongs in part to the "minimalist" versus "maximalist" historiography of Mediterranean trade in the early Middle Ages (8th and 9th centuries, including Muslim Sicily) and Michael McCormick's reimagined method for studying medieval economics. In contrast to Henri Pirenne's early twentieth century study of the Mediterranean that argued the spread of Islam into North Africa caused a stagnation in western Mediterranean trade, McCormick argued that non-luxury items—mainly foodstuffs— dominated trade in this period and that previous historians had overlooked such items in favor of luxury items as indicators for economic prosperity. See McCormick, *Origins of the Medieval Economy: Communications and Commerce A.D 300-900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 2-5.

[96] Davis-Secord, *Where Three Worlds Met,* 154-155.

[97] Jacoby, "Silk Economics," 205.

[98] Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders,* 112

assortment of gowns and blankets of undisclosed materials.[99] In another letter related to

the trade of Sicilian textiles, the writer describes a network of agents who understood the

complexities of the silk industry and were able to assist him with acquiring the most

amount of silk before his competitors exhausted the supply.[100] Additionally, Smit's

assertion that the *jara'id* records contained more *al-harīsī* than any other skilled

profession among Muslim Sicilians indicates the scale of silk production on the island.[101]

     The race for a limited supply of Sicilian silks and presence of silk textiles in cargo

records do not merely suggest a limited production of Sicilian silks, but a high demand

for the numerous types of silk that Sicily offered in various regions throughout the

Mediterranean. The writer of the previously mentioned letter, a merchant in Palermo

named Ya'qūb, demonstrates the potential for high profit and competition generated by

the desire for textiles including silk before the Norman incursions. In the letter, addressed

to Ya'qūb's cousin Yūsha regarding cargo and business relationships, Ya'qūb explained

> I added certain sums from my own resources to the price obtained and bought
> silk, lāsīn, farkhas, turbans, hides, and tin and sent you everything by boat… I
> sent you a bundle on account of our blessed partnership, it contains five bags of
> silk and lāsīn, and one of tin and copper… Three bags with silk and lāsīn for the
> partnership with my brother Elhanan are in the same bundle… [In another boat] I
> sent you a bundle containing five bags with silk and lāsīn… for my partnership
> with Elhanan, and four bags with silk and lāsīn… for my partnership with you…
> Had I not dispersed nufarriq (agents) for buying lāsīn immediately after my
> arrival, I would not have got a thing.[102]

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[99] Goitein, "Sicily and Southern Italy in the Cairo Geniza Documents," in *Archivio Storico per la Sicilia Orientale,* 67 (1971): 31-33.

[100] Ya'qūb, "Letter from Palermo" in *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders,* ed. Goitein, 114-5

[101] Smit, "This Island of Many Natural Riches and Many Peoples," 12.

[102] Ya'qūb, "Letter from Palermo" in *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders,* ed. Goitein, 114-5.

As a low quality, raw silk product, lāsīn required the mechanisms of sericulture for production, and demonstrates the wide variety of silk and silk-adjacent materials available to merchants through thriving trade.

The question of the trade skills required for producing silk has prompted scholars to examine the origin of the silk-manufacturing in Sicily, and many have pointed to the introduction of skilled laborers in 1147 as a starting point for higher quality silks coming out of Sicily. Indeed, early examinations in the historical field, guided by eurocentrism and the dated nature of the studies, saw scholars like Edmund Curtis speculating that "It was from Palermo that Italy learned the art of silk-weaving, as perhaps Sicily learned it from the Greeks."[103] While there are strands of evidence that suggest the importance of Greek (Byzantine) silk on the Sicilian trade, more documents point toward the influence of North African skilled workers on Palermo and Val Demone for the production of silk on the island.[104]

Between 827 and 996, two centuries before the Norman conquerors restructured the island's administration by reintroducing Greek administrators to the government and creating the royal *diwān*, the Aghlabid dynasty introduced mulberry trees and silk-workers to its environment.[105] Alongside the material required and the knowledge needed

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[103] Edmund Curtis, *Roger of Sicily and the Normans in Lower Italy, 1016-1154* (New York and London: The Knickerbocker Press, 1912), 399; while Italian silk centers relied on the majority of their raw silk products to come from the Eastern Mediterranean from regions controlled by the Byzantine Empire, connections to the Sicilian manufacture of silks remain questionable. However, speculation that Greeks— and not North Africans—taught Muslim Sicilian silk-workers to produce fine cloths does not hold continued credence in the historiography. See Jacoby, "Silk Economics," 201.

[104] The oft discussed Coronation Mantle commissioned by Roger II, while the inscription indicates that it was embroidered and decorated in Sicilian workshops in 1133, appears to have used red dyed silk cloth from Greek manufacturers or the silk workshops of Thebes. For Greek manufacturers. See Dolezalek, *Arabic Script on Christian Kings,* 4; For Thebes, see Jacoby "Silk in Western Byzantium," in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 84 (1992): 462-4.

[105] Jacoby, "Silk Economics," 200.

to produce silk cloth, the Aghlabids brought skilled laborers with the necessary experience to cultivate mulberry trees and convert silk strands into thread. They introduced new methods of irrigation and gardening (which included the introduction of new citrus plants and splicing fruit trees, among other agricultural novelties) that allowed for the growth of a new silk industry in the middle of the Mediterranean.[106] Further documents demonstrate that the Sicilian silk-workers produced cloth with various Arabic names before 1030.[107] To reiterate, Leonard Chiarelli, in an illuminating monograph that takes on the monumental task of surveying the Muslim history of Sicily suggests that "The development of the silk industry caused the Mulberry tree to be grown throughout the island. Its leaves were the main food source for the silkworm, making the tree an *important part of Sicily's economy.*"[108] Abulafia himself indicates, contrarily to his point about the value of Sicilian silk, the importance of Val Demone as a center for the production of silk cloth and carpets.[109]

Letters from the Cairo Genizah and an additional letter from the traveler Benjamin of Tudela indicate a deep tradition of sericulture and silk manufacture tied to Tunisia and Egypt. Benjamin points out that "people say that the silk industry here was begun when King Roger abducted skilled Jewish silk workers from the Greek lands, but in truth silk making is an old craft in Sicily and a traditional craft of Sicilian Jews. Silk was produced here under the Arabs."[110] Indeed, by the time of Benjamin's visit to Sicily in the 1170s, he added that "sericulture here has become very important. Sicily exports

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[106] For Mulberry Trees and skilled labor, see Chiarelli, *A History of Muslim Sicily,* 213; For the development of gardens and orchards in Sicily, see Smit, "This Island of Many Natural Riches and Many Peoples," 10.
[107] Jacoby, "Silk Economics," 201.
[108] My emphasis: Chiarelli, *A History of Muslim Sicily*, 217.
[109] Abulafia, *The Two Italies,* 44.
[110] Benjamin of Tudela, "Letter from Palermo," 282.

raw silk as well as silk fabrics, from Palermo and Masara in the west of Sicily and from Syracuse in the east."[111] Benjamin's report does not only undermine the suggestion that silk production in Sicily slowed under decades of Norman rule, but rather that it continued to be a lucrative industry.

Notably, scholarly focus on the highest quality, still surviving silks of the high medieval period fails to consider the use and wear of lower quality and lower thread count silks now lost to time. Low quality silks encapsulated the majority of Sicilian silk production and demonstrates the varying levels of skill possessed by the Muslim workers.[112] Trade hubs between large cities and rural estates that facilitated the distribution of silks destined for foreign and domestic markets reinforce the importance of a silks with a wide range of quality. For example, Girgenti (Agrigento) acted as a distribution center for the produce of neighboring regions, which would include the raw silk produced by rural communities with the widespread silkworms and mulberry trees.[113] Similarly, Ibn al- Idrîsî (1100-1165) describes the importance of Palermo's location as a port and agrarian hub due to its proximity to the *Caldo D'oro* (which had orchards with mulberry trees), and connection to the estates south of Monreale.[114] With these kinds of trade hubs and routes, there may have been a degree of separation between the urban and agrarian silk-workers, which in turn ties to the varying degrees of status and privilege they possessed.

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[111] Ibid, 282.
[112] Jacoby, "Silk Economics," 203.
[113] Abulafia, *Two Italies,* 38.
[114] Ibn al-Idrîsî, "The Book of Roger," *In Roger II and the Creation of the Kingdom of Sicily,* trans. Graham A. Loud, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 358-9.

When reimagining the study of silk-economics centered around the North African and Sicilian trade, the sources illustrate how previous limitations of quantitative analysis further neglect the many degrees of the cloth beyond top quality, or luxury silks. Benjamin of Tudela commented on the variety of silk available on the island from William II's silk workshops. In his letter on Palermo, he wrote that the varying degrees of silk changed after the abduction of North African silk-workers.[115] In 1191, Hugo Falcandus wrote a letter lamenting the "Sicilian Tragedy" and likely future loss of "brilliant" urban hubs like Palermo and Messina to Constance of Sicily (r. 1194-1198) and her husband, Holy Roman Emperor Henry VI (r. 1191-1197). In the letter, Hugo praised the beauty of Palermo, and among the many things he considered to demonstrate the "brilliance" of the city, included a list of at least four different qualities of silk cloth based on the strand count of their threads; that is, the *amita, dimita, triamita,* and *examita*.[116] Additionally, he paid special attention to how various adornments and colors threaded into the silk were "made to demonstrate the level of craftsmanship" for certain embroidered cloths.[117] Between these varying degrees of silk and the high demand for silk products from Sicily, the island had a well-established and continuous emphasis on silk production.

Skilled Artisans and Roger II's Prestige

As a well-established Mediterranean industry that included a wide variety of silk and skilled labor, Roger II recognized the value, economically and politically speaking,

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[115] Benjamin of Tudela, "Letter from Palermo," 282

[116] Hugo Falcandus, *La Historia O Liber De Regno Sicilie E La Epistola Ad Petrum Panormitane Ecclesie Thesaurarium*. ed. Giovanni B Siragusa (Torino: Bottega d'Erasmo, 1966), 178. The Latin terms for the varieties of silk can be translated as "one-stranded, double-stranded, triple-stranded, and six stranded threads"

[117] Ibid.

of adopting the silk industry for establishing the prosperity and power of his new kingdom in foreign regions. He established workshops in Palermo, commissioned the famous coronation mantle, and abducted North African silk-workers to expand the technologies and skills of the existing industry. Similarly, he re-privileged the hinterlands of Sicily in favor of Latin-Church officials and Christian lords, effectively demonstrating a plan that combined religious servitude with production and taxes that favored the crown. Examining Roger's operations and mobilization of an entire community for perpetuating his self-sovereignty in the Mediterranean network reveals how non-Christian silk-workers negotiated with Roger's successors for unique privileges and status within a system of religiously charged exploitation. Innovations inaugurated by Roger in the relationship between sovereign and silk-working subjects were later continued by his successors, with this mobilization of artisanal traditions during the Norman administration of the Island further emphasizing power and difference.[118]

Some scholars suggest that Muslim and Christian inter-religious exchange, at least that of Sicily and the Mediterranean, assumed religious neutrality or secular pragmatism as requirements for its existence. Isabelle Dolezalek, while investigating the significance of the Arabic script written along the edge of Roger II's coronation mantle, establishes early in her work that "religious neutrality—or at least a certain ignorance of original functions and meanings—is presented here as a prerequisite for the transfer of ornamental forms between Islamic and Christian cultures."[119] To a certain extent, Dolezalek introduces a thought-provoking question regarding religious interaction in

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[118] This is an idea adapted from the mobilization of non-Christian visual traditions in service of power and difference as presented in Cecily J. Hilsdale's "The Thallasal Optic," 30.
[119] Dolezalek, *Arabic Script on Christian Kings,* 1-2.

Sicily. This familiar paradigm, generated by its oversaturation in histories of medieval religious interaction, often leads historians to determine that Roger's decisions were "a product of the circumstances of his time" and consider the actions of Norman-Sicilians as secular or pragmatic decisions versus ideological or religious ones.[120] Certainly, when the majority religious population of recently conquered Sicily in the early twelfth century were Muslims, a small Christian aristocracy might make decisions based on necessity rather than religious difference.

On the other end of the same paradigm, rhetorically charged narratives of Roger I and Robert Guiscard's conquest of Sicily often display rigid relationships between Christians and Muslims in Sicily. For chronicler William of Apulia, religion motivated the conquest of Palermo in 1072 when Robert defeated the Muslim authorities "Where there was once the seat of Muhammed and his demons, he placed the throne of God."[121] Indeed, Roger II embraced imagery surrounding a divine right to rule that demonstrated an interest in presenting himself as a Christian ruler to the Mediterranean. For example, some historians have speculated that the lions subjugating the camels on the front of Roger's coronation mantle represent Christians dominating Muslims. However, there are not enough examples of camels in Mediterranean art to support this suggestion.[122]

Indeed, historians limit the spectrum of possibility by imagining these interactions as purely pragmatic or ideological and must consider new avenues of intercultural analysis. Studying a later Iberian context, Hussein Fancy cheekily points out that history of "religious transgression curiously has nothing to do with religion." He continues

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[120] Loud, *Roger II and the Creation of the Kingdom of Sicily,* 2-3 (circumstance).
[121] William of Apulia, *Geste,* 182-183. Quoted in Johns, "The Greek Church and the Conversion of Muslims in Norman Sicily?" in *Bosphorus: Essays in Honour of Cyril Mango* (1995), 135.
[122] Vernon, "Dressing for Succession," pt. 1.

asserting that rather than over-secularizing the past and letting modern liberal concepts inform our understanding of medieval *mentalité,* medievalists ought to consider political sovereignty an extension of theology.[123] A paradigm of political theology rejects simply falling between two extremes into a gray area of the established spectrum, and encourages historians to reimagine the complex layers of political necessity and religious belief as hybrid components of medieval authority. In the case of the Kingdom of Sicily, Fancy's paradigm points to a potential reason for confusion surrounding Norman-Sicilian authority. Rather than rejecting ideological decision making, as many have suggested, or basing their kingdom's policies on secular necessity; Roger II and his successors performed political sovereignty through the projected religious servitude of Sicily's Muslim silk workers.

Fig 2. Mantle of Roger II of Sicily. (Schatzkammer, WS XIII 14.)

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[123] Fancy, *Mercenary Mediterranean,* 68-72.

Visual cultures play a crucial role in constructing social relations.[124] And, due to the prevalence of sensory associations with silk, silk-workers performed an essential service for Roger II's court that established a relationship of skewed dependency between the Christian aristocracy and Muslim workers. It is evident that through the appropriation of cultural artistic and linguistic traditions, these Norman kings sought to emulate the Muslim world.[125] Indeed, the use of richly embroidered silks produced in the tirāz likened Sicilian kings to their North African Muslim counterparts.[126] Additionally, the Arabic inscriptions on Roger's coronation mantle and William II's alb demonstrated a certain command of Arabic North African script. This is not to suggest that the silks of the royal workshop were made to perfectly imitate textiles embroidered for ritual use in Muslim held lands, but that the use of silk itself and the appropriation of Arabic script allowed Norman kings to perform dominance over non-Christian communities for other Mediterranean powers. Ibn Jubayr, divided between the excitement for the proliferation of Muslim cultural practices and concern over what he considered to be practices of religious seduction, commented that William also ruled "in a manner that resembles the Muslim kings."[127] These Norman kings relied on the skills of local and foreign silk-workers to develop silk items for performative Sicilian prosperity.

Norman thirst for silk was so great, and performative prosperity so central to Sicilian understanding of kingship, that these two aspects of Norman rule influenced Roger's expansionary programs. In 1147, Roger II's repeated military successes in al-Madhiya, Thebes, and Corinth allowed him to pursue his Mediterranean plan to a greater

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[124] Hilsdale, "Thalassal Optic," 21.
[125] Davis-Secord, "Where Three World's Met," 178.
[126] Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy,* 149.
[127] Ibn Jubayr, *Travels,* 340, 341.

degree than the Normans already had in Sicily and southern Italy. After capturing these

cities, Roger abducted large amounts of skilled laborers, most notably the silk workers,

and sent them to his palace at Palermo. There, he used them to bolster the silk workforce

he already depended on for his court fabrics and ordered them to teach his subjects new

weaving skills that were being developed in North Africa. And, while there are no

existing looms in the archaeological record to testify for this, they might have built more

advanced looms for the King's workshops.[128] Interestingly, if the material for the

coronation mantle worn by these Sicilian kings came from silk workshops in Thebes, as

Jacoby suggests, the abduction and refusal to repatriate silk-workers from Thebes

emphasizes the importance of foreign workers for Norman imperial posturing.[129]

To Dolezalek's credit, she raises the question of choice in the Sicilian context and

how silk ornaments were "carefully adapted to suit local Sicilian needs."[130] However,

rather than assume secular prerequisites, Sicilian kings combined their political theology

with artisanal expression to establish their sovereignty. Eva R. Hoffman expresses how

mantles like the one worn by Roger II—and later Holy Roman Emperors—held political

and religious prerogative.[131] Together, when he donned the coronation mantle lined with

Arabic script "Roger's control and mastery extended to the language and culture of his

adversaries."[132] His appropriation of the cultural material tradition both suited Sicily's

needs and extended the reach of his posturing.

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[128] Jacoby, "Silk Economics," 227.
[129] A connection suggested by Vernon due to the high value attached to silk from Thebes, which prompted competition between merchants from Genoa, Amalfi, Venice, Gaeta, and Bari. See Vernon, "Dressing for Succession."
[130] Dolezalek, *Arabic Script on Christian Kings,* XVII
[131] Hoffman, "Pathways of Portability," 27.
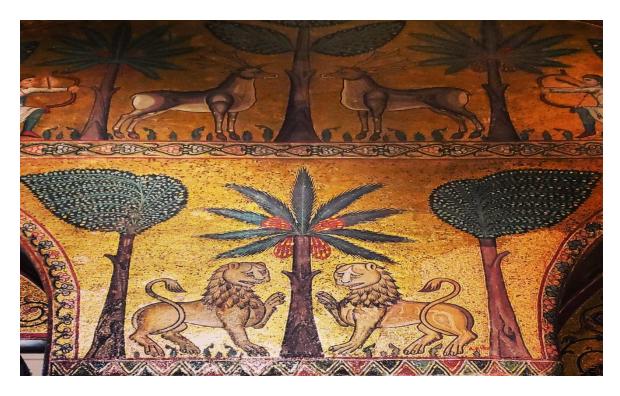[132] Ibid, 32.

Fig 3. Lions in the Capella Palatina. Mural. c. 1143. (Palermo: Capella Palatina)

For his coronation in 1130, Roger II commissioned the creation of a silk mantle from his newly established royal silk workshop that promoted the wealth of the kingdom through its adoption of Muslim artisan's skills. The workshop produced a mantle with pearls and golden thread for the images and a particularly notable inscription. The images on the textile include the tree of life, a common motif in Sicilian art that can also be found in murals in the Capella Palatina, two lions dominating and consuming camels, and the previously mentioned inscription, written in Arabic.[133] The image of the lion attacking the camel does not occur very often in European motifs, and many questions have been raised about its presence on this mantle. Dolezalek asserts that while the camel and its presence in North Africa has been suggested to have associations with Islam, there

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[133] The mantle can be found on display in the Secular Treasury of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna alongside coronation artifacts dating from King Roger II to Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II.

are not enough examples to clearly connect the two. Instead, the camel serves to represent

"bad rule" in Sicily due to the camels 'ignoble' associations with tyrants, usurpers, and

incompetent rulers.[134] Using Dolezalek's understanding of the depiction, it seems that the

Norman aristocracy had adopted Amatus' narrative that Ibn al-Thumna had requested

help from the Normans to bring 'stability' back to Sicily.

Roger II used his coronation mantle to establish the political grandeur of a king

with a successful and wealthy kingdom. The inscription along the bottom of the mantle,

written in Arabic in the form of a popular genre of poetry, reads

> Of what was made in the *Khizāna* (treasury), inhabited by happiness and glory, good
> fortune and perfection, and long (life) and merits, and welcome and prosperity, and
> generosity and splendor, and glory and beauty, and realization of desires and hopes, and
> delights of days and nights, without end and without modification, with might and care,
> and sponsorship and protection, and happiness and well-being, and triumph and
> sufficiency. In the city of Sicily, in the year 528.[135]

Roger's use of the workshop for self-promotion shows the utility that he harnessed by

'embracing' the skills and imagery of his new Muslim subjects. Johns has demonstrated

how Roger's appropriation of the Muslim community was a highly coordinated effort

used to influence court culture in his new kingdom.[136] Roger, as a self-fashioning ruler,

used the narrative of ignoble rulers to promote the seemingly firm, fair, and stabilizing

character of his kingdom. Ibn al-Idrîsî's dedication to Roger II in *The Book of Roger,*

honored the king's father as a nod to the legitimacy of the king's line. He wrote, "Roger,

son of Tancred, the best of Frankish Kings, conquered the principal towns of Sicily. and

with the help of his companions started to reverse the tyranny of its governors and to

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[134] Isabelle Dolezalek, *Arabic Script on Christian Kings*, 7-8.

[135] The Inscription of Roger II's Coronation Mantle, quoted in Isabelle Dolezalek, *Arabic Script on Christian Kings*, 9.

[136] Jeremy Johns, "The Arabic Inscriptions of the Norman Kings of Sicily: A Reinterpretation," in *The Royal Workshops in Palermo during the Reigns of the Norman and Hohenstaufen Kings of Sicily in the 12th and 13th century*, ed. Maria Andaloro (Catania: Giuseppe Maimone, 2006), 324–37

destroy their troops."[137] There certainly appears to be a relation in the rhetoric devoted to Roger II that suggests an association with the Sicilian Muslim lords and tyranny.

In contrast to these negative images of the previous Muslim rulers and with the replacement of religiopolitical power in Sicily, Roger II fashioned an image of himself that suggested to historians, like Haskins, that the kingdom was a 'modern state.' He projected a message to the urban elites of the Mediterranean that he had procured a kingdom tolerant to all faiths. Ibn al-Idrîsî reported how "he [Roger II] extended the benefits of his justice to the inhabitants; he respected their religion and laws; he guaranteed to them the preservation of their property and their lives, both to them and to their families and children."[138] Roger attempted to promote an image of a happy and glorious kingdom.

While the famed coronation mantle often rests at the center of this conversation, the question "by whom" takes greater priority over singular ornamental pieces. If Roger and his successors performed political sovereignty through projections of religious servitude with personal silk pieces, why could they not also project political sovereignty through the well-established silk industry and its workers? For example, Roger II promised that his successor, William I (1154-1166), would repatriate the workers and families he had abducted from Thebes and Corinth. However, William I acknowledged the importance of these foreign workers to the Norman sovereignty project (and perhaps his own comfort) and refused to return them to their homelands.[139] Additionally, Christian rioters in the 1160s, perhaps aware of the connection between royal silks and

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[137] al-Idrîsî, "The Book of Roger," 357.
[138] Ibid, 357.
[139] Jacoby, "Silk Economics," 227.

the exploited Muslim artisans of Palermo, both looted purple-dyed silk garments from the palace and murdered Muslim shop-keepers in the streets of the city during the succession crisis after the same William's death. The Muslim artisans of Palermo, not specifically silk-workers, were forced to flee the city to a nearby suburb.[140] With religiously charged persecutions such as this, the multifaceted story of religious difference informs the relationships between people.

The silk industry had such semiotic potential for Norman royalty that even urban topographies were manipulated to further express the prosperity and power of Sicilian kings. Metcalfe points out that the royal workshop's proximity to the court marked its importance for Roger II and his inheritors since it shared the elevated status of the royal mint and administrative offices. Additionally, the physical closeness of silk-workers and embroiderers to the king, demonstrated by Ibn Jubayr's encounter with the embroiderer Yahya Ibn Fityan in Roger's court "who embroidered in gold the king's [silk] clothes," provides a glimpse into William II's recognition of silk-worker status.[141] The status which, as William II's father demonstrated, was beholden to the king's religiopolitical authority.

Indeed, Norman kings appeared to enforce mental hybridity in their subjects directly in their charge. Yahya's role as an embroiderer in the king's court reveals this facet of silk-worker religious and political status within the immediate direction of the court. He shared a story with Ibn Jubayr where royal subjects, like himself and William's concubines and other pages, cried out for "God and His Prophet" to save them during an

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[140] Hugo Falcandus, *La Historia O Liber De Regno Sicilie*, 109.
[141] For the Embroiderer, see Ibn Jubayr, *Travels,* 342; For proximity, see Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy,* 149.

earthquake. In the story, William reportedly responded "Let each invoke the God he worships, and those that have faith shall be comforted."[142] This story provides specific reference to the religious experience of a courtly silk-worker, and corroborates Jubayr's discomfort with the blend of openness and manipulation that he considered religious seduction. Under the direct supervision of Christian court officials (Abd al-Massih feared informants) Norman kings could proliferate an image of cultural dominance by enforcing the subservience of a community they considered converted, yet somehow still counter to their faith. Jubayr regarded Yahya's contemporary Abd al-Massih, similarly interviewed in Messina, "one of their leading and most distinguished pages." Yet, even as a privileged individual in the king's circle, al-Massih lamented "we must conceal our faith, and, fearful of our lives, must adhere to the worship of God and the discharge of our religious duties in secret."[143] Jubayr reported that, as a result, Muslim royal pages relied upon the information and fervor of foreigners with shared religious devotion to maintain their connection to Islam.[144] The potential of the silk industry for Norman religiopolitical authority did not end at the walls of the royal workshops, however.

Sicilian urban environments proliferated sensory connections to religious communities, and the appropriation of fashion by the Christian community reinforced Sicilian displays of prosperity. By the latter half of the twelfth century, Sicilian silk garments demonstrated the adoption of sensory traditions in urban spaces that travelers associated with Muslim communities. Benjamin of Tudela noted in his letter from Messina how

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[142] Ibn Jubayr, *Travels,* 341.
[143] Ibid, 342.
[144] Ibid.

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Right now, Sicilians are marking a hundred years of Christian rule. Prior to that Sicily was under Muslim rule, and Messina still sounds and behaves as though it were a Muslim city. On the streets most people (including Jews) speak Arabic, and bands play Muslim music. Torchlight processions accompany weddings, and professional mourners accompany funerals in accord with Muslim custom. The Muslim women cover themselves completely and some of the older Christian women follow their example."[145]

This description of Messina provides a collection of visual and auditory experiences that Benjamin associated with Muslim culture. While Benjamin does not make any explicit mentions of silk here, the silk material for urban fashion trends such as veils and dresses are illustrated more clearly by Ibn Jubayr and Hugo Falcandus. Additionally, beyond a simply Muslim experience, he describes Messina as a city between faiths which, to him, encapsulated a uniquely Sicilian experience. Even Ibn Jubayr, who contrary to Benjamin commented on the lack of Arabic in the auditory landscape of Messina, pointed out how westwards, "the Christian women of [Palermo] follow the fashion of Muslim women… dressed in robes of gold-embroidered silk."[146]

Hugo Falcandus, after the death of William II, noted with a rhetorical flourish how "respectable women [in Palermo] wear sackcloth instead of silk" when political instability and the tensions between the Muslim and Christian communities had reached a boiling point under the pressure of invading Germans. [147] Should Hugo's poetic description of silk-robed urban elites be taken at face value? Or for that matter, was it common for the Sicilian upper classes to wear silk? It is worth noting that Hugo connects the reduction of daily use silk manufacturing with a Palermitan descent into poverty. Due to the reliance on Muslim silk-workers for domestic silk, it is likely that the actions of the

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[145] Benjamin of Tudela, "Letter from Messina," 278.
[146] Ibn Jubayr, *Travels,* 350.
[147] Hugo Falcandus, *La Epistola Ad Petrum Panormitane Ecclesie Thesaurarium,* 171. *matrone [in Palermo] pro sericis saccis indute.*

frustrated and oppressed silk-workers in the Muslim community reduced Christian access to silk clothes.[148]

The Norman project of performative prosperity bound to religious servitude also extended to the silk-workers of the rural estates. As previously mentioned, the Sicilian silk-industry included the many small-scale enterprises of the hinterlands which the Norman kings increasingly brought within the sphere of their religiopolitical authority. Key bureaucratic figures, like George of Antioch, led the royal dīwān's re-privileging of land to Church and royal officials.[149] Indeed, over time the royal dīwān tightened control around the villeins listed in the *jara'id*. By 1183, evidence shows administrators registering previously unregistered households. Registration, in this sense, tied households to specific estates. The Monreale jarīda of 1183 not only effectively registered 569 households of previously untethered villeins but referenced a decree that called for the return of all unregistered villeins to the lands with which they were originally tied. The registration of these villeins effected the Muslim community at large, and, consequently, allowed the Norman kings to tighten their reigns on the island's silk trade.

Registering the rural Muslim community made it easier to apply the *jizya*, or the tax only applied to Sicilian-Muslims, to artisans like the rural silk-workers. In a list of Roger's "good qualities," Alexander of Telese included that "[Roger] always understood better the revenues which had to be paid to his treasury, and from where they ought to be

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[148] It is unclear whether Falcandus either accurately predicted or was made aware of Muslim riots and flight from Palermo at the time when he wrote his letter in 1191. However, it is clear that he was aware of the social tensions between Muslims and Christians at the time.

[149] Johns, *Arabic Administration in Norman Sicily,* 91.

drawn."[150] Indeed, "from where" indicates an understanding of whom Roger taxed.

Propaganda from the list of good qualities commissioned by Roger's sister, Countess

Matilda (1062-1094), certainly proliferated an image of Roger and the Norman kings

intended by the court. Since these taxes did not require the payment to be made in the

exact coinage requested, payment occurred through service to the government; in other

words, tithes of produce.[151] And, due to the exceptional number of skilled villeins bearing

the *al-harīrī* title in the *jara'id*, silk-workers were the most common profession outside of

farmers who owed religiously charged service to the Christian crown. This apparent

justification made through enforced religious difference further allowed administrators to

tax and control the dispersion of the wide variety of silks made available by the Muslim

Sicilian community.

Notably, Latin Christian authorities of Sicily practiced some reluctance to convert

their Muslim subjects.[152] Despite efforts by the Greek Christian authorities to do

otherwise, Muslim suburbs and villages sometimes had guidance of an imam, and, did

their daily prayers and calls to prayer at a central mosques. Indeed, Ibn Jubayr

commented that most of the people whom he and his companions ran into between

Palermo and Trapani were Muslims, especially on the farms, but also in towns like

Alcamo.[153] Palermo itself contained many mosques, marked by their minarets, and Jubayr

points out that its Muslim inhabitants, including those in the Palermitan suburbs, came

"to prayers at the call of the muezzin." Yet, while they were allowed to practice their

religious ritual and calls to prayer, it is worth noting that the Muslim and Christian

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[150] *Alex. Tel.* IV, 3
[151] Johns, *Arabic Administration in Norman Sicily,* 14.
[152] Johns, "Conversion of Muslims in Norman Sicily?" 2.
[153] Ibn Jubayr, *Travels,* 350.

communities lived separated from one another.[154] For the Norman administration, retaining the Muslim population in lieu of encouraging conversion to Christianity marks the continuity of their twofold system of religious control and political-economic power.

While these suburbs and villages retained their connection to Islam, it is unclear to what degree they upheld connections with the greater community of Muslims from across the ocean in North Africa, Spain, and the Middle East. Beyond travelers like Ibn Jubayr and the reported astrologers and scientists encouraged to visit Roger's court, scant direct evidence pervades this discussion. Certain strands of evidence point to legal manipulation of social dynamics, but the motivations behind these shifts are not immediately clear. However, the nash status applied to new generations of Muslims in the jarā'id privileged them above their Muslim counterparts and may have created a social separation between new Sicilian Muslim families and those linked with Sicilian heritage.[155] By privileging new and foreign households perhaps the Normans meant to encourage immigration for more farmhands and skilled laborers in the Sicilian estates?

What did this mean for the silk workers and the silk economy of these rural and urban spaces? To a degree, a relatively high amount of security was afforded to foreign Muslim merchants and travelers, so long as they participated in the controlled public services of the king. Yet, shifts in patterns from the Norman conquests to the more deeply entrenched Kingdom of Sicily made the journey more restrictive, and even perilous with the potential of seized goods and property.[156] Through these systems, it appears that the barrier between the Christian and Muslim communities became less permeable over

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[154] Al-Idrîsî, "The Book of Roger," 359.

[155] Johns, *Arabic Administration in Norman Sicily,* 50.

[156] Gil, "Shipping in the Mediterranean in the Eleventh Century A.D as Reflected in Documents from the Cairo Geniza," in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies,* vol. 67, (2008): 283.

time.[157] State sponsored commercial depots and hostels, called fundaci, in Palermo,

Messina, and Syracuse allowed the Norman kings to maintain and regulate foreign trade.

Notably, while there were numerous fundaci divided between foreign Christian

merchants from places like Genoa and Amalfi, Muslims were separated from the

Christian merchants and funneled into a single hostel.[158] Such restrictions allowed

Norman rulers to maintain and direct trade between foreign and local Muslims.[159] Thus,

between the *jizya* and trade regulation, Norman kings retained some control over the

export of silk from silk workers not directly subject to the king like their royal workshop

counterparts.

Hugo Falcandus and Ibn Jubayr's reports of social dynamics appear to agree

that—despite the projections of interconnectedness on the island—oppression,

subversion, and conflict dominated the experience of Muslims in the latter part of the

twelfth century. Between the covert retention of faith and reliance on the connection to

foreign communities, Muslims in Sicily managed to retain an identity which connected

them to a broader Muslim community. However, the restrictions and overbearing legal

operations of the Normans exemplify the limitations on these social connections. Norman

religiopolitical actions encouraged the export of silks and trade but restricted the Muslim

communities' possible interventions in that system.

Were Sicilian silk-workers used by the Norman government of Sicily to generate

symbolic capital in the Mediterranean? As a key industry of Sicily, notably of the well-

known textile industry, the deep tradition of silk-weaving became a key method for

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[157] Johns, *Arabic Administration in Norman Sicily,* 4.
[158] Constable, *Housing the Stranger in the Mediterranean World,* 66.
[159] Davis-Secord, *Where Three Worlds Met,* 227.

Norman officials to generate symbolic capital in the Mediterranean. As a product described in the landscapes by travelers and merchants, the cloth adorning Christian and Muslim authorities, and symbol for Sicilian prosperity in the chronicles, silk performed multifaceted roles on the island. Norman mobilization of the silk-weaving community restructured the topography of the urban and rural environments and brought silk-production within the royal sphere on multiple levels. As such, Ibn Jubayr's description of Palermo, at least in part, was a product of the deliberate mobilization of artisanal communities in Sicily.

Part 3: Ambitious Landscapes

Gardeners, Irrigation, Architecture, and the Framing of Sicilian Prestige

In the eleventh century, Abu al Hasan Ali ibn al-Basayr wrote about the oranges

in the orchards of Sicily. He provided an engrossing account of picking the citrus off the

trees in a garden:

> Come delight in the orange you have gathered:
> it brings happiness with its presence.
> Let us welcome those rosy cheeks from off the boughs:
> let us give welcome to stars plucked from the trees.
> It seems that the heavens have poured forth pure gold
> which the earth has fashioned into shining orbs.[160]

The "golden" and "shining orbs" off of the limbs of the Mediterranean island's citrus

trees illustrate more than just one of the many food products of the island of Sicily, but

the value of the orange in the eleventh century Sicilian imagination. Ibn al-Basayr, like

many of his contemporaries, recognized the high status of the orange while comparing it

to stars, gold, and the heavens. The Sicilian orange continues to permeate even modern

perspectives of the island, as a collection of recipes and anecdotes covering "twenty-five

centuries of Sicilian food," (cleverly titled *Pomp and Sustenance*) notes the "Orange is

opulence: the ineffectual, useless opulence of the past."[161] Indeed, as evident in ibn al-

Basayr's poetry, the orange carried a sense of power and grandeur with it. However, the

colorful description of its "ineffectual, useless opulence of the past" undervalues the

overall significance of the orange and its orchard on the eleventh and twelfth century

perceptions of Sicily.

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[160] Abu al Hasan Ali ibn al-Basayr, quoted in Mary Taylor Simeti, *Pomp and Sustenance: Twenty-Five Centuries of Sicilian Food,* (Brattleboro, VT: Echo Point Books & Media, 2019), 59.
[161] Mary Taylor Simeti, *Pomp and Sustenance,* 63.

The oranges and the orchards that produced them are connected to a legacy of Muslim artisanal influence in Sicily. The rhetoric and images surrounding gardens, water, and the architecture of Roger's Sicily are connected directly to the skilled Muslim workers behind the development of these aspects of the urban environment. Why wonder at religiously interaction through the Sicilian landscape and gardens? The island provides one example from many nodes of interaction between political and economic entities guided by the facets of Christianity and Islam. The island is most well-known among historians of the Mediterranean for the foodstuffs—varieties of grains and fruits—that made up the majority of its exports. Sicily provided plenty of space, fertile land, and skilled agricultural workers for "intense production."[162] David Abulafia suggests that famine in North Africa forced the communities of the coastline to rely heavily, if not entirely, on Sicilian foods.[163] The production of grains included specialized products like noodles produced from rice in Agrigento.[164] These agricultural products of the island included the raw resources for a thriving textile industry that drew many of the Jewish traders whose letters can be found in the Cairo Geniza.[165] Alongside the intensive agricultural production that included unique gardening and farming techniques introduced to Sicily after the initial conquest of 827, the predominately Muslim fishing industry and two hundred years of cuisine under Muslim leadership sprouted the legend of Muslim cooks inventing *Pasta Con Le Sarde* (pasta with sardines) in Mazara.[166]

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[162] Smit, "This Island of Many Natural Riches and Many Peoples," 2.
[163] Abulafia, *The Two Italies,* 42.
[164] Idrîsî, "The Book of Roger," 360.
[165] See Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders.*
[166] Simeti, *Pomp and Sustenance,* 60.

During the Islamic period of Sicilian rule, Tunis and Palermo acted as the central hub for traders in the networks that prompted Priene to call the Tyrrhenian Sea a "Muslim Lake." In turn, Palermo's agricultural workers needed to provide a great deal of their famed products for ninth and tenth century merchants. In the twelfth century, the royal Christian authorities, in the wake of the Norman conquest projected their wealth by relying heavily on the Muslim farming communities that made up a great majority of the population on the island.[167] Urban markets provided a location where the boundaries between the rural and urban communities blurred.[168] The *Conca d'Oro*, a royally controlled and nutrient rich stretch of agrarian land nestled between Monreale and Palermo, contributed sour oranges, dates, and mulberry trees for nurturing silk worms to the trade network governed, taxed, and carefully administered by the king. Many of the techniques implemented for the cultivation of the orchards and fields along this shell-shaped stretch of fertile land came from the Muslim migrants and rural farming communities.[169] Roger II embraced the connection between these farming communities and established a royal network of agricultural to his urban interests, like the many workshops ran by Muslim artisans.

Though it is cliché to lament the fact that the edifices and landscapes of the past are not able to speak directly to the historian as though through text, the architecture and agricultural practices of Norman Sicily reveal much more about the relationship between ruler and ruled than this restriction seems to allow. Additionally, despite the limitations of archaeology and analysis of symbols; textual evidence reveals the value of buildings

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[167] Smit, "'This Island of Many Natural Riches and Many Peoples," 93-7.
[168] Oldfield, *City and Community,* 252.
[169] Smit, "This Island of Many Natural Riches and Many Peoples," 101-3.

and landscape on Mediterranean perceptions of Sicily. The gardens and architecture of

Sicily both demonstrated the power of Roger II and his successors' to other

Mediterranean authorities, and unveils the deceptively 'hidden' interactions between

Latin Christian authorities and their non-Christian subjects. The diversity and richness of

the island's agriculture and construction in the eleventh century has led historians to

identify the significance of Norman Sicily's relationship to the Mediterranean and the

wealth of its trade as a "crucial hinge of Mediterranean trunk routes."[170] Tim Smit offers

that "the location, landscape, and diverse population of the island, with its variety of

religious and commercial identities, contributed to Sicily's reputation as the richest

kingdom in Christendom."[171]

Despite the initial destabilization of trade due to the Norman conquest, gardens

helped inform the perception of Sicilian—now Norman—sovereignty. Indeed, for

premodern poets and travelers a garden might "reflect the ambition of kings or the ability

of a community to organize itself."[172] In *Islamic Gardens and Landscapes.* D. Fairchild

Ruggles establishes how gardens developed within the *dar al-Islam* held a multifaceted

role as both a symbolic expression of the "position of humankind" and a practical

productive space for nutritional needs.[173] As organized spaces of plant-life, water, and art,

the garden characterizes a human relationship with both nature and domestication.

Gardens are often situated in urban and suburban contexts, and while in the case of Sicily

the title *al-Jannat* may refer to an orchard laborer as well as a garden laborer, these

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[170] McCormick, *Origins of the Medieval Economy,* 502.
[171] Smit, "This Island of Many Natural Riches and Many Peoples," 2.
[172] D. Fairchild Ruggles, *Islamic Gardens and Landscapes,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), vii
[173] Ibid, viii.

orchards are often found in concert with buildings and innovative irrigation techniques. As such, gardens demonstrate a direct connection between pragmatism and emotion that often riddles the memories of medieval travelers.

With the growth of the *dar al-Islam* across Sicily, the Iberian Peninsula, and North Africa, trade brought both indulgent and practical foodstuffs, agriculture and irrigation techniques, and a dynamic range of symbolic meaning related to food, agriculture, and the related workers. After the Norman conquest of Muslim Sicily, the Normans retained the Sicilian habit of developing organized gardens in the urban spaces of the island. The gardens of Sicily did not take on entirely new forms under the Christian authorities; instead, they retained some motifs and connections from North Africa and the Middle East. The Muslim gardener identity became an aspect of Sicilian culture because gardening was "connected to the specialized agriculture introduced to Sicily by Muslims in the ninth century."[174]

It is evident that the movement of skilled agricultural workers and botanical treatises across the ocean between North Africa and Sicily encouraged the expansion of gardens from the central powers of the *dar al-Islam* to Sicily. Almanacs and manuals with agricultural instruction on appropriate propagation, pollination, and grafting techniques reached Sicily alongside the people familiar with the techniques described therein.[175] Books on botany and the gardeners familiar with the traditions and techniques (such as grafting branches of separate citrus trees) are found in high numbers in the records of the royal *dīwān*.[176] Similarly, alongside the race for textiles on the coastlines of

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[174] Smit, "This Island of Many Natural Riches and Many Peoples," 10.
[175] Ruggles, *Islamic Gardens and Landscapes,* 36.
[176] Smit, "This Island of Many Natural Riches and Many Peoples," 10; Ruggles, *Islamic Gardens and Landscapes,* 36.

Sicily, North African merchants carried books from predominately Muslim communities for sale in Sicily which included details on agriculture and irrigation that could not be found in Latin texts.[177]

Gardens and al-Jannan

Gardens, as a product of development between human and environmental factors, require the labor of gardeners for their production. Ruggles notes the importance of the signatures of masons for studying the architecture within or enclosing landscapes, and expresses how such signatures mark the cultural imprint upon such structures. The gardener, in the context of the relationship between human and environment, makes their mark upon a space that existed before them and would certainly exist after them.[178] In other words, gardeners expressed their own organization upon a space that might be cultivated without their influence. In this sense, the gardener's signature is left on the space that they interacted with, and as such, the gardens were perceived as deeply connected to their religious and cultural identity. In the case of Sicily, these gardens and their gardeners were inextricably tied to the Muslim community and the skilled agricultural laborers and knowledge passed through trade and legacy to the Norman authorities of the island.

To a certain extent, Sicilian gardens were one of many signatures left behind by the Kalbid and Aghlabid dynasties who preceded the Normans. The Normans adopted, or appropriated, such signatures and framed them to propagate their own socio-political expression. It should be noted that Christian authorities in Europe had used gardens to

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[177] Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders,* 115.
[178] D. Fairchild Ruggles, "The Landscape of al-Andalus: Water, Metaphor, and Materiality," Keynote Speech, Medieval Academy of America, (Virtual, April 15, 2021).

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portray their rule as beneficent and prosperous and demonstrate their God-granted

dominance of the environment. Charlemagne's peach orchards, for example, may have

been a means for signaling his "prestige and ambition."[179] However, travelers and

geographers more often compared Sicilian gardens to gardens throughout the *dar al-*

Islam, as can be seen in Ibn Jubayr's comparison of Palermo to Cordoba, and they are not

compared to the gardens nor the orchards in northwestern Europe by other travelers.[180]

Indeed, Garden farming appears to have been connected to Muslim identity in Sicily, as

when Frederick II expelled many people from the island's Muslim community to

southern Italy, garden agricultural practices slowed.[181] Muslim travelers had a tendency

to compare "the river landscape of Seville with the Tigris and Euphrates, or Baghdad

with Cairo, in one sentence praising both," and the comparison of these seemingly

disparate regions indicates an acknowledgement of a specifically Islamic legacy on

garden development in Sicily.[182]

The royal *dīwān* kept a close record of gardeners with the unique skills required to

cultivate Sicily's gardens. In the *jara'id* households and persons titled "*al-Jannan* likely

referred to someone who cultivated land that could be described as a garden or orchards,

a farmer of crops such as date palms or citrus fruits."[183] The title in the *jara'id*, as it tied

to the Muslim community of Sicily (as shown by the conflation of Arabic with Muslim

and non-Christian communities in Sicily), demonstrates the importance of an arabic

language title for the role of these garden and orchard working households. Their

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[179] Noah Blan, "Charlemagne's Peaches," 525.
[180] Ibn Jubayr, *Travels,* 348.
[181] Smit, "This Island of Many Natural Riches and Many Peoples," 10.
[182] Ruggles, *Islamic Gardens and Landscapes,* 4.
[183] Smit, "This Island of Many Natural Riches and Many Peoples," 10.

prominent presence in the records surrounding non-Christian communities in Sicily similarly demonstrates the association of Muslim workers with garden work. In Sicily, as the community was tied to the gardens themselves through their work, these places for leisure, opulence, and subsistence were used simultaneously to portray the Christian ruler's prestige and their command over the non-Christian community. Muslim authors of the period certainly shared the opinion that gardens could be used to demonstrate the prestige of a community in regions across the Mediterranean with the authors who wrote on Charlemagne's peaches and this association raises the question: how did the Muslim communities of North Africa and *al-Andalus* perceive Roger's appropriation of their agricultural techniques?

Under Roger II, Ibn al- Idrîsî, a court geographer related to ruling families in the Maghreb, wrote the *Book of Roger* starting in 1139 to provide the king with a compiled work of his routes and resources and an account of the world. The beginning of the book, containing more than complimentary praise of the king and the Normans, emphasizes the beauty of the gardens in and around the Sicilian capital, Palermo. Scholars often use *The Book of Roger* to characterize Roger's interest in arts and sciences, or a general pursuit of knowledge about the world. These intellectual pursuits may even be attributed to the Norman court of Sicily for the twelfth century in general, as demonstrated by Ibn Jubayr's familiarity with William II (Roger's grandson's) patronage of Arabic speaking scientists and writers.[184] However, Katherine Jacka offers that the *Book of Roger* contains enough detail about Sicily specifically that Roger may have commissioned the work for its strategic value, notably for knowledge to strengthen Sicily's economic assets and trade

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[184] Ibn Jubayr, *Travels,* 341.

routes.[185] Idrîsî's work certainly provided detailed descriptions of distance and marked

distinct features of the Sicilian landscape. In contrast to the descriptions of Sicily, the

intellectual mapping of regions beyond the island relied heavily on Ibn Hawqal's

geography from the ninth century, which illustrated mystical and incorrect descriptions of

spaces outside the more immediate 'view' of Idrîsî.[186]

However, when Ibn al-Idrîsî recorded the resources of King Roger's domain as a

tribute to the king, his recollections of the vast gardens in the suburbs of Palermo did not

inventory the kingdom's products and resources, but rather offered colorful descriptions

of the landscape that emphasized the power of the king. Idrîsî often notes how fields

along the coastal routes of Sicily are "perfectly cultivated," but neglects to name the

crops which are cultivated in those spaces. By illuminating Roger's landscape in

qualitative detail rather than providing quantitative lists of agricultural products, Idrîsî

inferred that the Norman rule had the divine favor of God. The quintessential Islamic

garden, as it were, became synonymous with the domestication of the landscape and

asserting dominance over the environment.[187] The palatial gardens, in turn, allowed users

and their gardeners to grow highly specialized fruits and flowers from the region to

demonstrate an even higher degree of organization and control over the space.

Idrîsî's descriptions provide a range of places with these "perfectly cultivated"

fields and gardens to be grown and admired. Palermo, Termini, Trabia, Brucato [Bû

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[185] Jacka, "The True Nature of His Lands'" 60.

[186] Nehemia Letzvion, "Ancient Ghana: A Reassessment of Some Arabic Sources," in *Le Sol, la parole et l'écrit: 2000 ans d'histoire africain. Melanges en hommage à Raymond Mauny,* (Paris: Société française d'histoire d'outre-mer, 1981): 429-437.

[187] Ruggles, *Islamic Gardens and Landscapes,* 39. While Ruggles is hesitant to provide such a narrow definition of the power relationship between authority and gardens, she admits that garden space in palatial and authoritative contexts certainly suggest a ruler's authority over the landscape, especially with the mixed emphasis on local and foreign flora, not to mention water.

Ruqqâd], Rocella [Sahkrat al-Hadid] (home to a large iron mine), Cefalu, Tusa, Messina, Taormina, and Aci all share mentions of gardens or "perfectly cultivated" fields.[188] This is to provide only a few examples of the coastal cities and settlements of the island with similar references to the land. Ruggles suggests that "a good garden [is] a sign of human successes, and productive landscape a sign of divine favor."[189] As such, al-Idrîsî's book provided Roger with a means of portraying his divine right to rule, as it were, through emphasizing the success of agricultural communities across Sicily. Among these regions, Palermo, Brucato, Messina, and Taormina all share specific references to gardens that demonstrates these regions' ability to generate specialized garden or orchard crops like grafted citrus trees, mulberry trees, pomegranates, and cucumbers.

Travelers to Sicily often regarded the gardens of Sicily with a sense of awe, alongside a prescribed familiarity with Sicily's garden culture. Benjamin of Tudela noted that Palermo and Messina were well supplied with gardens and orchards. He expressed how "Messina is beautifully situated in a country abounding with gardens and orchards and full of good things like lemons and oranges, almonds and melons."[190] As a Mediterranean traveler, Benjamin owed thanks to Ibn al-Idrîsî for the guidance attained through the geographer's book. To a certain degree, the direct reference to Idrîsî in Benjamin's work indicates the importance of gardens for an outsider's perception of Sicily as both geographers shared at least a fascination with the island's agriculture. Benjamin's familiarity with the text also reflects the dissemination of the book across regions of the Mediterranean as a guidebook for travelers, not to mention the likelihood

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[188] Idrîsî, "The Book of Roger," 359-62.
[189] Ruggles, *Islamic Gardens and Landscapes,* ix.
[190] Benjamin of Tudela "Letter from Messina," 281.

of its pages coming to the hands of the ambassador's and dignitaries of non-Sicilian courts. Indeed, when Benjamin noted how the silks and sounds of Messina resembled (to him) a "Muslim city," he included that the island struck him as a place with "many natural riches and many peoples."[191]

For the Muslim communities of Sicily, *al-Andalus*, and north Africa, a sense of nostalgia and loss dominates a great deal of their rhetoric surrounding Sicily. Unlike the Jewish traveler Benjamin, these individuals regarded the gardens and architecture of the island with an emphasis on separation. Jacka suggests that Idrîsî downplayed the religious diversity of Sicily by only mentioning the presence of mosques five times and churches even less throughout the entire book. However, if Idrîsî was, as many scholars have argued, familiar with the standard geographic genre known in English as "kingdoms and routes" he more than likely also knew genres of poetry and nostalgia related to space. By acknowledging what is not directly stated in Idrîsî's text have scholars been avoiding assumptions about cultural difference that the geographer may have included implicitly? In his description of the suburban (al-Rabad) sections of Palermo, Idrîsî ties the "old town; called Khâlisa" to the previous Muslim rulers of the city: "where in the days of the Muslims, the Sultan and the upper classes resided."[192]

When Ibn Jubayr visited Acre on the return journey to *al-Andalus* from his pilgrimage to Mecca, he commented on the notable lack of gardens in the city. For Jubayr, the lack of gardens in the Christian-held city demonstrated the barbarism of Christian rulership and the neglect of the city's landscape. For Mediterranean

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[191] Ibid, 281.
[192] Idrîsî, "The Book of Roger," 359.

geographers, praising gardens is often used as a sign of a 'civilized' community.[193] Yet, when Jubayr visited Palermo in Sicily after being shipwrecked in Messina, he specifically mentioned the presence of gardens and greenery across the landscape, comparing it to a "Córdoban city."[194] As such, Roger II simultaneously demonstrated Sicily's prestige to communities across the Mediterranean while also demonstrating control over the non-Christian artisans behind the development of the island's urban and palatial landscapes. Córdoba's fall from grace at the end of the Umayyad caliphate in 1044 gives Jubayr's comparison between it and Palermo dynamic symbolism concerning the prestige of gardens and orchards. The connection between Córdoba and Palermo raises valuable questions concerning the memory and perception of Sicily in the eyes of authors from the *dar al-Islam*. Ibn Hamdis' poetry, for example, belonged to a tradition of memory and loss that one finds often in regard to the height of Umayyad power in *al-Andalus*. His focus on Sicily, however, reveals how the tradition could be applied to a wider range of places and space. Ibn Hamdis' nostalgia for the Sicilian landscape is reminiscent of Abd al-Rahman's memory of palm trees shading the terraced gardens of Madinat al Zahra, the Córdoban Palace.

The Norman invasion of Sicily established a less permeable boundary between Sicily and North African communities, and the poetry and memory regarding gardens constructs an image of that separation. Indeed, the memory of Sicily is characterized by its gardens and their connection to the Muslim community, a construct redefined by Norman authority. The poetry of abd al'Jabbar Ibn Hamdis focuses heavily on descriptive and metaphorical recollections of his homeland. Having left Sicily around eighteen years

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[193] Ruggles, *Islamic Gardens and Landscapes,* 24.
[194] Ibn Jubayr, *Travels,* 348.

old, Hamdis resented the Norman invasion that prevented him from returning to Syracuse. His work contains many elements of memory and nostalgia familiar to those who have studied the motifs of Arabic neoclassicism. Ibn Hamdis wrote, upon leaving Sicily, "may abundance preserve for her the most glorious of praise/binding her to all the camels that traversed the wasteland." William Granara, in interpreting the three signature motifs of the poet's style argues that, for Ibn Hamdis, "Sicily, with her tantalizing proximity, intoxicating smells and lush gardens, becomes the abandoned encampment, departed from, separated from and longed for in the desert crossing."[195] Considering these feelings of nostalgia, the role of garden workers in Muslim Sicilian communities is revealed to be more skewed than beneficial for the island's Muslim communities, at the very least via their connections to a non-Sicilian Muslim community outside the island.

However, through the introduction of gardening and irrigation techniques, Sicilian Muslim skilled workers undoubtedly left their mark on the landscape. Ibn Jubayr, after shipwrecking and arriving in Messina, admired the produce and fruits of "every species" in the hill surrounding the city. Additionally, he found the extent of cultivation and luxuriance of its potential harvests remarkable.[196] As such, the already abundant natural resources and their skillful cultivation could be used for internal subsistence and for the exports that traders valued.[197] Yet, this aspect of Sicilian Muslim agriculture required the water resources for their intensive agricultural practices and the production of the opulent Sicilian orange.

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[195] William Granara, *Narrating Muslim Sicily: War and Peace in the Medieval Mediterranean World,* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019), 107.
[196] Ibn Jubayr, *Travels,* 339.
[197] Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy,* 65.

Irrigation Technologies

The enormity of irrigation projects required for the demands of tight garden spaces in urban environments called for large-scale and expensive endeavors that further expressed the power of eleventh century authorities. Before Roger II or any Norman claimed the lands of Sicily a kind of "Green Revolution" occurred in Sicily where new technologies, like innovative hydraulic irrigation systems, ditches, channels, and watercourses supplied the fields in the countryside and market gardens of the island.[198] Ruggles finds that court chroniclers in areas throughout the *dar al-Islam* presented how "a clearly broadcasted sign of beneficent sovereignty was the construction of a hydraulic system" serving gardens first, then farms and drinking fountains. Additionally, reckless use of water, which was possible in Sicily due to abundant water from the snowpack on mountain peaks, wells, rivers, and springs, was often used by Muslim aristocracy to display wealth and power.[199] While it may be anachronistic and ill-representative of the geography to suggest that Sicilians saw water as a commodity, a trait more commonly associated with water laws in contemporary twelfth century Yemen, these water projects required massive amounts of funding and labor.[200]

Due to its location, access to mountain streams, and temperate climate, Sicilian agriculture was not necessarily wanting for water in the twelfth century. However, the aridity of landscapes in the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa encouraged innovative agricultural techniques.[201] Certain Sicilian dialectic terms for ceramic conduits, channels, and artificial reservoirs like *gattuso* (from the Arabic *qadūs*), *saia* (*sāqiya*), and *gébbia*

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[198] Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy,* 64.
[199] Ruggles, *Islamic Gardens and Landscapes,* 26.
[200] Ibid, 24.
[201] Ibid, 21, 23.

(*jābiya*), demonstrate the tendency for irrigation techniques to be tied to Sicilian Muslims.[202] The *dar al-Islam* encouraged the spread of new irrigation technologies, inspired in part by Roman and Persian texts, that they used to rebuild Roman aqueducts, build new aqueducts, channel watercourses, and develop the *qanat* system, which used water from mountain dams to irrigate urban and specialized agriculture.[203] The *qanat* system uses underground canals that employ gravity to propel water from mountain dams to urban reservoirs and fountains and allowed for the introduction of new crops to Sicily from along new North African trade like the famed varieties of citrus fruits and date palms.

The *qanat* system is the most significant irrigation system introduced to Sicily during the reign of the Aghlabids. For Palermo, the mountainous environment of Sicily was well-suited for the *qanat* system, which allowed the urban and suburban ruling classes to build fountains, ponds, and even small lakes (see Favara Palace). The canal systems allowed for largescale rice cultivation in Agrigento alongside the more specialized and "high status" foods.[204] Idrîsî commented that the Sicilian capital's suburb had "canals with fresh running water coming from the mountains that surround this plain" in addition to watercourses and springs which "traversed the [the town] on every side"[205] With little concern for the availability of water, save for the geography and premium land required for the cultivation of the dates and oranges that required immense amounts of water, it became easy for Sicilian Muslim workers to develop the techniques

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[202] Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy,* 64.
[203] Ruggles, *Islamic Gardens and Landscapes,* 22.
[204] Nicole Boivin, Alison Crowther, Mary Pendergast, Dorian Q. Fuller, "Indian Ocean Food Globalisation and Africa," in *African Archaeological Review*, ed. Akinwumi Ogundiran: 549.
[205] Idrîsî, "The Book of Roger," 359.

that would inform the imagined starry oranges in ibn al-Basayr's poem. The irrigation and gardening techniques practiced in Palermo required a significant amount of skill and knowledge from the Muslim communities of North Africa and the Middle East to use. While some of the irrigation skills did come from Roman texts and botanical treatises from Greek and Roman authors, the transfer and employment of these skills required skilled laborers.

Framed by Architecture

Roger II's ambitious building projects highlight the replacement and embellishment of Muslim architecture in Sicily and the mobilization of Sicilian Muslim skilled garden workers. For example, the refurbished coastal castles and interior forts demonstrated both the military needs and the deliberate replacement of structures originally built by Muslim rulers.[206] More importantly for the exploration of the Norman-Sicilian landscape, new palaces, refurbished churches, and allocation of land for specialized gardens came together as essential aspects for the appropriation of art styles associated with Muslim identities. Images, rhetoric, and structure seen as "Muslim" by the Christian authorities contributed to the portrayal of Roger II as an imperial sovereign. When Roger became king of Sicily, he celebrated in part by transforming the Favara Palace, a suburban pleasure garden previously owned by a Muslim prince, into a 'summer palace.' Such projects characterize the deliberate appropriation of Muslim motifs used to demonstrate Norman-Sicilian sovereignty as Mediterranean rulers showed reluctance to accept the new Norman authority.

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[206] Jacka offers that while the *ḥiṣn* and *qal'a* are words for fortified positions that are difficult to interpret and divide from each other in translation, Idrîsî likely uses the *ḥiṣn* to describe secure and impenetrable fortifications built upon and refurbished from fortresses built on Byzantine forts during the reign of the Aghlabids. "The True Nature of His Lands," 81.

al-Idrîsî, at times, heaped Christian Palermo with praise as he became enamored

by the architecture funded by the same Norman aristocracy. He wrote, "The town is

endowed with magnificent buildings, which welcome travelers and flaunt the beauty of

their construction, the skill of their design and their marvelous originality."[207] However,

fifty years after Roger's coronation, the position of the Muslim community did not seem

to be the one promised by the ruler on his coronation mantle, in al-Idrîsî's book (finished

in the 1150s), and in law. Norman rulers effectively disconnected their subjects from the

rest of the dar al-Islam by the 1080s and enacted a campaign of Latinizing urban Sicily

while appropriating Muslim and Greek architecture by converting mosques and Orthodox

churches to Latin Christian churches.[208] Indeed, Palermo's Cassaro (al-Qasr) district

provides a clear example of religiously charged refurbishing. Despite his heaped praises,

Ibn al-Idrîsî noted how "it is there [in al-Qasr] that the grand mosque is situated, or at

least the building that fulfilled that function, and which is today returned to that condition

in which it was formerly" that is to say, converted back into a Christian cathedral after

the building's supposed Byzantine legacy.[209] At the same time, a new Norman fortress

was built "at the highest point in Palermo" and was "composed of enormous blocks of cut

stone covered with mosaics" which included allusions to dominance over Greek and

Orthodox motifs.[210] This new fortress created a district separate from al-Qasr that

portrayed the transition of power and transformation of the city's authoritative hubs.

The Favara Palace, which boasted Roger's wealth through its immense garden

space and artificial lake, also contributed a drastic change to Palermo's suburban skyline.

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[207] al-Idrîsî, "The Book of Roger," 358.
[208] Davis-Secord, *Where Three Worlds Met,* 233.
[209] Idrîsî, "The Book of Roger," 359
[210] Ibid, 359.

Favara Palace, which stood south of Palermo in the Conca d'Oro across the Oreto river, represents one of many Norman building projects that likely employed the services of and skills of non-Christian artisans. Or, at the very least, the construction of the palace conveys the adoption of skills from Muslim skilled laborers to develop a pleasure palace and luxurious garden. The foundations of the palace, archeologists suggest, were built under the Aghlabid dynasty for a stone fortification outside the city walls in the late tenth century.[211] It is likely that the structure which the Normans would refurbish around the 1130s had originally been built for a Muslim administrator or governor of some kind, and scholars often attribute its construction to an emir called Ja'far II (c. 997-1099). Indeed, during earlier incursions into Sicily, Amatus of Montecassino noted a region remarkably similar to the Favara district in suburban Palermo where "the Prince [Roger I] received the delightful gardens full of fruit and water" while his knights profited from the ruler's reward.[212] The region surrounding this castle is repeatedly noted by travelers and visitors as rich with gardens and never short of water due to the Oreto river and its congruous canals.

However, the palace construct itself did not achieve the grandeur and status that made it worthy as a gift to the Teutonic Order under Frederick II until after Norman intervention. During the reign of Roger II, innovative channeling and siphoning techniques brought water from the freshwater spring that the palace and surrounding district are named after (*fawwara*) and pumped it into an artificial lake, or relatively large

[211] Rosa Di Liberto, "Norman Palermo: Architecture between the 11th and 12th Century," in *A Companion to Medieval Palermo: The History of a Mediterranean City from 600-1500,* ed. Annliese Nef; trans. Martin Thomas, 139-194, (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), 160.
[212] Amatus de Montecassino, *The History of the Normans*, trans. Prescott Dunbar and Graha, A. Loud, lib. 6, chp. 16. See Theresa Jäckh, "Water and Wealth in Medieval Sicily: The Case of the Admiral's Bridge and Arab-Norman Palermo (10th-13th centuries)," in *Wires* Water, vol. 6, no. 5, (2019): 8.

pond. The spring water's mountain origin required the construction of canals to bring the water into the area via a *qanat* system. This monumental task no doubt borrowed from the skills and techniques that informed the specialized watering, gardening, and agricultural traditions of Sicily in the wake of Muslim leadership and connections to North Africa. At the center of this body of water sat an island carved from the surrounding stone that boasted a luxuriant garden with vegetation fit for royalty, as it were. The direct rapport between the exterior environment of gardens, water, and the frame of architecture suggests a connection to "Mediterranean Islamic taste."[213]

Such "Mediterranean Islamic tastes" are undoubtably generated from associations of specialized gardening skills and the Muslim community of Sicily. The Favara district shared thematic similarities with its surrounding gardens and orchards. The Genoard, or Jannat al-Ard (earthly paradise), and Dattileto, or plantations of date palms, shared roles as from where Palermo's rulers earned many of their profits.[214] While the Favara palace would have been more of a drain on the king's profits due to the costs of such a large-scale endeavor, like its surrounding district and orchards, it represented the king's wealth and power. As not only a largescale project, but a demonstration of authority over the skills of non-Christian communities, the Favara districts presence on the edge of Palermo illustrates the value that Roger II and his successors placed with the skills of al-jannan. In other words, the Muslim Sicilian gardeners provided a service for the framing of Roger's imperial sovereignty that other communities and artisans could not.

The regions around Palermo demonstrate clear distinctions between Latin and Arabic toponyms that reveal more cultural signatures for researchers. For example, the

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[213] Ruggles, *Islamic Gardens and Landscapes,* 159.
[214] Jäckh, "Water and Wealth in Medieval Sicily," 2.

Admiral's bridge, which crossed the Oreto river in the forementioned Favara district in the southwestern hinterlands of Palermo, may have preceded the reign of Roger and administration of George of Antioch. The bridge, surrounded by gardens and date palm orchards on either side of the river, belonged to the royal demesne and was administered through the century of Norman rule by powerful members of court until Frederick II granted the gardens and farmlands to the Teutonic order of Palermo at the beginning of the thirteenth century.[215] While scholars have suggested that Roger's appointed admiral, George of Antioch, commissioned the bridge and earned it its name, more recent analysis of water resources in the region suggests an Aghlabid origin for the 'Admrial's bridge.' Theresa Jäckh suggests that the 'amir' or 'admiral' Jafar II, who was also reportedly responsible for the Favara palace, commissioned the bridge before the Norman invasion of Sicily. In turn, George of Antioch later refurbished it as a part of Roger II's early building campaign.[216] Regardless of the bridge's origins, the toponyms for water resources of Sicily could both suggest "religious, ethnic, or social affiliations" and mark the names of those "who had some sorts of rights or access to them."[217] The land itself, named after the Arabic word 'fawwara,' indicates the vestiges of Muslim influence on the region alongside its gardens.

The cloister of the San Giovanni degli Eremiti (Church of Saint John of the hermits) boasts space for a garden that blends nature with architecture. This church was converted and refurbished from a mosque during the reign of William II and demonstrates the deliberate lingering influence of Islamic garden architecture alongside

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[215] Theresa Jäckh, "Water and Wealth in Medieval Sicily," 6.
[216] Ibid, 6-7.
[217] Ibid.

the Christian transformation of Sicilian landscape. Framing a perceived 'Islamic' landscape through a Christian lens became a standard of Roger's dynastic reign. As the building projects of the Norman king combined the famed opulence of Sicilian architecture with imagery associated with their trees, gardens, gold, and silk, the emphasis on framing items and landscapes tied to Muslim identity in Sicily became more evident. Murals and the artwork found in the buildings further characterize this frame in the royal demesne as they took on wholly Christian significance through religiopolitical governance and Church control.

The Norman palace of Palermo, on its high foundations overlooking the city, provides one final aspect of framing these gardens that exemplifies the importance of al-jannan on the island. Murals across the walls and ceiling of the palace contain images of 'exotic' animals and hunters travelling through gardens with oranges and date palms. The importance, significance, and value of the gardens to Sicilian kings is no more evident than in these depictions of a paradise, that have trees and scenes inextricably connected to the Sicilian Muslim gardeners behind their cultivation. Without al-jannan and the skills and treatises they provided, the gardens that the Norman-Sicilian kings so prized would not have reached the level of grandeur, perhaps, that the Rogerian dynasty wished. In turn, the skewed dependence on Sicilian artisanal workers adds to the complex negotiations between the Christian rulers and their Muslim subjects, all aspects of the relationship that further complicate and contribute to Roger II's legacy in the Mediterranean.

Conclusion

Ibn Jubayr, a pious Muslim pilgrim and premodern travel writer, projected a sense of both fascination and melancholy about the Kingdom of Sicily in the 1180s. While reviewing the state of Islam in urban Sicily and finding its influence sparse when compared to what he may have read in Hawqal's tenth-century travelogue on the cities, Jubayr noted that a separated Muslim community attempted to retain the last vestiges of their religious institutions. He expressed how "The Muslims of this city [Palermo] preserve the remaining evidence of the faith. They keep in repair the greater number of their mosques and come to prayers at the call of the muezzin. In their own suburbs they live apart from the Christians. The markets are full of them, and they are the merchants of the place."[218] Jubayr warned his readers that the apparent Christian tolerance of Muslim rituals was an attempt at seduction to convert faithful Muslims to Christianity.[219] His nostalgia and warnings indicated the waning influence of Islam on Sicily in the late twelfth century. He arrived in Sicily after a series of riots and massacres in the 1160s that Christian nobility orchestrated to redistribute land held by the Arabic Palermitan elite.[220] These riots demonstrated the subordinate position of the Sicilian Muslims and while Birk would suggest that this was a sign of acting on insecurities with the authorities due to William II's young age and the imagination of the Muslims as a royal protected community, the Christian authorities themselves incited the riots.[221]

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[218] Ibn Jubayr, *Travels,* 348-349.
[219] Ibid, 345.
[220] Alex Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy,* 185.
[221] Thomas W. Barton suggests that regional authorities in the Crown of Aragon negotiated their political agency by competing for authority over non-Christian subjects whom they saw as a toll for legitimacy, power, and wealth. Using Barton's framework and the consistent though less than overwhelming presence of royal authorities in regions outside of Palermo, these Christian authorities acted on the legacy of Roger II and used the redistribution of land to assert their dominance over the Muslim community rather than

William II, the last of Roger II's direct line of succession, died in 1189 and the

absence of a direct successor caused a brief and violent succession crisis in Sicily. In the

1190s, during the state of political unrest following William II's death, the negative

portrayal of Sicilian Muslims intensified, and Christian mob violence reemerged.[222] The

violence against the controlled community and their response re-illustrates the

negotiations of agency and subordination that defined a rigid line of Christian dominance

and use of the Muslims as a projection of power. The Norman aristocracy came under

pressure from the Holy Roman Emperor Henry VI (1165-1197), the son of Frederick I

and part of the Hohenstaufen dynasty, who laid claim to Sicily through his marriage to

Constance I, one of Roger II's daughters and often referred to as the Queen of Sicily

(1154-1198). Tancred, a distant relative of Roger's who had been exiled for taking part in

the previously mentioned mob violence, was crowned king of Sicily by the Normans and

he turned his gaze to the coast near Messina to prepare for battle.[223] The Sicilian Muslims

saw an opportunity to renegotiate their agency and flee the violence of the anxious

Christian population.

The large Muslim exodus from the urban centers of the island to its mountainous

interior demonstrates the insecurity of the Sicilian Muslim population as Christian

polities vied for power and mob violence increased.[224] Hugo Falcundus, an author with

an internal view of the Sicilian court and writing under a pseudonym, recorded a letter

that had been sent to the archdeacon of Palermo. The letter lamented the divide between

undermining the power of the crown. Thomas W. Barton, *Contested Treasure: Jews and Authority in the Crown of Aragon,* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015).

[222] Birk, *Norman Kings of Sicily,* 265.

[223] Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy,* 275.

[224] Birk, *Norman Kings of Sicily,* 266-7.

Christians and Muslims as the German emperor and his soldiers conquered Southern Italy and began staging the invasion of Sicily. The letter explains that "it would be difficult for the Christian population *not* [my emphasis] to oppress the Muslims in a crisis such as this, with the fear of the king removed," and that "[the Muslim Sicilians] will do whatever they can in their wretched situation to surrender to the foreigners."[225] The Muslim community, which the sources that record these 1190s events lumped into a single 'Muslim Sicilian' identity, were seen as a separate entity that had attained more leniency after the death of the king. Thus, rather than a sign of the lost protection of the King, Christian communities enacted violence upon a Muslim community that they now saw as able to threaten the societal standard of Muslim oppression.

Birk relates the willingness of the Muslim community to surrender to Henry VI to the interpretation of the chronicler Roger of Howden that Sicily's Muslims had disagreements between separate rural and urban communities, but overall wanted a return to the "monarchical traditions which had governed the island for over a century."[226] However, these Muslim migrants in the mountain fortresses attempted to establish a new autonomous emirate-like community in western Sicily and later negotiated terms with the German invaders in 1197 that brought the migrants back into the monarchical fold.[227] While Birk considers the pragmatic concerns and points out the disagreement between several Muslim communities in Sicily, he does not address the possibility that these migrants were trying to negotiate out of their previous "wretched situation" when Henry

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[225] Hugo Falcundus, "Letter to Peter Concerning the Sicilian Tragedy," in *The History of the Tyrants of Sicily,* trans. Graham A. Loud and Thomas Wiedemann, (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), 255.
[226] Birk, *Norman Kings of Sicily,* 272.
[227] Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy,* 277.

VI established a new authoritative Christian power in Sicily. Yet, despite their best efforts to attain more autonomy outside of the urban Sicilian environment, the power of Frederick II, Henry VI's successor, brought them back into the "monarchical" fold as soldiers, and even retainers for the court.

In 1197, amidst the apparent chaos recorded by the authors of the time, Henry VI fell ill and died. After his father's death, Frederick II became the emperor of Sicily. The nobility of the divided regions in Germany pressed Frederick to return to Germany when he came of age to rule. Although he was by title the King of Sicily, he left the island in 1212 and did not return to Sicily until 1220, when he redistributed the lands of previously autonomous Muslim communities near Monreale to the Church.[228] Alongside the redistribution of land, Frederick II maintained a circle of Muslim scholars and administrators at Palermo, while also possibly planning the expulsion of Muslims that occurred in Sicily six years later.[229] In a manner of speaking, Frederick adopted the legacy of the previous Norman kings of Sicily and simultaneously redefined the landscape of the religious Sicilian experience by building upon shifting policy toward Muslims already in place.[230]

As a crucial aspect of Roger's legacy, whether deliberate or not, Frederick's court included black African retainers and separate Muslim administrators. Frederick self-fashioned, in a very similar way to Roger, to create an image of authority over the Mediterranean and beyond. Frederick's interest in maintaining a court came from a wish to project his authority, not only as the Holy Roman Emperor and King of Sicily, but as

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[228] Birk, *Norman Kings of Sicily,* 287.
[229] Davis-Secord, *Where Three Worlds Met,* 215.
[230] Ibid, n37.

the Christian leader of the known world, including 'the two Ethiopias, the country of the black Moors, the country of the Parthians, Syria, Persia … Arabia, Chaldea and even Egypt."[231] Just as Johns claims that Roger II's court used 'diversity' as a political strategy and how "ideology alone inspired the development of trilingual epigraphy,"[232] Frederick's appropriation of these groups of people from across the Mediterranean in his court came from his interest in projecting the image of an emperor dominating the world and groups perceived as antithetical to Christianity.

Paul Kaplan's work on the images of black magi in fourteenth-century art brings to light a thirteenth-century narrative about Frederick II's court and the strategies that he employed. As a method that shares the previously mentioned inclusion of many different ethnic and religious groups to assert his will on the people, his "Muslim enclave functioned as a repository for camels and other exotic beasts used by [him] to impress the populace while on the march across Italy and Germany" and the imagery associated with the emperor included black servants driving those exotic animals.[233] It is important to repeat that a great number of the migrants from North Africa to Sicily were "black Sudanese soldiers" and that many of the Muslim inhabitants of Sicily were descendants of these communities.[234] Frederick's court became so attached to this visage "that an impostor who appeared in Germany in 1283 (long after Frederick's death) used three black servants and a black chamberlain dispensing treasure as proofs of his imperial identity!"[235] As such, Frederick used his Muslim subjects as a community to proliferate

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[231] Paul H. D. Kaplan, *The Rise of the Black Magus in Western Art,* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985), 10.
[232] Johns, "The Arabic Inscriptions of the Norman Kings of Sicily," 332.
[233] Kaplan, *The Rise of the Black Magus,* 10.
[234] Chiarelli, *A History of Muslim Sicily,* n10.
[235] Kaplan, *The Rise of the Black Magus,* 10.

his identity efficaciously to the point that Mediterranean narratives tied him to having

black and Muslim retainers. By addressing the efficacy of Frederick's strategy, the reason

for Roger and Frederick's methodologies becomes immediately evident. Yet, the same

emperor began to expel the Muslim community from Sicily to the settlement of Lucera in

Southern Italy in 1226.

As early as the 1190s, there appears to have been an awareness amongst the

Muslim community of an incoming religious upheaval, evidenced by the mountain

revolts following William II's death. Wealthy merchant families began buying passage to

regions in North Africa and migrating to al-Madhiyya, Tunis, al-Andalus, or Egypt.[236]

However, many of the Muslim communities either chose not to, or were unable to

migrate like their wealthy religious brethren.[237] There is not enough evidence to

determine how many, or exactly who were able to escape the island before the re-forging

done by Frederick, but it is clear that members of the community might have been aware

of an impending shift in policy. The expulsion of Muslims from Sicily occurred slowly

over the course of twenty years and by 1246 there are few indications of continued

practice of Islam in Sicily.[238] Notably, despite the pressure from forces that pushed

Frederick to expel the Muslim community that he used to express his own wealth and

power, premodern historical memory continued to attach the community to him.

Giovanni Boccaccio, the author famous for writing the *Decameron* in the wake of the

plague in the fourteenth century, stated that Frederick sent the Muslims to the settlement

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[236] Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy,* 276.
[237] Davis-Secord, *Where Three Worlds Met,* 221.
[238] Some linguistic studies have connected the names and local dialects of regions in Sicily to the Arabic speaking communities of the past, but the studies provide mostly inconclusive results. Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy,* 294.

of Lucera as an "affront to the church."[239] Whether or not Frederick intended the expulsion as an affront to the pope, this invocation of the Mediterranean memory of Frederick shows how it would not come as a surprise to the author for the deceased emperor to plan another complex strategy projecting his status to the most important Christian authority west of Constantinople.

The papacy did not react well to their new neighbors. In 1233, Gregory IX sent a letter to Frederick regarding the "infidels" neighboring the papal states. He implored Frederick to be "the material sword of the faith" and to "drag" the inhabitants of Lucera to inquisitorial conversion "by means of terror."[240] It does not appear that, despite his promises otherwise, Frederick kept his promise to the pope to do so. By 1239, Gregory excommunicated Frederick implicitly due to the emperor's attachment to the Sicilian Muslims. Through this lens, it seems possible that Frederick used the Muslim community a final time as a tool for self-fashioning. However, in 1300, long after the emperor's death, the Angevin king Charles II attacked and sacked the settlement at Lucera and all of its Muslim inhabitants were exiled to North Africa or sold into slavery despite their descendance from a line of Sicilian Muslims.[241]

These self-fashioning kings, as examples of oppressive entities interested in expanding their image for the accruement of wealth and authority in the Mediterranean, provide valuable windows into the phases of religiopolitical change in Sicily. The

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[239] Giovanni Bocaccio, *Bocaccio's Expositions on Dante's Comedy,* trans. Michael Papio, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 453.
[240] Von Rodenberg, *Epistolae Saeculi XII* (1883), vol. 1, pp. 447-48, quoted in Birk, *Norman Kings of Sicily,* 308.
[241] There appear to be some remnants of the Muslim culture in regions around Lucera in the historical record. It is perhaps too reductive to say that the Muslims were completely removed from the region. However, the linguistic and cultural comparisons attaching these communities to Lucera are unclear and inconclusive connections, like those in Sicily. Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy,* n60.

Muslim community of Sicily attempted to negotiate its limited agency within the boundaries of these kings. They did not act as a 'protected' or privileged group that represented the royal authority of the island. Instead, they struggled within the context of both a communicative and paradoxical policy that favored artisanal workers while condemning their faith. Muslim artisanal communities in Sicily both signaled the Norman kings' ambitions and prestige, while also challenging and negotiating for a higher status in the king's court and Mediterranean memory. As always in the Mediterranean realm of study, it is imperative to recognize the nuances of the permeable communities, and the lack of incommensurability between religious groups. The urban environment of Sicily provided a space of exchange that religiopolitical authorities exploited for the development of invented identities of global authority.

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