“Reddimus urbem”: Civic Order and Public Politics at the End of Norman Sicily

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This article addresses the relationship between political change and political culture at the end of Norman Sicily. It argues that one distinctive feature of that culture can be brought to light through an examination of the events of the 1190s, as processes of political restructuring gathered pace under the Staufen. The article begins from Peter of Eboli’s *Liber ad Honorem Augusti*. This text depicts a Norman political culture with considerable space for public assembly and interaction between *populus* and king. This was a model which allowed different religious and linguistic groups to be constituted in direct relationship to the king, without the formal mediation of institutional structures. Indications of a distinctively Norman Sicilian “public sphere” can be found in other texts of the period. Peter offered this to Henry VI, as a model the Staufen emperor could follow to demonstrate the legitimacy of his rule.

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Where does Staufen Sicily begin?

Chronicles must start somewhere. In the 1230s, Richard, a notary of the town of San Germano, near Montecassino, was at work on what he described as "a chronicle of all the events which took place in the Kingdom of Sicily or in any place across the world, from the time of William II to the time of Frederick II".[1] Richard described himself as a son of the Sicilian kingdom (*regni filius eius sum*); thus his choice of Sicily as his focus is readily understandable. But he explained no further his choice of starting point—the death of William II, the last recognised Norman (Hauteville) ruler in Sicily. William ruled from 1166 to 1189; Richard's own date of birth is unknown but, as he is first attested as a notary in 1186, he must have spent his youth and young adulthood under Norman rule. Richard commemorates William II as an entirely good king: blessed by fortune, learned, disciplined, and just. Yet William faced a problem that could not be

[1] Richard of San Germano, *Chronica*, ed. C. A. Garufi [Rerum italicarum scriptores, vol. VII, pt. 2] (Bologna: N. Zanichelli, 1938), p. 3. On the chronicle, see Eduardo D'Angelo, "Stil und Quellen in den Chroniken des Richard von San Germano und des Bartholomaeus von Neocastro", *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken* 77 (1997): 437–58.

overcome even through pious prayers: his lack of an heir. Richard records that in his desperation, William built a cathedral dedicated to the Virgin—Monreale, a foundation without parallel in his own times—in the hope that the Lord would bless him with a son to continue his dynasty.[2] But the Lord did not.[3]

William's death ultimately gave rise to two competing claims to the Sicilian throne: that of Count Tancred of Lecce and that of Constance, wife of Henry VI, German Emperor. Both Tancred and Constance traced their claim through Roger II (d. 1154), William II's grandfather, and the ruler who had transformed Hauteville Sicily from a mere county into a monarchy. Tancred was the illegitimate son of Roger's eldest son; Constance was Roger's daughter (and

[2] Richard, *Chronica*, pp. 4-5.

[3] Richard implies a biblical parallel for this, making reference to Zacharias being struck dumb by God for doubting that his aged wife would be able to provide him with a son (Luke i.12–22). *Chronica*, p. 3.

thus William II's aunt).[4] The military dynamics of the ensuing struggle were complex and swift-changing, but by 1194 it was Constance and her husband who stood victorious.[5] In December 1194, Constance gave birth to the son who would ultimately become Frederick II. It was Frederick who ruled in Sicily while Richard wrote his *Chronica*.

Richard of San Germano had lived long enough to recognise that 1189–94 represented not merely a change of personnel on the throne in Palermo, but a reorientation of political relationships between the Sicilian kingdom and other Mediterranean and northern European polities. Modern historiography, however, has yet to grapple with exactly what changed in that crucial final decade of the twelfth century, as Sicily moved from a Norman monarchy to a Staufen imperial

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[4] See further Dione Clementi, "The Circumstances of Count Tancred's Accession to the Kingdom of Sicily, Duchy of Apulia, and the Principality of Capua", in *Mélanges Antonio Marongiu* (Bruxelles: Éditions de la Librarie encyclopédique, 1968), pp. 57–80.

[5] For Tancred's rule, see Christoph Reisinger, *Tankred von Lecce. Normannischer König on Sizilien 1190–1194* (Köln: Böhlau, 1992).

possession.[6] While the recent work of Jean-Marie Martin and Theo Kölzer has examined matters of administrative continuity over the longue-durée, our picture of political culture under a newly-minted Staufen regime is altogether more opaque.[7] For all that Henry VI and later Frederick II would claim emulation of

[6] An exception to this is Thomas Curtis Van Cleve, *Markward of Anweiler and the Sicilian Regency: A Study of Hohenstaufen Policy in Sicily During the Minority of Frederick II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1937). Cf. Antonio Marongiu, "A Model State in the Middle Ages: The Norman and Swabian Kingdom of Sicily", *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 6:3 (1964): 307–320. More recent works extend the scope of "Norman" Sicily into the thirteenth-century kingdom but without explicitly addressing the matter of continuity *versus* change: *The Society of Norman Sicily*, ed. Graham A. Loud and Alex Metcalfe (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

[7] e.g. Jean-Marie Martin, La Pouille du VIe au XIIe siècle (Rome: Ecole française de Rome, 1993); and T. Kölzer, Urkunden und Kanzlei der Kaiserin Konstanze, Königin von Sizilien (1195-1198) (Köln: Böhlau, 1983).

Norman models, the arrival of German emperors is not a straightforward story of continuity.[8]

The purpose of this article is to ask how that political transition occurred, and how it was understood, particularly within the island of Sicily. The view from San Germano was not the only perspective available. Richard's account of the civil war of the 1190s is framed in terms of a quarrel between counts, barons, usurpers, and emperor. He explains the outbreak of violent conflict at the death of William as primarily a manifestation of noble unrest and baronial ambition: "none of them wished to be equal to the others; they all began to contend among themselves to be the greatest, and all aimed at the throne of the kingdom".[9] Tancred secured power with a series of actions focused on the greatest in southern Italian society: he sent gold to Count Richard of Acerra; he

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[8] See Thomas Foerster, "Imperial Tradition and Norman Heritage: Cultures of Violence and Cruelty", in *Norman Tradition and Transcultural Heritage: Exchange of Cultures in the "Norman" Peripheries of Medieval Europe*, ed. Stefan Burkhardt, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2016), pp. 167–94.

[9] *Chronica*, p. 8.

used his sons to secure the southern Italian mainland against rebels; he ensured abbatial professions of loyalty. Richard was not alone as presenting the period 1189-96 as primarily a struggle among lords and powerful men. The Annals of Marbach, written in Lower Saxony, describe Henry VI's process of conquest: cities were stormed and taken by the emperor; Henry succeeded because he was able to capture counts, great men, their wives and bishops.[10]

Richard's *Chronica* serves to highlight two themes in the transition from Norman to Staufen Sicily, both deserving of more detailed examination. The first is how contemporary writers lined up Henry VI as a successor to William II, and how they squared the circle of the fact of a violent and prolonged conquest with the continuity claimed by the Staufen. Second is how those sympathetic to the new rulers of Sicily explained what it meant to rule Sicily.

Richard's model of politics, which might crudely be called "top down", was not the only way to imagine a new "imperial" Sicily. The rest of this essay focuses

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[10] *Annales Marbacenses qui dicuntur*, ed. Hermann Bloch, (Hannover: Impensis bibliopolii Hahniani, 1907) [1195].

on "the view from Palermo", embodied in the *Liber ad honorem Augusti* of Peter of Eboli.[11] Only when read next to an account of Staufen Sicily like that of Richard can one begin to discern exactly what is so distinctive about the politics of the *Liber*, and what it reveals about how Henry VI was being presented to a Sicilian audience in the mid-to-late 1190s.

The *Liber* is in fact a long praise poem; Henry VI is the Augustus of the title, whose conquest Peter recounts. The work is divided into three books: the first addresses the death of William II and the rise of the villainous Tancred; the second focuses on Henry VI's attempts to conquer Sicily; the third looks within the palace of Palermo after Henry's conquest, offering an irenic vision of a palace

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[11] For Peter's biography, see Gwenyth Hood, *Book in Honor of Augustus* (Tempe: Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2012), pp. 6-15. This article works from the translation provided in Hood's edition, hereafter cited as *LHA*. Hood's translation is based on the Latin text of G. B. Siragusa, *Liber ad Honorem Augusti di Pietro da Eboli, secondo il cod. 120 della Biblioteca civica di Berna* (Rome: Forzani, 1906). For a more recent edition, see Theo Kölzer et al (ed.), *Petrus de Ebulo: Liber ad Honorem Augusti, sive de rebus Siculis: Codex 120 II der Bürgerbibliothek Bern* (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1994).

and city in harmony, set within a greater imperial frame. It can be dated to the period between the summer of 1195 and the autumn of 1196, possibly with some later revisions.[12] Timing, however, was not on Peter's side, and the political currency of such a panegyric was short-lived. The *Liber* concludes by looking hopefully towards Henry VI's future reconquest of Jerusalem, but the Staufen emperor died in September 1197. The final months of his rule saw considerable unrest and rebellion in Sicily.[13]

Peter was firmly supportive of the Staufen conquest, depicting Henry VI as the only ruler capable of restoring "integra pax" to the kingdom. This view may have been influenced by Peter's connection to Henry's chancellor, Conrad of Querfurt, Bishop of Hildesheim, who seems to have acted as his patron. The *Liber* not only defends the legitimacy of Henry's claim to the kingdom, but also

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[12] See Hood's introduction, pp. 20–1, for a summary of this debate.

[13] See Richard of San Germano's entries for 1196 and 1197, *Chronica,* pp. 17-19. The unrest in Sicily is also recorded in German sources, e.g. *Annales Marbacense*s for 1196-7. I am grateful to the journal's anonymous reviewer for this reference.

denounces the terrible state to which Sicily was reduced under Tancred and his allies, which Peter holds up as further evidence of the illegitimacy of the Tancredine claim to the kingdom.[14]

The *Liber* survives today in a single manuscript (Burgerbibliothek Bern, Codex 120 II). The condition and quality of this manuscript argue against it being the presentation copy intended for either Henry VI or his Chancellor, Conrad.[15] Instead the manuscript probably represents an advanced draft.[16] Almost certainly

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[14] This is made explicit in the postscript to the manuscript, where Peter explains that he writes to confound the "Tancredines" (Hood, p. 360). See also Ivo Wolsing, '"Look, there comes the half-man!" Delegitimising Tancred of Lecce in Peter of Eboli's Liber ad honorem Augusti", *Al-Masāq* (2018): 1-15.

[15] Conrad is depicted twice in the miniatures illustrating the *Liber*: 144r and 145r.

[16] On the reception of the poem and Peter's other works, see Teofilo De Angelis, "Towards a Critical Edition of Petrus de Ebulo's De Balneis Puteolanis: New Hypotheses", in *People, Texts and Artefacts: Cultural Transmission in the Medieval Norman Worlds*, eds. David Bates, Eduardo D'Angelo and Elizabeth Van Houts (London: Institute of Historical Research, 2017), pp. 65–76, esp. p. 76.

its assembly and illustration were supervised by Peter himself. Historians have often mined the *Liber* for specific details about the Norman kingdom, or, just as often, for images of Norman Sicily.[17] What commentary the *Liber* has received in its own right has focused (broadly) on its panegyric function: praise of the Staufen, and particularly its construction of Henry VI as the heir who could fulfil the crusading promise of Frederick Barbarossa.[18]

This article argues that the *Liber* is most valuable precisely because it can tell us about Sicilian society in transition—a kingdom where a distinctive Norman political culture was being adapted for new Staufen rulers. It articulates a framework for presenting and legitimising Henry VI's rule in Sicily, in the immediate aftermath of the conquest. It can, moreover, be used to probe the

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[17] For example, Dirk Booms and Peter Higgs, *Sicily: Culture and Conquest* (London: The British Museum Press, 2016), p. 184, 223.

[18] For the crusading interpretation, see Dana Katz, "From Norman to Hohenstaufen Rule of Sicily. The Representation of Matthew of Ajello in the Liber ad honorem Augusti and the Church of La Magione in Palermo", *Convivium* 5:1 (2018), 66-79.

nature of politics in Sicily in the 1180s and 1190s, given Peter's comments about justifications for political rule and the politics of public space.

Peter's manuscript allows us to think more clearly both about the last years of Norman Sicily and about the political structures which followed it. Most strikingly, one can appreciate the sheer speed with which a legend of Norman Sicily as a distinctively well-ruled, well-governed, well-ordered kingdom began to circulate in the region. This is a characterisation which still has considerable currency today, in part the legacy of John Julius Norwich's portrait of Norman Sicily as a brilliant, but short-lived, "kingdom in the sun".[19] Even though (as seems apparent from the state of the manuscript), Peter's poem was never presented to either Henry or Conrad, the governing idea behind it is clear—it presents the Staufen mode of rule as a natural successor to that of William. In addition to asserting that the only legitimate line of inheritance runs through Constance, Peter also furnishes Henry VI with a claim in his own right. Sicilian kings, he argues, historically paid tribute to German Emperors; the invasion of Sicily thus

[19] John Julius Norwich, *The Kingdom in the Sun, 1130-1194* (London: Longman, 1970).

made Henry VI a successor to both his father Frederick Barbarossa and to Charlemagne.[20] Frederick II would later look to endorse a similar sense of continuity, perhaps most famously by having two porphyry sarcophagi, originally constructed for Roger II, transferred to Palermo, where they were used to entomb both him and his father.[21]

The *Liber*, however, does rather more than assert that Henry VI's rule to Sicily is legitimised by historical precedent and dynastic inheritance. It makes an ideological claim about modes of rule, establishing William II's reign as the last point of orderly governance in Sicily. William is presented as possessing the characteristics which made it possible to rule the island—characteristics lacking in Tancred—namely, the ability to regulate social relations and to control and order how politics operated in public. William II's death marks the end of an era, but it is also an era which can be revived, after a fashion, under Staufen imperial

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[20] *LHA*, XII, ll. 306-19.

[21] See Livia Varga, "A New Aspect of the Porphyry Tombs of Roger II, First King of Sicily", *Anglo-Norman Studies* 15 (1992): 311–12.

guidance. The poem, therefore, offers us a glimpse of those early and unstable years, when so much was staked on arguments of continuity. In this, it accords with the diplomatic evidence, which shows Henry VI not only reissuing the privileges granted by William I, but making provision for candles to be supplied in the palace chapel to commemorate the anniversaries of Roger II, William I and William II.[22]

Beyond showing us how Conrad of Querfurt might have wished for the Staufen in Sicily to be perceived, Peter's poem also reveals something about the conditions and assumptions which governed Sicilian politics in the last years of the Norman monarchy. It underlines the significance of public (and semi-public) space in later Norman Sicily—a political society which Peter knew, inhabited, and

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[22] Dione Clementi, "Calendar of the Diplomas of the Hohenstaufen Emperor Henry VI concerning the Kingdom of Sicily", *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken* 39 (1955), 86-225, no. 43; see also his "Some Unnoticed Aspects of The Emperor Henry VI's Conquest of The Norman Kingdom of Sicily", *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 36:2 (1954): 328–59.

most likely participated in. The *Liber ad Honorem Augusti* thus captures a peculiar dynamic. It is a praise-poem for an emperor, but much of the focus is not primarily Henry VI's virtuous or imperial qualities, but the way in which different Sicilian cities responded to Henry's claim: choosing to support imperial rule or to collaborate with Tancred's illegitimate claims.

Peter presents a world where established political frameworks fall into dysfunction where the ruler is incapable of pressing the population into order. The participants in the political machinations of the *Liber* represent a much broader group than kings and their barons and military leaders—it gives space to rumour, quarrel, civic rivalries. In that sense, the *Liber* has a "public" quality to it. This characteristic was not much in evidence when in Richard of San Germano re-told the events of the 1190s in the 1230s; however, it does accord with other texts describing the nature of politics in later twelfth-century Sicily.

Death in Palermo

The first book of the *Liber ad honorem Augusti* begins with a brief prologue, summarising the life of Roger II, the first king of Sicily. Peter is not much

interested in Roger's deeds as a ruler, but he is interested in Roger's three marriages and the offspring from those marriages. The prologue thus serves to introduce Constance, Roger's daughter, describing her birth and hence establishing the legitimacy of her claim, even before this claim becomes politically relevant. The narrative then leaps forwards, providing a description of Sicily at the moment of the death of William II, Roger's grandson, in November 1189. What is striking is the attention which Peter pays to a description of the city, identifying and naming the districts of Palermo.

On William's death, the neighbourhoods of the city are united in grief: the illustration accompanying this verse (98r) is labelled, possibly in Peter's own hand, identifying a number of distinct districts where the citizens were in mourning: the Royal Garden of Januardo (*Viridarium Genoard*); in the city itself (*civitas Panormi*); the Royal Chapel (*cappella regia*); the castle (*castrum*) and port (*portus*), as well as mourning in the areas of Ideisini, the Cassaro, Calza and Scerarchadium. It is the final four which are the most interesting in this list: as Pezzini has observed, each represented one of the four main areas of Palermo, with a distinctive character, demography, and population. Ideisini and the

Scerarchadium were home to Muslim and Jewish population (a fact reflected in Peter's illustrations), while the Cassaro and Calza (or Alza) were predominantly populated by Christians (both Latin and Greek).[23] The point Peter was making would be familiar to those who knew the city: grief for William cut across the religious groupings within Palermo. Even for those who were not familiar with the geography of the Palermo and the significance of these names, the same idea would be conveyed with the distinctive styles of dress depicted in the accompanying miniature. One might even, perhaps, position the text as providing a way for Henry VI to get to know his newly-acquired capital.

Peter breaks down Palermo into distinctive areas, according to both geography and demography, reflecting what seems to have been the reality on

[23] Elena Pezzini, "Palermo in the Twelfth Century: Transformations in Forma Urbis", in *A Companion to Medieval Palermo: The History of a Mediterranean City from 600 to 1500*, ed. Annliese Nef (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 195–232, here at p. 213.

the ground.[24] Palermo serves as Sicily writ small, precisely because it contains multiple kinds of people. The same point is underlined in the illustrations to the scene of William's death and illness, where Peter identifies, distinctly, the *domini curie* (lords of the court), the *comites et barones*, and the *populus Panormi*. Each of these groups is assembled separately, according to status, but are united in their love for a great Norman monarch. So too in the miniature depicting William's court at the moment the king lies dying: the illustrator shows both Muslim and Christian figures present in inside the royal palace. These groups, though united in grief, are separated on the page: occupying distinct spaces, divided by the arches of the palace complex. It is an image which emphasises

[24] William Tronzo, "The Artistic Culture of Twelfth-Century Sicily, with a focus on Palermo", in *Sicily and the Mediterranean: Migration, Exchange, Reinvention*, eds. Claudia Karagoz and Giovana Summerfield (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 61–76. But for the limitations of Peter's topographical accuracy, Theresa Jäckh, "Space and Place in Norman Palermo", in Urban Dynamics and Transcultural Communication in Medieval Sicily, eds. Theresa Jäckh and Mona Kirsch (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2017), 69.

ordering of communities within the kingdom. The model on show here is not one of syncretism and blending of cultures, but rather a society which achieves a regulated measure of unity through the person of the king.

What Peter presents is a society united in mourning, but not a homogenous one—each group mourns the death of William according to their station in life: "those who lie in cradles, those who rely on middle-aged strength/the aged, who go about with walking sticks;/They all lament throughout neighbourhoods, the streets and in lofty palaces (*per loca, per vicos, per celsa palacia plorant*)".[25] These early *particulae*, however, represent almost the last moment in the text when the reader encounters a Sicilian city which is united, and where there is urban order and agreement—at a moment of public mourning for the last "legitimate" king whom the later Staufen emperor would recognise.[26]

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[25] *LHA*, III, ll. 64-6.

[26] Although Peter does not describe it as such, it seems that there was a ceremonial component of public mourning at the death of Sicilian kings. The History of "Hugo Falcandus" describes

It is far from unusual, of course, to find a medieval ruler (or those writing for him) drawing a direct connection between their own governance and a point of political stability in the immediate past. But what is striking about Peter of Eboli's construction of Staufen imperial rule as continuity with Norman monarchy is the fact he anchors this in the *populus*. The city-space of the kingdom is far from incidental or mere backdrop—it is the proving ground for showing how good order was disrupted in the Tancredine interregnum. Peter goes as far as merging the identity of citizens and towns. As Henry inspects Naples, for example, he "rejoices as he looks over the well-defended city/the walls and the

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assigned days of public mourning on the death of William I, during which women (particularly Muslim women) made processions through the city in a formalised public demonstration of genuinely-felt grief. *La historia o Liber de Regno Sicilie e la Epistola ad Petrum panormitane ecclesie thesaurarium*, ed. G. Siragusa [Fonti per la storia d'Italia pubblicate dall'Istituto storico italiano 22] (Roma: Forzani, 1897). This has been translated into English as *The History of the Tyrants of Sicily by "Hugo Falcandus" 1154-69*, trans. G. A. Loud and T. E. J. Wiedemann (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), hereafter cited as *Falcandus*. For this passage see XXV.

palisades, towers and men (*menibus et vallo, turribus atque viris*)".[27] Both men and constructions adorn a city; just as the walls must be in right order, so too must its citizens.

William's death marks the breakdown of both political order and social order in Sicily: "the city, its hand turned against its own breast, drank of so much blood/That no-one could tell it all".[28] Without the figure of William who—through his person—brought a unity to the various social groups of both the city and the kingdom, Palermo rapidly becomes a place of disorder. More than that, it becomes a place where there is no unifying ideology or sense of political principle: something reflected, in Peter's account, in the fact that not only was there disagreement over who should succeed to the throne, but there was disagreement over which qualities ought to qualify a man for the crown:

[27] *LHA*, XIV, l. 359.

[28] *LHA*, III, ll. 86-7.

"Each one sought for himself as a kind someone he knew for a friend./This one sought a superior, that one an equal (*hic se maiorem querit, et ille parem*)./This one asked a blood relation, that one sought a comrade./This one praised a lowly man, that one a warlike man./Each sought a king for himself, this man or that man;/The Pharisaical mind was not united in its choice./This one seeks Tancred, that one seeks Count Roger./What one seeks another denies, and what one denies another seeks (*quod petit hic negat hic; quod negat hic petit hic*)".[29]

Urban order, Peter demonstrates, died with William II. It is no longer to be found in Sicily. Instead, those looking for a model for good urban order must look to Rome—the scene of Henry VI's imperial anointing in 1191, which Peter also describes. This is one of the few occasions when Peter's narrative looks beyond the boundaries of the Norman kingdom. There is an obvious contrast drawn between the state to which Palermo (a place which should be "altera paradisus")

[29] *LHA*, IV, ll. 90-7.

has been reduced in the absence of a ruling principle, and the order to be found in Rome with Henry. In Sicily the streets are filled with blood; in Rome, by contrast, "the smoke of aromatic frankincense spirals everywhere".[30]

In the absence of the person of William II (or a legitimate successor), Palermo becomes a stage for violent dissent, disunity and the staging of irresolvable arguments. There is no recourse to a higher power, because the usurper Tancred woos the "vulgus", indulging their entreaties instead of governing and directing them.[31] That sense of urban disorder, dispute, disagreement is only resolved at the end: Henry—having triumphed in Calabria—crosses to the island of Sicily, and the effective end of his campaign is marked by the reception of a legation from Palermo announcing the city's loyalty to him. It is only the prospect of Henry as ruler which is able to produce a sense of agreement of opinion in the kingdom's capital city and seat of power. Thus the legates from Palermo convey to Henry "the thoughts of the people,

[30] *LHA*, X, ll. 260-75.

[31] See the illustration and text accompanying IV, f. 99r (Hood, p. 97).

their serene intent, the feelings of the young and the purpose of the old". They make their legation to him "with one voice (*ore ferrunt uno*)".[32]

At the very least, these moments reveal something about the way in which Peter imagined Sicily. Peter provides very little detail about the political structures of the Norman kingdom (he is rather more explicit when it comes to the division of offices and roles within the Staufen empire).[33] As presented in the *Liber*, Sicily, first and foremost, is a kingdom of cities, and one city in particular. Palermo represents the rest of the kingdom in microcosm. Henry's imperial conquest is really a series of negotiations with cities, and, indeed, with their citizens. The distinction between the two—city and *cives*—is repeatedly blurred because Peter makes no reference to the institutional structures which order might order civic life. Instead, citizens speak directly to their ruler. It is the *combination* of ideas here which is so striking: here we have an imperial text

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[32] *LHA*, XXXIX, ll. 1233-7.

[33] See, for example, book 3 of the *Liber* (the most heavily damaged section of the manuscript), depicting the order within the court – esp. f. 145r, 147r.

fitted into a Sicilian frame, with specifically Sicilian points of reference. There can be no simple transference of German political norms to Sicily.

On one hand, Peter's focus on the importance of local conditions and local negotiations reflects political reality: as Paul Oldfield has argued, the prevailing political conditions at the death of William II meant that the towns of the southern Italian mainland had already established considerable freedom in controlling their own affairs, and the exercise of royal authority in places like Gaeta and Salerno depended on agreement with respective urban leaders.[34] Indeed, after securing the kingdom, Henry VI had relatively little room for political manoeuvre, and could not abandon the accommodations which Tancred had made with southern Italian towns. On the other hand, however, Peter lays royal authority on top of urban communities, presenting an argument that civic life in Sicily is incomplete without royal guidance. He goes to great lengths to emphasise that towns cannot be ruled for themselves alone.

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[34] Paul Oldfield, *City and Community in Norman Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 121–35.

In the *Liber*, the only way for urban order to be restored is for the city to be given back to someone who is capable of ruling over it. Hence, in the second book, the archdeacon Aldrisio addresses the citizens of Salerno, advising them to surrender to Henry VI. Even here the role of the citizens is active: they have been persuaded to return the city to its rightful ruler: "now Caesar is near, now Caesar's weapons gleam/Now his banners shine, now his trumpet calls resound./Send messengers from among you to say, 'We give back the city (*reddimus urbem*)'".[35] We might see an echo of this in the evidence of Henry VI's charters for Sicily. Following the conquest, Henry paid special attention to renewing civic privileges, typically in the formula of "libertates, consuetudines, dignitates bonosque usus" as they had stood at the time of William II.[36] Peter's vision of the basis of Staufen rule—rooted in the public "assent" of each city—was a description of a potential strategy, and an understanding which Henry VI recognised, at least in part.

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[35] *LHA*, XXXVII, ll. 1161-6.

[36] e.g. Clementi, "Calendar of the Diplomas", no. 42.

A kind of public politics

Thus far, perhaps, the set of ideas about civic order and good governance on offer in the *Liber* may seem an assembly of fairly traditional standards of medieval thought. Indeed, one might suggest that Peter's focus on the civic dimensions of politics is essentially the product of a literary tradition. That much one might glean from Peter's classicising praise of Capua as "urbs antiqua, suis uberrima denique campis, mater opum, felix presule, plena viris".[37] Twelfth-century Italy saw a renewed interest in the composition of *encomia* and *descriptiones* in praise of cities.[38] Such *descriptiones* might take in the setting

[37] *LHA*, XXVII, ll. 773-4.

[38] J. K. Hyde, "Medieval Descriptions of Cities", *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 48:2 (1966): 308–40; cf. Paul Oldfield, "Alexander of Telese's Encomium of Capua and the Formation of the Kingdom of Sicily", *History* 102, no. 350 (2017): 183–200.

and climate of the city, any notable buildings, the virtues of its citizens, and its religious life.[39]

It is difficult to discern exactly which (if any) literary models in this tradition Peter might have known when he began composing his *Liber*. That question is further complicated by the uncertain nature of Peter's status and career. Though he is accorded the title "magister", this may have denoted medical learning, or alternatively simply his status as a professional.[40] It is possible that Peter the poet is the same as one "Petrus de Ebulo Iudex"—a judge. This identification is not by any means a secure one, although in twelfth-century southern Italy one would not be surprised to find a judge playing an important role as a guardian and keeper of local and civic traditions.[41] Regardless of the career one constructs for

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[39] The most popular of these and a model for the others, as Hyde notes ("Medieval Descriptions of Cities", 320), was the *Mirabilia Urbis Romae*, a work of c. 1143.

[40] Discussed in Hood's Introduction, pp. 6–9.

[41] If this was Peter's profession, it would not be an unusual occupation for a writer of historical works: Falco of Benevento, an earlier twelfth-century southern Italian chronicler, had also worked

Peter, one can say at the very least that he would have been exposed to traditions of civic praise from a variety of angles, and a tradition of civic autonomy which had remained relatively robust throughout the twelfth century.[42] The *Liber* is also peppered with references signalling Peter's understanding of the classical past: he makes a point of referring to Naples by its ancient name of "Parthenope".[43]

Thus there is a case to be made that all one may really take from the *Liber* is an understanding of the literary landscape of southern Italy: an example of what happened when Staufen imperial conquest was dressed in an ostentatiously classicising and "civic" robe. But it would be wrong to assume that

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as a notary and judge. *Chronicon Beneventanum: Città e feudi nell'Italia dei normanni*, ed. Edoardo D'Angelo (Firenze: SISMEL, 1998), [1133.3.3], p. 148. For Falco, see G. A. Loud, 'The Genesis and Context of the Chronicle of Falco of Benevento', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 15 (1993), 179–98.

[42] Oldfield, *City and Community*, esp. 263-5.

[43] *LHA*, XIV, l. 358.

the *Liber ad honorem Augusti* reveals only Peter's literary training and political loyalties; that this is merely a classical form grafted onto a Sicilian frame. Peter's language and choices reflect something particular about the characteristics of Sicilian political life and Sicilian political and public space in the later twelfth century. That is an argument reinforced by an examination of other texts of the period.

One of these texts is *The History of the Tyrants of Sicily* (*Liber de Regno Sicilie*). This is a work with a famously challenging textual history, and a long-disputed authorship (which I will not rehearse here). What can be safely said about it, however, is that it offers a depiction of Sicilian political life in the latter half of the twelfth century, focused on the later reign of William I and the early years of William II.[44] Setting aside the question of exactly when and by whom it was written—as far as that is possible—one must be struck by the fundamental

[44] For its composition, see the introduction of Loud and Wiedemann, pp. 42–50, and most recently on its authorship, see G.A. Loud, 'Le Problème de Pseudo-Hugo: qui a écrit l'histoire de Hugues Falcand?', *Tabularia* 15 (2015), 39–55.

parallels between the *History* and Peter's *Liber*, as far as both texts understand the relationship between public order, civic order and royal control.

The *History* and the *Liber* share several common assumptions about the shape of civic life. Foremost amongst these is that the character of a city determines the character of its citizens, and vice-versa. Some are disposed to be faithful, others to be faithless. The *History* employs this in the negative formulation, particularly when it comes to Messina: "this city was composed of immigrants, pirates and brigands. It held within its walls almost every type of human being, free from no kind of wickedness, rejecting no crime, thinking that nothing which it had the power to do was forbidden".[45] The most remarkable thing about the city is not the city itself but the people who make it up: Messina is a breeding ground for more Messinese of the same terrible type. Beyond a description of the cities of the kingdom, the *History* fundamentally accords with the vision of urban politics found in the *Liber*. While much of the *History* is concerned with intrigues and counter-intrigues in the royal court of the 1160s,

[45] *Falcandus*, XXXII, p. 156.

there are several moments at which its author suggests that matters of "politics" engaged a broad section of the Sicilian population.

The terms "public" and "crowd" cannot be applied indiscriminately when assessing these texts. The *History* uses a number of words to describe the "people" of Sicily and Palermo: *populus*, *cives*, *plebs*, *vulgus*, *turba*. But there is no evident pattern to the usage: while terms such as "vulgus" and "turba" have obviously negative connotations, "populus" and "cives" are sometimes used merely descriptively—"omnes cives panormitani"—and sometimes with suggestions of impropriety and plotting—"inter cives seditionis".[46] However, the overall effect of the *History* is to present the inhabitants of Palermo as a more complex and politically-aware group than a mere mob. Indeed, there are differing opinions within this collectivity; they have an appetite for political information. They are able to make it difficult for rulers and administrators to

[46] For these references, see c. XIII and c. XIX. As Oldfield has argued in relation to the southern Italian mainland in this period, the meaning of terms such as "civis" and "populus" was not fixed but fluid and dependent on context; *City and Community*, pp. 176–81.

regain control or to direct political action which is unpalatable to the public. The anonymous author of the *History* describes the febrile atmosphere and "public" dimensions of politics in Palermo on the eve of a conspiracy to kill one of the leading members of the royal court:

> "Darkness was now following the setting of the sun, and you could see the whole city paralysed by sudden and strange rumours (*totam urbem subitis incertisque rumoribus videres attonitam*), the citizens going about in groups, this way and that, and asking each other what fear it was that had suddenly stunned the city in this way. You would see some with their heads bent to one side, but their ears pricked up, forming little groups in the city's squares and proffering different and contradictory comments on the situation (*per plateas urbis conventicula facientes, varias super hoc dissonasque proferre sententias*)".[47]

[47] *Falcandus*, XIII, pp. 96-7.

There is a striking similarity to Peter's description of how unrest spread in Palermo on the death of William II. The *History*'s portrayal is ambivalent: there is a sense of effective, even to some extent informed opinion (*sententia*), and a population which listens for further information in order to make sense of what is already known to them. The location of these discussions remains to be considered, but one might note here the suggestion that the urban architecture of Palermo (*platea*—squares or wide streets) facilitated this kind of behaviour, became a natural place for the exchange of information.

The inhabitants of Palermo pick up on political information and have some capacity to debate it; forming opinions—possibly the wrong opinions—for themselves. The author of the *History* does not reckon this to be a good in itself, and explicitly recognises that there are times when this undermines the coherence of political power. On one occasion, William I lost his ability to keep order in the city and was obliged to permit the looting of certain houses

belonging to court figures, "since the mob could not easily be hindered from this".[48]

This statement should not be dismissed as merely an invective against mob violence. The *History*, like Peter's *Liber* describes the nature of Sicilian politics—as something which is at least partially open to public debate. We can see it not in Palermo, but in Salerno (a city which Peter considered perfidious for its Tancredine allegiance). Peter describes the entrance of Constance into Salerno, presenting the moment as a queen returning to claim her rightful inheritance. However, much like the scene at the moment of the death of William II, Constance's right to reign over the city is disputed—not by the lords, but by the *populus*. "How many people gather together and whisper with low voices (*quamplures tacita collecti voce susurrant*)!".[49] What we see is not necessarily urban disorder *per se*, but citizens who—in the absence of the right political framework—draw the wrong conclusions from their discussions. This becomes

[48] *Falcandus*, XIII, p. 98.

[49] *LHA*, XVI, l. 438.

more apparent when Peter describes how the Salernitan people encroach on the palace in where Constance has taken up residence, and decide to hand her over to Tancred.

> "They come together and speak of many things, murmuring low (*conveniunt, tenui murmure plura loqui*)./Goaded by evil counsel, the savage people of Salerno/atone for a sin with a crime, a trick with deception./They reckon that showing obedience [to Constance] is perjury towards the king./And busy themselves to pacify Tancred towards them./Thus now they surround the vast palace of the kings".[50]

As much as Peter despises the Salernitans for their loyalty to Tancred, he attributes to them some level of political awareness, strategy, and ability to act on counsel. Peter might reckon the people of Salerno to be full of deception, but he cannot deny the sophistication in their plotting.

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[50] *LHA*, XX, ll. 552–8. This is accompanied by an illustration depicting the crowd at 115r.

One cannot consider these Sicilian "publics" without considering the spaces in which they were acting, and the extent to which the form of those spaces may have helped shape their actions. The *History of the Tyrants* referred to the kinds of opinion that were formulated and argued over in the public squares of Palermo. That text also contains multiple examples of how the urban architecture of Sicily (and, in particular, Palermo), worked to give focus to expressions of anger and other emotions by *cives*. Indeed, those expressions could act as a check on the political actions taken within the royal court, i.e. decisions made in private. At the death of William I in May 1166, the *History* reports that the interim rulers of Sicily were obliged to resort to careful stage managing of events in order to contain the popular response to the king's death, fearful that it would result in rumours and chaos:

> "they were afraid that if a sudden rumour spread among the common people it would cause some disorder and ordered that he should be buried temporarily within the palace, pretending that he was still alive,

until they had summoned the leaders to court and made the preparations they thought necessary for the king's [i.e. William II's] coronation".[51]

Scholarly research on Sicily has often employed the metaphor of Palermo, in particular, as a "stage" on which the Norman monarchy was presented and from where its authority was projected.[52] One cannot deny that presentation was vital tool for the Norman kings, but it would be remiss to assume that such a process flowed only in a single direction. On the accounts of the *Liber* and the *History*, we might do better to think of that as a two-way conversation—where Norman projections of power were constrained by their public reception.

Moreover, while one can discern in both the *Liber* and the *History* the influence of Roman and classical models and reference to citizens, much of their account is rooted in a particular "Sicilian" urban context. The urban shape of

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[51] *Falcandus*, XXV, p. 138.

[52] Cf. Annliese Nef, "Norman Palermo: The Capital of a Kingdom or the Dream Scene of an Empire?", *A Companion to Medieval Palermo*, pp. 131–7; see also Jäckh, 'Space and Place', 72–9.

Palermo, and its relationship to the structures of the royal palace, made this possible—that "public" quality was embedded within the place from which Sicily was governed. This is most apparent when one examines the surviving evidence for royal audiences and royal halls.

The "publicness" of Sicilian royal halls (the *aula regia*, sometimes the *aula* or *sala verde*) is a point which has been touched on by Ruggero Longo.[53] The *aula* itself—something rather like an open-air courtyard—was distinct to Sicily, a product of the kingdom's eclectic architectural history. The significance of the *aula regia* as a political space is noted not only in the Latin *History of the Tyrants* but in the account of the Arab traveller Ibn Jubayr.[54] In Palermo (though such halls were found in multiple royal palaces), the *aula* served as a middle space—standing between the private rooms and offices of the palace and the city itself;

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[53] Ruggero Longo, '"In Loco Qui Dicitur Galca". New Observations and Hypotheses on the Norman Palace in Palermo', *Journal of Transcultural Medieval Studies* 3:1 (2016): 225–317.

[54] Ibn Jubayr, *Riḥlat,* ed. R. C. Broadhurst, *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1952), p. 347.

it was a place where people and officers could assembled (or be assembled) to be addressed by the king.[55] Such a space was unusual by the standards of medieval Italian and western European architecture; it was not a model which would be emulated in Frederick II's palace-building in the thirteenth century.[56] It was a space which was at least *partially* public: Ibn Jubayr recalls how William II could be seen there as he sat down for a meal with his companions, surrounded too by those who attended to business—officials and magistrates. In an earlier period for the kingdom, a similar function had been served by the Cappella Palatina: acting as a space for private devotion and liturgical ceremony as well as a public stage for display.[57]

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[55] Rosario La Duca, "L'Aula Regia o Sala Verde", in *Il Palazzo dei Normanni* (Palermo: Flaccovio, 1997), pp. 120–30; For its later history, Vincenzo Di Giovanni, "L'Aula Regia o la Sala Verde nel 1340", *Archivio Storico Siciliano* 7 (1887): 1–39.

[56] Longo, '"In Loco Qui Dicitur Galca".

[57] On this point, see Umberto Bongianino, "The King, His Chapel, His Church. Boundaries and Hybridity in the Religious Visual Culture of the Norman Kingdom", *Journal of Transcultural Medieval Studies* 4:1-2 (2017): 3–50.

The *aula* was not completely "open": it permitted the members of the city to come before the king, seek contact with him, but only on terms dictated by the palace. But the firmness of those terms and the established protocols for interaction could break down. At moments of crisis, a royal administration's ability to enforce the rules and terms of engagement within the *aula* could weaken—and management of the public lose a measure of control. This happened in 1161 when William I was grieving for the death of his son, Duke Roger. The *History* records that William was so overcome by his grief that "the gates of the palace were left open and unguarded; he would give audience to all who approached him in a gentle and friendly manner, thrusting his pain upon them".[58] It was only when William was brought to his senses—through the pleas and warnings of his bishops and counsellors—that the king once again took proper command of the space of the *aula* and his interaction with the public, acting once again as a king should: "he went down into the great hall which

[58] *Falcandus*, XVIII, p. 114.

adjoined the palace, and gave orders for the people to be called together there, since the place was big enough for a great crowd".[59]

Given these frameworks, it is perhaps no surprise that the *Liber ad honorem Augusti* should place such an emphasis on the "public" nature of politics in Sicily. Moreover, both the Norman *aula*—as we can recreate it from texts and archaeology—and Peter's *Liber* present a kind of public participation which was not mediated by institutional civic structures. The people assemble before the king and his counsellors; they are viewed as a common body as "cives" (although perhaps with some differentiation according to religion and status). The relationship with the crown is direct and personal.

The *Liber* and the *History* may lead us to conclude that there was significant space for "public" discussion in Sicily, but that was a space which could be dangerous and tilt out of control. Of course, such a conclusion leaves open a number of questions. The first is that of the identity of these *cives*.

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[59] *Falcandus*, XIX, p. 114. "descendit in aulam que palatio coniuncta erat, iussitque populum convocari, eo quod amplitudo loci capiende multitudini vulgi sufficeret".

Neither from Peter of Eboli nor from the *History* do we get any sense of who were included within this *populus*; how inclusive or exclusive it was, how vertically stratified, how horizontally divided.[60] The second question is the extent to which such "popular" participation extended beyond Palermo. This is something that may be beyond the proof of the surviving evidence for twelfth-century Sicily. Certainly, it would go too far to suggest that this kind of politics could be seen in every city in the *regno*. It may have been limited to Palermo on the island of Sicily, and Salerno on the mainland. These were cities of status and considerable complexity: the interaction between the royal court and urban population driving this process at Palermo, while Salerno's public politics may have derived at least some of its potency from the concentration of people and

[60] Chris Wickham has suggested that southern Italian towns like Salerno were less socially stratified than those of the north: "City Society in Twelfth-Century Italy and the Example of Salerno", in *Salerno nell XII secolo: istituzioni, società, cultura*, eds. Paolo Delogu and Paolo Peduto (Salerno, 2004), p. 24. See Oldfield, *City and Community*, pp. 188–92; 223-5, for the argument that southern Italian "elites" were not exclusively those who held noble status.

patronage in the schools there. Elsewhere in the *regno*, it is possible to distinguish something intermittently "public" about the politics of Benevento in the 1120s.[61] But—unlike Palermo and Salerno in the later twelfth century—early twelfth-century Benevento's public assemblies were dominated by religious ceremonies, brought into being by the presence of either pope or archbishop, and took shape around the discovery of saintly relics and moments of religious intercession and procession. The Panormitan public space seems less obviously demarcated by Christian points of reference, defined by a different set of boundaries.

A final question (one which I am only able to raise rather than resolve here) is whether we might reasonably apply the term "public sphere" to the

[61] *Chronicon Beneventanum*, pp. 52–107. I am grateful to the journal's reviewer for their suggestions about Beneventan politics in this period.

unique circumstances of late twelfth-century Palermo. That term is, one must recognise, a contested frame of reference for the Middle Ages.[62]

One of the problems here—beyond Habermasian arguments about literacy *versus* orality and the nature of medieval communications—is that as far as this term has been applied to (or reclaimed for) the middle ages, it has been in the context of Latin Europe (England, France, the Netherlands, Northern Italy). The models and structures advanced, and recommendations on where we might look to find medieval "public" deliberation have not been addressed to the complexities of cultural and political life on the shores of the Mediterranean. Carol Symes, for example, has exhorted medievalists to consider how the shape, layout and soundscape of urban space could foster the conditions for "public"

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[62] For the origins of the discussion, J. Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Berlin: Luchterhand, 1962). For medievalists' engagement with the concept: J. Masschaele, "The Public Space of the Marketplace in Medieval England", *Speculum* 77:2 (2002), 383-421; L. Melve, *Inventing the Public Sphere: The Public Debate during the Investiture Contest (c. 1030-1122)* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

discussion within medieval towns. The focus of Symes' study was Arras, where public proclamations, bell ringing, and gestures all went towards creating such a space.[63] Arras, of course, was a northern European town; the Panormian (and Sicilian) population inhabited a different world of civic ritual and civic space. Moreover, the "populus" of Palermo was altogether a different beast from that of Latin Europe: even in the later twelfth century, this was a body which could not easily be united under a heading like "populus Christianus". One suspects that the term held different resonances in the kingdom of Sicily than it did when used in France, England, or northern Italy. One might suggest that the Sicilian historian searching for a "public" or publics will need to begin from thinking about the public- and semi-public geographies laid out by a Norman monarchy; as well as the relative paucity of documentary evidence relating to twelfth-

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[63] C. Symes, "Out in the Open, in Arras: Sightlines, Soundscapes, and the Shaping of a Medieval Public Sphere", in *Cities, Texts, and Social Networks, 400-1500: Experiences and Perceptions of Medieval Urban Space*, ed. Caroline Goodson, Anne Elisabeth Lester and Carol Symes (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 279–302.

century Sicily.[64] The architecture and function of the *aula* should perhaps be our first port of call.

Conclusion

The question of what Henry VI meant for Sicilian history—whether he represented a dramatic change of course or merely the intensification of pre-existing trends—remains an open one. The Staufen invasion may have made the political culture more vicious.[65] The question of exactly how, and exactly how fast, Sicilian political culture changed awaits further research, as does whether we can rightly describe this as a process of "Latinization". At the very least, however, by the second quarter of the thirteenth century, Staufen power in Sicily and Southern Italy looked markedly different to what had gone before. Frederick II's

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[64] For an overview: G. A. Loud, "The Chancery and Charters of the Kings of Sicily (1130–1212)", *English Historical Review* 124, no. 509 (2009): 779–810.

[65] Stefan Burkhardt, "Sicily's Imperial Heritage", *Norman Tradition and Transcultural Heritage*, pp. 155-66.

building blocks were hewn from Roman *spoila*; his palaces markedly different in their layout and relationship to their cities from the places William II had ruled.[66]

Peter of Eboli was writing at the very start of Staufen Sicily. He offers to Henry VI a model to adopt: a relationship between ruler and kingdom which, civic and "popular", is premised on the ability of a king to unite a realm made up of different groups and different cities. Gossip, rumour and outright dissent, of course, were to be condemned, but nonetheless there was space for the right kind of public opinion to be expressed. The challenge for a good king was to keep that public within certain limits or ensure such discussions ran in favour of the ruler. One might even ask whether Peter represents a characteristically Norman Sicilian interest in delimiting the boundaries of public (and royal) space; especially when that space was occupied by distinct groups (religious and linguistic) who could not easily be encompassed within a single vertical hierarchy.

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[66] Jill Meredith, "The Arch at Capua: The Strategic Use of Spolia and References to the Antique", in *Intellectual Life at the Court of Frederick II Hohenstaufen*, ed. William Tronzo (Washington, 1994). See also Gary M. Radke, "The Palaces of Frederick II", in the same volume, pp. 179–86.

After 1194, however, the diversity of that public was diminishing, and the governmental structures into which Sicily was to be fitted were less sensitive to local variation—simply by dint of the size of the Staufen empire. Peter recognises this in his third book: Sicily is now part of a much wider group of lands subject to Augustus; a swathe of territory almost co-extensive with the globe, and which Conrad must now administer.[67]

By way of underlining this point, one might return to the text with which I began: Richard of San Germano's *Chronica*. What is perhaps most striking are the different modes of explanation Peter and Richard adopt to describe the conflict of the 1190s. Those different modes may be a reflection of the way in which quite differing local conditions compelled Richard and Peter to conceptualise power. Imperial authority for Richard was wedded to the ability to command aristocratic support. Richard sees the breaking of lordly oaths and great men rising in revolt out of desire for plunder. For Peter, fitting a Staufen

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[67] *LHA*, XLIX, ll. 1550–3. See the illustration at f. 142r, describing all the lands subject to imperial authority.

emperor into the role of a Norman king meant recognising the surpassing importance of interaction, in both formal and informal settings, with an urban populace. Norman power had only been possible when Norman kings recognised the necessity of managing urban politics. In the world of the *Liber*, civil war bursts out of unregulated cities: lords may squabble for power at the top, but the Sicilian kingdom is either made or dissolved from the bottom up. If that represented a theory of Norman Sicilian royal power in the late 1190s, it also came to represent a path not taken in Staufen Sicily.