

**THE NORMAN KINGS OF SICILY AND
THE FATIMID CALIPHATE**

Jeremy Johns

Offprint from
Anglo-Norman Studies XV
The Boydell Press, Woodbridge 1993

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First published 1993 by The Boydell Press, Woodbridge

The Boydell Press is an imprint of Boydell & Brewer Ltd
PO Box 9, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 3DF, UK
and of Boydell & Brewer Inc.
PO Box 41026, Rochester, NY 14604, USA

ISBN 0 85115 336 4

ISSN 0954-9927
Anglo-Norman Studies
(Formerly ISSN 0261-9857: Proceedings of the Battle Conference
on Anglo-Norman Studies)

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this series is available
from the British Library

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 89-646512

Printed in Great Britain by
St Edmundsbury Press Ltd, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk

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The de Hauteville rulers of Sicily were parvenus. Tancred, lord of Hauteville-la-Guichard near Coutances, had owed only ten knights' service to Duke Robert.¹ It was Tancred's inability to provide for his twelve sons that drove eleven of them south to seek their fortunes.² None of these eleven vaunted his patrimony, and it was left to their sons to adopt the style *de Altavilla*.³ The de Hautevilles hastened to add nobler blood to the line. The first emigrant generation tended to marry into the families of their leading allies in Italy.⁴ Only in the second generation did they begin to ally themselves with the royal houses of Europe.⁵ Thus, when Roger II had himself crowned king of Sicily on Christmas Day 1130, he had inherited from

¹ Geoffrey of Malaterra, *De rebus gestis Rogerii Calabriae et Siciliae comitis et Roberti Guiscardi ducis fratris eius*, ed. E. Pontieri, *RIS*², V.i, Bologna 1927–28, I.xl, 25.

² Malaterra, I.v, 9.

³ William, son of Geoffrey the fourth or fifth son of Tancred and Muriel, and a familiar and baron of Roger I, witnessed documents in 1091–1101 as *Guilielmus de Altavilla*: L.-R. Ménager, 'Inventaire des familles normandes et franques émigrées en Italie méridionale et en Sicile (XI^e–XII^e siècles)', in *Roberto il Guiscardo e il suo tempo. Relazioni e comunicazioni nelle Prime Giornate normanno-sveve* (Bari, maggio 1973), *Fonti e Studi del Corpus membranarum italicarum*, XI (Centro di Studi normanno-svevi, Università degli Studi di Bari), Rome 1975, 318–319. (Reprinted with additions in L.-R. Ménager, *Hommes et institutions de l'Italie normande*, London 1981.)

⁴ Robert Guiscard married first Alberarda, daughter of the powerful Apulian baron Giraldo of Buonalbergo ('Ceste choze fut lo commencement de accrestre de tout bien à Robert Viscart': Amatus, III.xi, 126), and then, in 1058, Sichelgaita, sister to the Lombard prince Gisulf of Salerno (Malaterra, I.xxx, 22; Amatus, IV.xxiii, 197; cf. F. Chalandon, *Histoire de la domination normande en Italie et en Sicile*, 2 vols, Paris 1907, I.154, n.2). Robert's brothers had already forged strong ties with Gisulf's family: Humphrey was married to the sister of Duke Guy of Sorrento, Gisulf's uncle, and William of the Principate had married Guy's daughter. Count Roger's third and most important marriage (1089) was to Adelaide, niece of Boniface del Vasto of Savona, 'famosissimi Italarum marchionis' (Malaterra, IV.xiv, 93; cf. E. Pontieri, 'La madre di re Ruggero: Adelaide del Vasto contessa di Sicilia, regina di Gerusalemme (?–1118)', in *Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi Ruggeriani (21–25 aprile 1954)*, 2 vols, Palermo 1955, II.328–330, and H. Houben, 'Adelaide "del Vasto" nella storia del regno di Sicilia', *Itinerari di Ricerca Storica* IV, 1990, 10–22).

⁵ Bohemond, prince of Antioch, married Constance, daughter of Philip I of France (Orderic, XI.12, vol. VI.70; cf. R.B. Yewdale, *Bohemond the First*, New York 1917, 110–111); Count Roger married one daughter, Constance, to Conrad, the son of the Emperor Henry IV (Malaterra, IV.xxiii, 101), and another, Busilla, to Coloman king of Hungary (Malaterra, IV, xxv, 102); and Roger II married Elvira, the daughter of Alfonso VI of Castile (Romuald of Salerno, *Chronicon*, ed. C.A. Garufi, *RIS*², VII.i, Città di Castello – Bologna 1934–35, 222; cf. Chalandon, II.105). In the next generation, of course, Constance married the Emperor Henry VI, and William II wed Margaret, the daughter of Garcia IV Ramirez of Navarre; in the next again, William II married Joanna of England. (For a recent discussion of the marriage-politics of the de Hautevilles, see D' Alessandro, *supra* 91–97.)

his ancestors no trapping of monarchy in which to robe himself. Nor, in Sicily, had he conquered an ancient kingdom which he could assume intact merely by ascending to the vacant throne. The Sicilian monarchy, its constitutions, laws, ceremonies, and regalia, had all to be built *ex novo*, and, once the foundations had been laid in 1130, King Roger and his ministers exercised an eclectic taste in furnishing the new royal structure. Monarchies past, including the tyrants of Magna Graecia, and present, including the Capetian kings of France and the emperors of Byzantium, all contributed elements to the new monarchy.⁶

The Arabic facet of the de Hauteville monarchy was systematically described by Michele Amari and by his diligent editor Carlo Alfonso Nallino.⁷ It was Amari who first listed its components: Arabic fiscal administration and chancery, palace architecture and decoration, ceremonial and regalia, and the patronage of Arab scholars and poets.⁸ Amari seems to have had little doubt as to the origins of the Arabic facet of Norman kingship: the de Hautevilles simply modelled themselves

⁶ Magna Graecia: H. Wieruszowski, 'Roger II of Sicily "Rex-Tyrannus"', in twelfth-century political thought', *Speculum* xxviii, 1963, 46–78 (reprinted in H. Wieruszowski, *Politics and culture in medieval Spain and Italy*, Storia e Letteratura, Raccolta di Studi e Testi 21, Rome 1971, 51–97); S. Turkheim, 'Un exemple d'imitation dans le monnayage de Guillaume II, roi de Sicile (1166–1189)', *Proceedings of the International Numismatic Symposium on contemporary coin imitations and forgeries*, ed. I. Gedai and K. Birò-Say, Budapest 1980, 217–221; L. Travaini, 'Le prime monete argentee dei normanni in Sicilia: un ripostiglio di kharrube e i modelli antichi delle monete normanne', *Rivista italiana di numismatica e scienze affini* XCII, 1990, 186–192. Capetians: E. Kitzinger, 'The mosaics of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo: an essay on the choice and arrangement of the subjects', *Art Bulletin* 31, 1949, 269–292. Byzantium: E. Kitzinger, 'On the portrait of Roger II in the Martorana in Palermo', *Proportioni* 2, 1950, 30–40; E. Kitzinger, *The mosaics of St Mary's of the Admiral in Palermo*, Dumbarton Oaks Studies 27, Washington 1990. There is a large bibliography upon the sources of the Norman monarchy of Sicily, e.g. L.-R. Ménager, 'L'institution monarchique dans les états normands d'Italie. Contribution à l'étude du pouvoir royal dans les principautés occidentales, aux XI^e–XII^e siècles', *Cahiers des civilisations médiévales* 2, 1959 303–331, 445–468 (reprinted in *Hommes et institutions*); R. Elze, 'Zum Königtum Rogers II von Sizilien', *Festschrift Ernst Schramm*, 2 vols, Wiesbaden 1964, I.102–116; P. Delogu, 'L'evoluzione politica dei Normanni d'Italia fra poteri locali e podestà universali', *Atti del congresso internazionale di studi sulla Sicilia normanna (Palermo 1972)*, Palermo 1973, 51–104; W. Ullman, 'Roman public law and medieval monarchy: Norman rulership in Sicily', in W. de Vos et al. eds, *Acta Iuridica: essays in honour of Ben Beinart*, Cape Town 1979, 157–84; C.D. Fonseca, 'Ruggero II e la storiografia del potere', in *Società, potere e popolo nell'età di Ruggero II. Atti delle terze giornate normanno-sveve, Bari, 23–25 maggio 1977*, Centro di studi normanno-svevi, Università degli Studi di Bari, Bari 1979, 9–26; G.M. Cantarella, *La Sicilia e i Normanni. Le fonti del mito*, Il mondo medievale 19, Bologna 1988: all with useful further bibliography.

⁷ Amari's *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia* was first published in 3 vols in Florence in 1854–1872. Amari died in 1889 before he himself could complete a much needed revised version. A much amplified and thoroughly revised edition was seen through the press by Nallino in 3 vols, Catania 1933–1939.

⁸ Arabic administration: Amari, *Storia*, III.450–460; M. Amari, 'Su la data degli sponsali di Arrigo VI con la Costanza erede del trono di Sicilia e su i divani dell'azienda normanna in Palermo', *Atti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei, Memorie della Classe di Scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, 3rd ser., 2, 1878, 409–438 (reprinted in M. Amari, *Studi medievistici*, ed. F. Giunta, Palermo 1970). Art and architecture: Amari, *Storia*, III.840–890; M. Amari, *Le epigrafi arabe di Sicilia trascritte, tradotte e illustrate*, 3 vols, Palermo 1875–1885 (reprinted Palermo 1971, ed. F. Gabrieli). Ceremonial and regalia: Amari, *Storia*, III.453–457. Arab Scholars and poets: Amari, *Storia*, III.460–471, 671–790.

upon the Kalbid emirs of Sicily, who, in turn, had imitated the Fāṭimid caliphs of Egypt.⁹

There are, however, considerable difficulties with this initially persuasive hypothesis. First, the Kalbids lost their hold upon Sicily in the mid 1040s, twenty years before the Norman invasion, and ninety before the foundation of the monarchy. From 1044 until 1062, Sicily was divided between several petty rival lordships.¹⁰ Thus, there was a long interregnum between the fall of the Kalbids and the foundation of the Norman kingdom. Second, although the Normans did inherit certain institutions from the Muslim rulers of the island, such as the mint and the *diwān* or fiscal administration, none of the most characteristic components of the Arabic facet of the Norman monarchy appears until after 1130. And, third, where the evolution of Arabic components can be traced from the period of conquest until after the foundation of the monarchy, it is evident that they were reformed radically in c.1130, and thereafter more closely resemble the equivalent institutions in the contemporary Muslim world than the Arabic institutions inherited by the early Norman rulers of Sicily.

It is necessary, therefore, to make the distinction between those components of the Arabic facet of the Norman monarchy which were inherited from the Muslim rulers of Sicily, and those which were imported from the contemporary Muslim world after c.1130. This will be best demonstrated by considering briefly three examples: the architecture and decoration of the Norman palaces; the structure and practices of the Norman *diwān*; and the Arabic titles of the Norman kings.

The Arabic titles of the Normans in Sicily developed in three stages.¹¹ In the first, Robert Guiscard and Roger I had their feudal titles transliterated from Latin or Greek into Arabic. Thus Duke Robert appears on his coins as *Abār al-dūqa*, 'Robert the duke', and Count Roger as *al-qūmmus akh al-dūqat Ajjār*, 'Count Roger, brother of the duke'.¹² In the second stage, Roger I, the young Roger II, and the regent Adelaide, have their scribes and mint officials experiment with various Arabic terms which translate as precisely as possible their feudal titles. Roger I now appears as *sulṭān Ṣiqilliyya*, 'lord of Sicily'; Adelaide and Roger are *mawlātu-nā al-sayyida wa-mawlā-nā al-qūmmus Rujjār*, 'our lady regent and our lord Count Roger'; and Roger II is just that, *Rujjār al-thānī . . . sulṭān*, 'lord Roger II'.¹³ The third stage, which opens with Roger's coronation in 1130, marks a clear break with the past: new titles and formulae are employed which have nothing in common with the Greek and Latin royal titles.¹⁴ King Roger is styled 'the royal, sublime, Rogerian, supreme majesty, may God make his days eternal and give strength to his banners',¹⁵ while William II introduces one of his decrees

⁹ Amari, *Storia*, III.875: 'Se i principi normanni seguirono gli usi dei Kalbiti, questi a lor volta aveano imitati i califi del Cairo'.

¹⁰ Amari, *Storia*, II.482–488, 613–620; U. Rizzitano, 'Ibn al-Ḥawwās', *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn, III.788; U. Rizzitano, 'Ibn al-Thumna', *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn, III.956.

¹¹ There follows a brief summary based on J. Johns, 'I titoli arabi dei signori normanni di Sicilia', *Bollettino di Numismatica* 6–7, 1986, 11–54; J. Johns, 'Malik Ifrīqiyya: the Norman Kingdom of Africa and the Fāṭimids', *Libyan Studies* 18, 1987, 89–101; and a section of J. Johns, *Duana Regis. Arabic Administration and Norman Kingship in Sicily*, forthcoming.

¹² Johns, 'Titoli arabi', 36, cat. 1–7.

¹³ Johns, 'Titoli arabi', 37–39, cat. 9–10, 13–17.

¹⁴ Johns, 'Titoli arabi', 39–49, cat. 18–63.

¹⁵ Johns, 'Titoli arabi', 43, cat. 43.

as 'the high, to-be-obeyed order, may God increase it in prestige and in efficacy . . . of the sublime, royal, ruling, Williamian majesty, magnificent, desirous of power through God, aided by His omnipotence, victorious through His strength, king of Italy, Lombardy, Calabria, and Sicily, defender of the pope of Rome, protector of the Christian faith, may God perpetuate his reign and his days, make eternal his times and his years, carry his armies and his banners to victory, and give strength to his swords and to his pens'.¹⁶

Comparing this third stage with the two that precede it, it is apparent that this is no longer a Latin, feudal tradition of titulature, transliterated or translated into Arabic, but rather an almost completely independent tradition which belongs to the Islamic world and which, moreover, has no traceable ancestor in Sicily.¹⁷

The second example to illustrate the distinction between the inherited and the newly imported components of the Arabic facet of the Sicilian monarchy concerns the practices and structure of the Norman *diwān* or Arabic fiscal administration. During the conquest of Sicily, Count Roger had his men seize the records of the fiscal administration of the island, and, from 1093, these formed the basis for the distribution of lands amongst his supporters. These records were polyptychs, lists of the names of the heads of tax-paying households, called *jarā'id* (sing. *jarīda*) in Arabic. New *jarā'id* were issued to feudatories by Roger I and by the regent Adelaide and Roger II until 1111, but thereafter no new Arabic documents were issued until after 1130. Over the next decade, the *diwān* was reformed and a range of new bureaucratic practices were introduced, culminating in c.1145 with the reform of the landholding regime founded by Roger I in the 1090s. Feudatories were compelled to submit their original privileges to the royal *diwān* for scrutiny: only if they proved satisfactory, were they reissued, at a price. During this reform, the *diwān* was restructured, and new administrative offices were introduced.¹⁸

The royal *diwān* had essentially the same duties after 1130 as the Arabic administration had had since c.1093, namely the administration of the royal demesne. In this task, it made use of the *jarā'id*, which had evolved only a little way from their origins in the fiscal administration of Muslim Sicily. But if these elements demonstrate continuity with the pre-conquest past, others attest to the importation of a new bureaucratic structure and new bureaucratic practices.

The most conspicuous of the latter is the new, elegant, and highly professional *diwānī* script, employed in all royal documents from c.1130 onwards. The surviving Arabic documents from the comital period are all written in different scripts, none of which can be considered the ancestor of the royal *diwānī*.¹⁹ Nor do the very rare surviving examples of pre-conquest Arabic script from South

¹⁶ Johns, 'Titoli arabi', 47, cat. 53.

¹⁷ Johns, 'Titoli arabi', 20–29.

¹⁸ This is a much simplified summary of long and complicated argument: Johns, *Duana Regis*.

¹⁹ The 4 documents are: (1) Palermo, Archivio capitolare, no. 5, photo in J. Johns, 'The Muslims of Norman Sicily, c.1060–c.1194', D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford 1983, pl. 1; (2) Catania, Archivio capitolare, arabo-greco no. 1, photo in Johns, 'Muslims', pl. 2; (3) Palermo, Archivio di Stato, Tabulario di S. Filippo di Fragalà, no. 9, photo in G. La Mantia, *Il primo documento in carta (Contessa Adelaide, 1109) esistente in Sicilia e rimasto sinora sconosciuto*, Palermo 1908; (4) Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Suppl. Gr. no. 1315,1, photo in A. Guillou, *Les actes grecs de S. Maria di Messina*, Istituto siciliano di studi bizantini e neoellenici, Testi no. 8, Palermo 1963, pls IIa/b.

Italy and Sicily bear any relationship to the royal script.²⁰ In Norman Sicily, the royal *dīwānī* is encountered only in the royal palace and the court, and the private documents of the island display a variety of scripts none of which is morphologically related to royal *dīwānī*.²¹ On the other hand, the royal *dīwānī* does closely resemble *dīwānī* scripts from contemporary Egypt and the Levant.²² The strong probability is that the royal *dīwānī* script was imported into Sicily from an east Mediterranean chancery.

A second new chancery practice concerns the royal signature. The early de Hautevilles either did not sign their Arabic documents, or used their Greek signature. The Norman kings, too, often used their Greek signature, but occasionally employed an Arabic personal cypher or *ʿalāma*. Roger and William II used the same *ʿalāma*, *al-ḥamdu li-ʾllāh wa-shukran li-anʿumi-hi*, 'Praise be to God, and thanks for his blessings', while that of William I was *al-ḥamdu li-ʾllāh ḥaqq ḥamida-hu*, 'Praise be to God, it is fitting to praise him'.²³

The use of the *ʿalāma*, in place of the ruler's personal name, has been called 'the classical Islamic method of signature'.²⁴ It was the Fāṭimid caliphs who first made use of the *ḥamdala* (an *ʿalāma* beginning with the phrase *al-ḥamdu li-ʾllāh*) as the ruler's signature, and all Fāṭimid caliphs employed the formula *al-ḥamdu*

²⁰ See, for example, the bilingual gospel of St Luke of 1043 from Calabria: Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Suppl. Gr. no. 911, photo in K. and S. Lake, *Dated Greek Miniscule Manuscripts to the year 1200*, *Monumenta Palaeographica Vetera*, Boston, Mass., American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1st ser., 1934–, fasc. V, pls 265 and 283; and in H. Omont, *Facsimilés des manuscrits grecs datés de la Bibliothèque nationale du IXe au XIVe siècles*, Paris 1891, pls XVIII and XVIII/f. The script of the Palermo Qurʾān of 982–83 is still further from Norman *dīwānī*: Istanbul, Nuruosmaniye Library, MS. 23, and London, Nasser D. Khalili Collection, QUR261 and QUR368 (F. Déroche, *The Abbasid tradition. Qurʾāns of the 8th to the 10th centuries*, vol. I of J. Raby, ed., *The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art*, Oxford 1992, I.146, no. 81).

²¹ See, for example, S. Cusa, *I diplomi greci ed arabi di Sicilia pubblicati nel testo originale, tradotti ed illustrati*, 2 vols, vol. 1 in 2 pts, vol. 2 never published, Palermo 1868 (*sic*, corr. 1874)–1882 (reprinted, Köln/Wien 1982), pl. IA: an act of sale from Palermo, 1161. Albrecht Noth has tentatively identified a few Maghribī features in the royal script (A. Noth, 'I documenti arabi di Ruggero II', in C. Brühl, *Diplomi e cancelleria di Ruggero II*, Accademia di Scienze Lettere e Arti di Palermo, Palermo 1983, 205–206), but these occur neither frequently nor with any regularity. It is likely, therefore, that they indicate not the ancestry of the script itself, but rather the geographical origins (Ifriqiyya or Sicily) of some of the scribes who used it. John Wansbrough ('Diplomatica Siciliana', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 47, 1984, 14, n.12) also makes this point.

²² Compare, for example, the Fāṭimid documents illustrated by: G. Khan, 'A copy of a decree from the archives of the Fāṭimid chancery in Egypt', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 49, 1986, 439–453; D.S. Richards, 'A Fāṭimid petition and a "small decree" from Sinai', *Israel Oriental Studies* 3, 1973, 140–158; S.M. Stern, *Fāṭimid decrees. Original documents from the Fāṭimid chancery*, London 1964; S.M. Stern, 'Three petitions of the Fāṭimid period', *Oriens* 15, 1971, 172–209; and S.M. Stern, 'An original document of the Fāṭimid chancery concerning Italian merchants', in *Festschrift G. Levi della Vida*, I.529–538.

²³ Ibn Jubayr, *Riḥlat al-Kinānī*, ed. M.J. de Goeje and W. Wright, Oxford 1907, 325. Roger attached his *ʿalāma* to the endowment charter of George of Antioch's foundation, S. Maria dell'Ammiraglio: Cusa, no. 70, 68–70. William II's *ʿalāma* is close to that used by Roger II and William I upon issues from the mint of al-Mahdiyya, *al-ḥamdu li-ʾllāh ḥaqq ḥamida-hu wa-ka-mā huwa ahl-hu wa-mustahiqq-hu*, 'Praise be to God, it is fitting to praise Him, for He deserves praise and is worthy of it': H.H. Abdul-Wahhab, 'Deux dinars normands de Mahdia', *Revue Tunisienne* ns 1, 1930, 215–218; Johns, 'Malik Ifriqiyya', 92–3.

²⁴ Stern, *Fāṭimid decrees*, 123–124.

li-'llāh rabb al-ʿalām, 'Praise be to God, the Lord of the Universe'.²⁵ Similarly, the de Hauteville kings all used *ḥamdalas* for their *ʿalāmas*, although the formulae they employed were those appropriate to the leading officers of the Fāṭimid court, not to the caliph himself.²⁶

Not just *dīwānī* practices but also the structural organization of the *dīwān* itself underwent change after the foundation of the kingdom. Before 1130, there survives no Arabic term for the office which administered the affairs of the de Hauteville demesne, and it is only during the reforms of 1145 that it is first named as *al-dīwān al-maʿmūr*, literally 'the populous' or 'busy *dīwān*'.²⁷ Soon afterwards, in 1149, another office appears, called *dīwān al-taḥqīq al-maʿmūr*, literally 'the busy *dīwān* of verification'. While *al-dīwān al-maʿmūr* was responsible for the administration of all royal rights and possessions in Sicily and Calabria, the *dīwān al-taḥqīq al-maʿmūr* was responsible for compiling and preserving the registers of the boundaries of all lands, upon which the fiscal administration of the island was ultimately dependent. The *dīwān al-taḥqīq al-maʿmūr* was also responsible for controlling donations of lands and men out of the royal demesne and, to this extent, it supervised the activities of *al-dīwān al-maʿmūr*.²⁸

Before it appears in Sicily, the *dīwān al-taḥqīq* is known only in Fāṭimid Egypt.²⁹ The circumstances surrounding the creation of this office by the vizier al-Afdal in 1107–1108 are strikingly similar to those associated with its

²⁵ Stern, *Fāṭimid decrees*, 127–128; Khan, 450.

²⁶ King Roger's *ʿalāma* is very close to a vizieral form: *Al-ḥamdu li-'llāh shukran li-niʿmati-hi*, see D. Sourdel, 'al-Djardjārā (4)', *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn, II.462. It may be significant that, from 1137, all Fāṭimid viziers bore the title *malik*, the Arabic designation of the Norman kings: D. Ayalon, 'Malik', *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn, VI.261–262.

²⁷ *Al-maʿmūr* is an epithet traditionally applied to royal institutions within Islam: it simply expresses the pious wish that the institution will be always 'populous' or 'busy' (Amari, *Storia*, III.237; Noth, 217). The term is in no way descriptive of the functions or activities of the *dīwān* (pace C.A. Garufi, 'Sull'ordinamento amministrativo normanno in Sicilia: Exhiquier o diwan? Studi storici diplomatici', *Archivio storico italiano*, 5th ser., 27, 1901, 229, 236–238). In Norman Sicily, the term is used of other royal institutions such as the royal palace (Cusa, 44), and the royal *ṭirāz* (F. Bock, *Die Kleinodien des Heil-Römischen Reiches Deutscher Nation nebst den Kroninsignien Böhmens, Ungarns unter der Lombardei*, 2 vols, Vienna 1864, I.27–31, II.6/8).

²⁸ This is a brief summary of the conclusions of Johns, *Duana Regis*, where the following rather different interpretations are discussed in detail: Amari, 'Su la data', 431; Amari, *Storia*, III.327–328, n.2; M. Caravale, 'Gli uffici finanziari nel Regno di Sicilia durante il periodo normanno', *Annali di storia del diritto* 8, 1964, 178–185 (reprinted in M. Caravale, *Il regno normanno di Sicilia*, Milan 1966, 206–209); E. Caspar, *Roger II (1101–1154) und die Gründung der normannisch-sicilischen Monarchie*, Innsbruck 1904, 314–317; Chalandon, II.647–653; Garufi, 229, 236–238; L. Genuardi, 'I defetari normanni', in *Centenario della nascita di Michele Amari. Scritti di filologia e storia araba*, 2 vols, Palermo 1910, I.217–218; E. Mayer, *Italienische Verfassungsgeschichte von der Gothenzeit bis zur Zunft Herrschaft*, 2 vols, Leipzig 1909, II.384–388; E. Mazzaresse Fardella, *Aspetti dell'organizzazione amministrativa nello stato normanno e svevo*, Milan 1966, 29; Noth, 217–18; H. Takayama, 'The financial and administrative organization of the Norman kingdom of Sicily', *Viator* 16, 1985, 150–51 *et pass.*

²⁹ The main sources for the Fāṭimid *dīwān al-taḥqīq* are the fifteenth-century writers al-Qalqashandī (*Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā fī ʿināʿat al-inshāʾ*, 14 vols, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Rasūl Ibrāhīm, Cairo 1913–1920, and Index, Cairo 1972, III.493–94) and al-Maqrīzī (*Al-Mawāʿiz wa-'l-iʿtibār fī dhikr al-khitāt wa-'l-āthār*, ed. Būlāq, 2 vols, Cairo 1853 [reprinted Beirut c.1970], I.401; *Ittiʿāz al-hunafāʾ*, ed. Jamāl al-Dīn al-Shayyāl, 3 vols, Cairo 1967–73, III.69, 338, 340–41), whose reports seem to be largely based upon the *Nuḥḥat al-muqlatayn fī akhbār al-dawlatayn*, a lost work by Ibn al-Tuwayr (d.1220): cf. W.J. Björkman, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Staatskanzlei im islamischen Ägypten*, Hamburg 1928, 83; A.R. Guest, 'A list of writers, books, and other

introduction to Sicily. Al-Afdal founded the office at the time of a major reorganisation of land-holding in Egypt, and its main duty was to supervise and to control this process and the subsequent reallocation of estates.³⁰ There is, at the very least, a strong *prima facie* case that the *dīwān al-tahqīq* was imported to Sicily from Egypt to serve exactly the purpose for which it had originally been created.³¹

The third and last example concerns the architecture and decoration of the Norman palaces. There survive the substantial remains of six principal royal palaces in and around Palermo from the period after c.1130: the Palazzo Reale, l'Uscibene or al-Mannānī near Altarello di Baida, il Mareddolce or la Favara near Brancaccio, and il Parco at Altofonte, all founded by Roger II; la Zisa, begun by William I and completed by William II; and la Cuba, with la Cubula and la Cuba Soprana, built by William II.³² But two major obstacles impede discussion of the evidence. First, nothing survives of the palaces of Sicily before the Norman conquest, and almost nothing from the period before 1130.³³ And, second, only scattered fragments survive of the Fāṭimid palaces of Cairo, so that the best comparanda available are the Ifrīqiyyan palaces of the Fāṭimids and of their Zīrid and Hammādid clients, which all date from the tenth to early eleventh century, and thus predate the Norman palaces by more than a century.³⁴

authorities mentioned by El Maqrīzī in his Kitā', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 34, 1902, 117; and C. Cahen, 'Quelques chroniques anciennes relatives aux derniers Fatimides', *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire* XXXVIII, 1937, 10–14 and 16, n.1.

³⁰ Ibn Muyassar, *Akhbār Miṣr*, ed. H. Massé, Cairo 1919, 42; al-Qalqashandī, III.494; al-Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz*, III.338, 340–41.

³¹ For a full discussion of this subject, see Johns, *Duana Regis*.

³² Palazzo Reale: F. Valenti, 'Il palazzo reale di Palermo', *Bollettino d'Arte* 4, 1924–1925, 512–528; M. Guiotto, *Palazzo ex-reale di Palermo. Recenti restauri e ritrovamenti*, Palermo 1947; R. Delogu and V. Scuderi, *La reggia dei normanni e la Cappella Palatina*, Florence 1969. Uscibene: A. Goldschmidt, 'Die normannischen Königspaläste in Palermo', *Zeitschrift für Bauwesen* 48, 1898, 542–590; Amari, *Storia*, III.842–844; S. Braidā Santamāura, 'Il "Sollazzo" dell'Uscibene', *Architetti di Sicilia*, I.i, 1965, 31–42. Mareddolce: Goldschmidt; S. Braidā Santamāura, 'Il castello di Favara. Studi di Restauro', *Architetti di Sicilia*, I.v–vi, 1965, 21–34. Altofonte: L. Anastasi, *L'arte nel parco reale normanno di Palermo*, Palermo 1935; S. Braidā Santamāura, 'Il palazzo ruggeriano di Altofonte', *Palladio* 23, 1973, 185–197. Zisa: G. Bellafiore, *La Zisa di Palermo*, Palermo 1978; G. Caronia, *La Zisa di Palermo. Storia e restauro*, Palermo 1987; U. Staacke, *Un palazzo normanno a Palermo. La Zisa. La cultura musulmana negli edifici dei Re*, Palermo 1991. Cuba: S. Bellafiore, *La Cuba di Palermo*, Palermo 1984; G. Caronia and V. Noto, *La Cuba di Palermo*, Palermo 1988; P. Lojacono, 'L'organismo costruttivo della Cuba alla luce degli ultimi scavi', *Palladio* ns 3.v–vi, 1953, 1–6.

³³ Amari (*Storia*, II.407, 515–516, III.121, 844) identified King Roger's suburban palace of Mareddolce or La Favara with the Qaṣr Jaʿfar mentioned by Ibn Jubayr (329–330), and argued that the latter had originally been built by the Kalbid emir Jaʿfar (997–1019). There is no evidence for or against this hypothesis.

³⁴ For the Fāṭimid palaces in Cairo, see the still largely reliable reconstruction of R. Ravaisse, 'Essai sur la topographie du Caire d'après Maqrīzī', *Mémoires . . . de la Mission Archéologique Française au Caire*, I/iii, 1887, 407–80 and III/iv, 1890, 33–114; also, K.A.C. Creswell, *The Muslim architecture of Egypt*, 2 vols, Oxford 1952, I.33–35, 128–30, pls 38–39. For the surviving fragments of the ceiling of the Fāṭimid palace: M. Herz, 'Boiseries fatimides aux sculptures figurales', *Orientalisches Archiv*, III/4, 1913, 169–74, pls XXVII–XXIX, esp. XXIX/18–19 which shows scenes not in Pauty's catalogue; E. Pauty, *Les bois sculptés jusqu'à l'époque Ayyoubide (Catalogue général du Musée Arabe du Caire)*, Cairo 1931, 48–50, pls XLVI–LVIII; G. Marçais, 'Les figures d'hommes et de bêtes dans les bois sculptés d'époque fāṭimide conservés au Musée Arabe du Caire', *Mémoires . . . de la Mission Archéologique Française au Caire (Mélanges*

There can be no doubt that the Norman palaces belong to the same family as the earlier Ifrīqiyyan structures. The solid geometry of the ground-plan of the Zisa or of the Cuba reveals their parentage with the Zīrīd palace at Ashīr (figs 1 and 2). Again, the symmetrical arrangement of rooms on either side of a central axis links the two groups of palaces, as does the canonical employment of the inverted-‘T’ plan on the central axis, a feature which suggests that the space was intended for ceremonial use (figs 1 and 2). Similarly, the solid, four-square plan of the Torre Pisana in the Palazzo Reale, with its central chamber placed within a surrounding ambulatory, finds a close parallel in the Qaṣr al-Manār at the Qalʿa of the Banī Ḥammād (figs 3(A) and 4).

The architectural decoration of the two groups of palaces is also clearly connected. The exteriors present a severely sober and restrained aspect, characterized by tall blind arches, for example on the Qaṣr al-Manār at the Qalʿa of the Banī Ḥammād in Ifrīqiyya and on the Cuba in Palermo.³⁵ The interiors share many decorative features in common, such as the use of *muqarnas* or stalactite vaulting, which first appears in the Maghrib from Fāṭimid Egypt in the Qalʿa of the Banī Ḥammād.³⁶ *Muqarnas* vaulting in stucco and wood is found in the Palazzo Reale and l’Uscibene, and in la Zisa and la Cuba. Other decorative features in the Norman palaces proclaim their Islamic origins, such as the fountain in the Zisa: water flows from a lion-head spout or *sabīl*, over an inclined marble slab or *shadirwān*, and into a series of rectangular basins linked by channels. This arrangement seems to hark back to Persian antecedents, but can be seen in the tenth-century houses of Fustāṭ, whence it was presumably passed to Sicily.³⁷

Finally, the magnificent painted wooden ceiling of the Cappella Palatina, and the less well-known painted ceilings of Palermo cathedral, Cefalù, and la

Maspero III) 68, 1940, 241–257. For a further fragment, probably from the western palace, now in the Louvre: E. Anglade, *Catalogue des boiseries de la section islamique (Musée du Louvre)*, Paris 1988, 59–63, no. 32. See also: V. Meinecke-Berg, ‘Materialen zu fāṭimidischen Holzdekorationen in Kairo I: Holzdecken aus dem fāṭimidischen Westpalast in Kairo’, *Mitteilungen des Deutschen archäologischen Instituts abteilung Kairo* 47, 1991, 227–233; and Sabiha Khemir, ‘The palace of Sitt al-Mulk and Fāṭimid imagery’, Ph.D. thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London 1990, which contains important new evidence. For the Ifrīqiyyan comparanda: L. Golvin, ‘Note sur le décor des façades en Bérbérie Orientale à la période sanhâgienne’, in *Études d’Orientalisme dédiées à la mémoire de Lévi-Provençal*, 2 vols, Paris 1962, II.581–589; L. Golvin, *Recherches archéologiques à la Qalʿa des Banu Hammad, Algérie*, Paris 1965; L. Golvin, ‘Le palais de Ziri à Achir (dixième siècle J.C.)’, *Ars Orientalis* 6, 1966, 47–76; A. Lézine, *Architecture de l’Ifriqiya. Recherches sur les monuments aghlabides*, Paris 1965; A. Lézine, *Mahdiyya. Recherches d’archéologie islamique*, Paris 1965; A. Lézine, ‘La salle d’audience du palais d’Achir’, *Revue des Études Islamiques* 37, 1969, 203–218; G. Marçais, *L’architecture musulmane d’Occident. Tunisie, Algérie, Maroc, Espagne et Sicile*, Paris 1954. For discussion, see especially U. Scerrato, ‘L’architettura’, in F. Gabrieli and U. Scerrato, *Gli Arabi in Italia*, Milan 1979, 307–342.

³⁵ For the Qalʿa: Golvin, ‘Note sur le décor des façades’, 584–85; Golvin, *Recherches archéologiques*, 67–71, 96–100. For the Cuba: the works cited in n.32, above.

³⁶ For *muqarnas* in general: D. Behrens-Abouseif, ‘Mukarnas’, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn, VII.501–506; and F. Fernandez-Puertas, ‘Mukarnas’, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn, VII.500–501. For *muqarnas* at the Qalʿa: L. Golvin, ‘Les plafonds à muqarnas de la Qalʿa des Banū Ḥammād et leur influence possible sur l’art de la Sicile à la période normande’, *Revue de l’Occident Musulman et de la Méditerranée* xvii, 1974, 63–69.

³⁷ G. Marçais, ‘Salsabil and sadirwan’, in *Études d’Orientalisme dédiées à la mémoire de Lévi-Provençal*, 2 vols, Paris 1962, II.639–648. For the Zisa: Caronia, figs 71–73; compare with the panel from the Cappella Palatina, Gabrieli and Scerrato, fig. 56. For the Fustāṭ houses: A. Bahgat and A. Gabriel, *Fouilles d’al-Foustat*, Paris 1921.

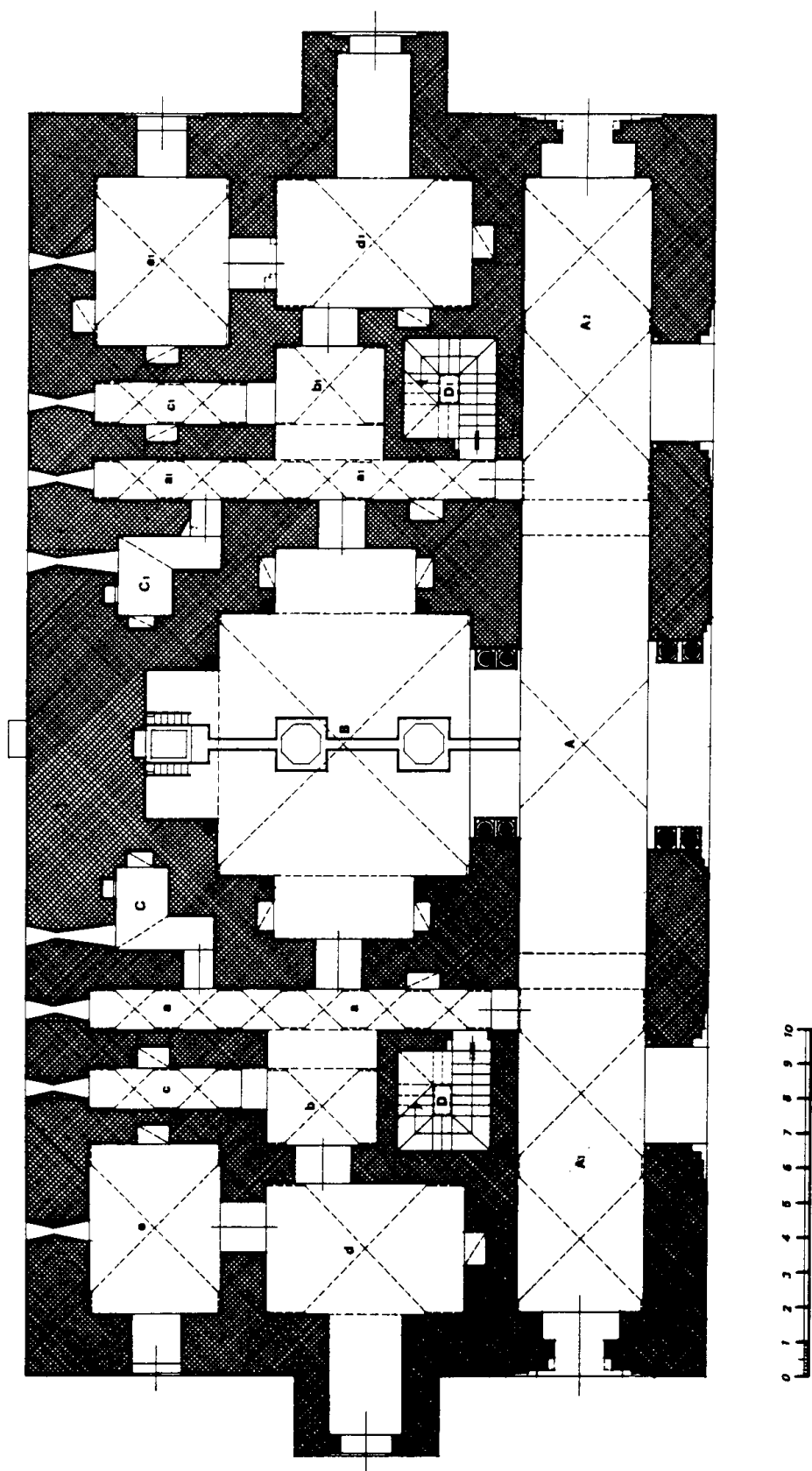


Fig. 1. Palermo, the Zisa: ground plan (after Bellafigliore)

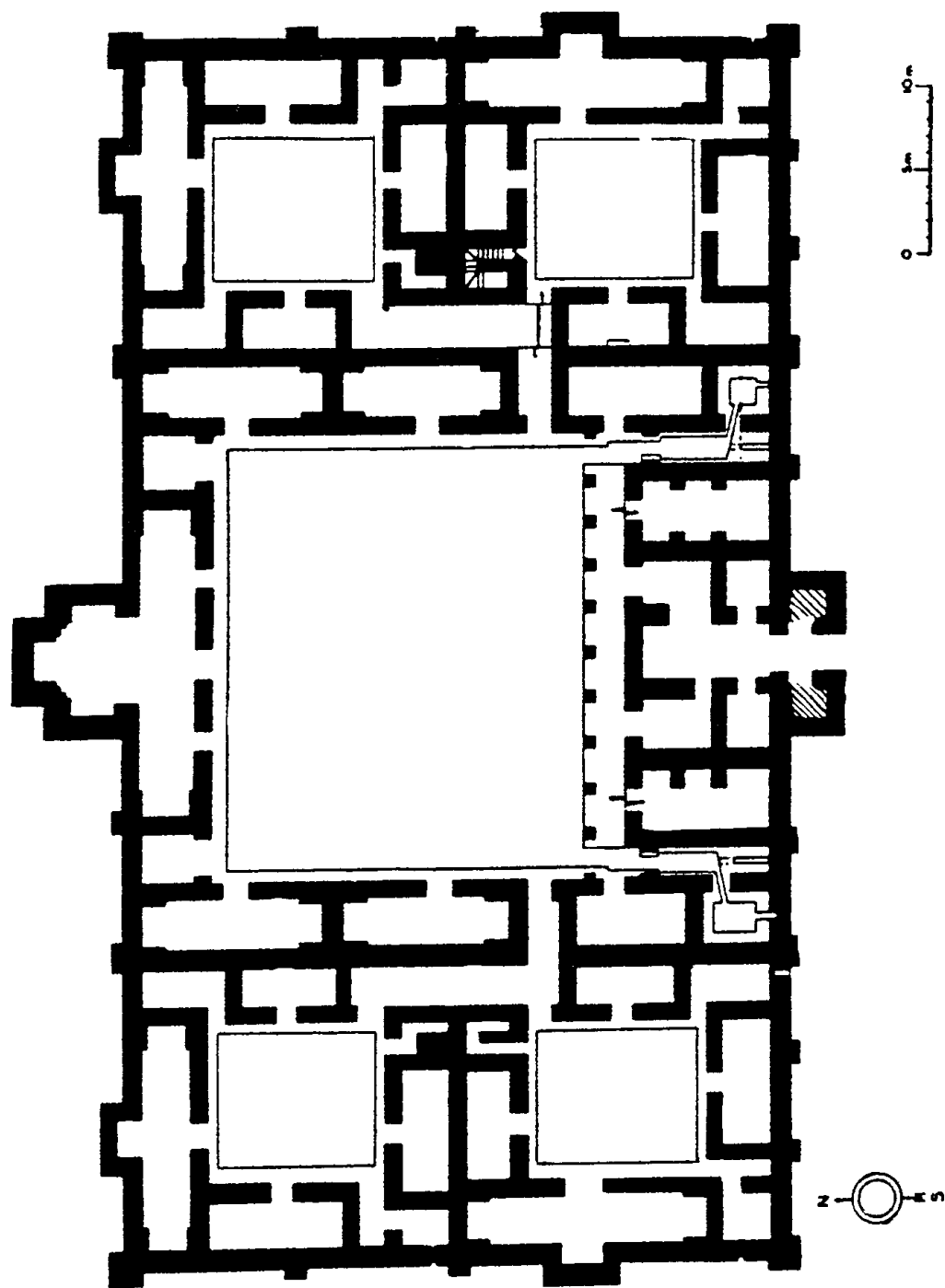


Fig. 2. Ashīr, Algeria, Zīrīd palace: ground plan (after Golvin)

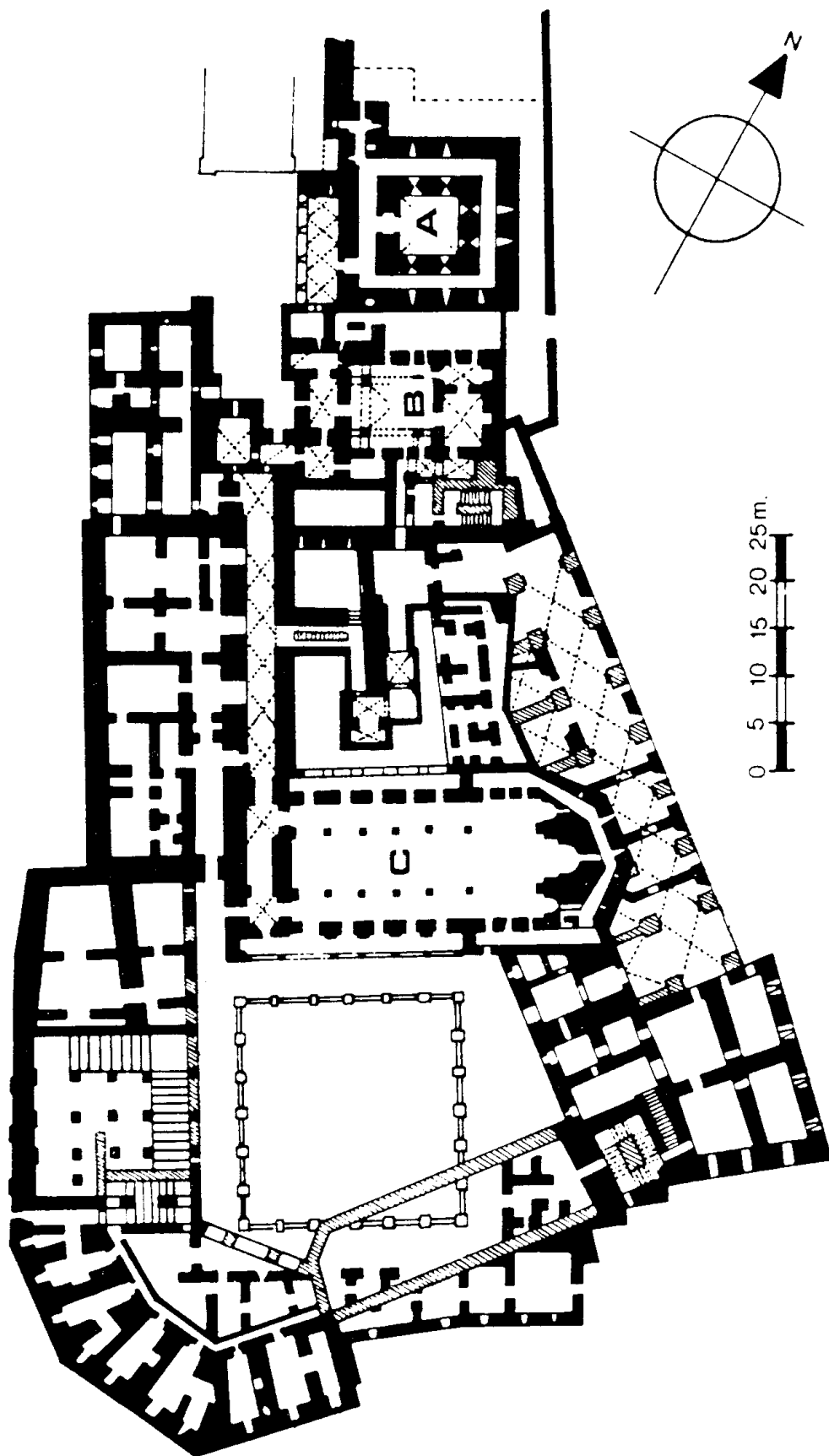


Fig. 3. Palermo, Palazzo Reale: ground plan (after Valenti)

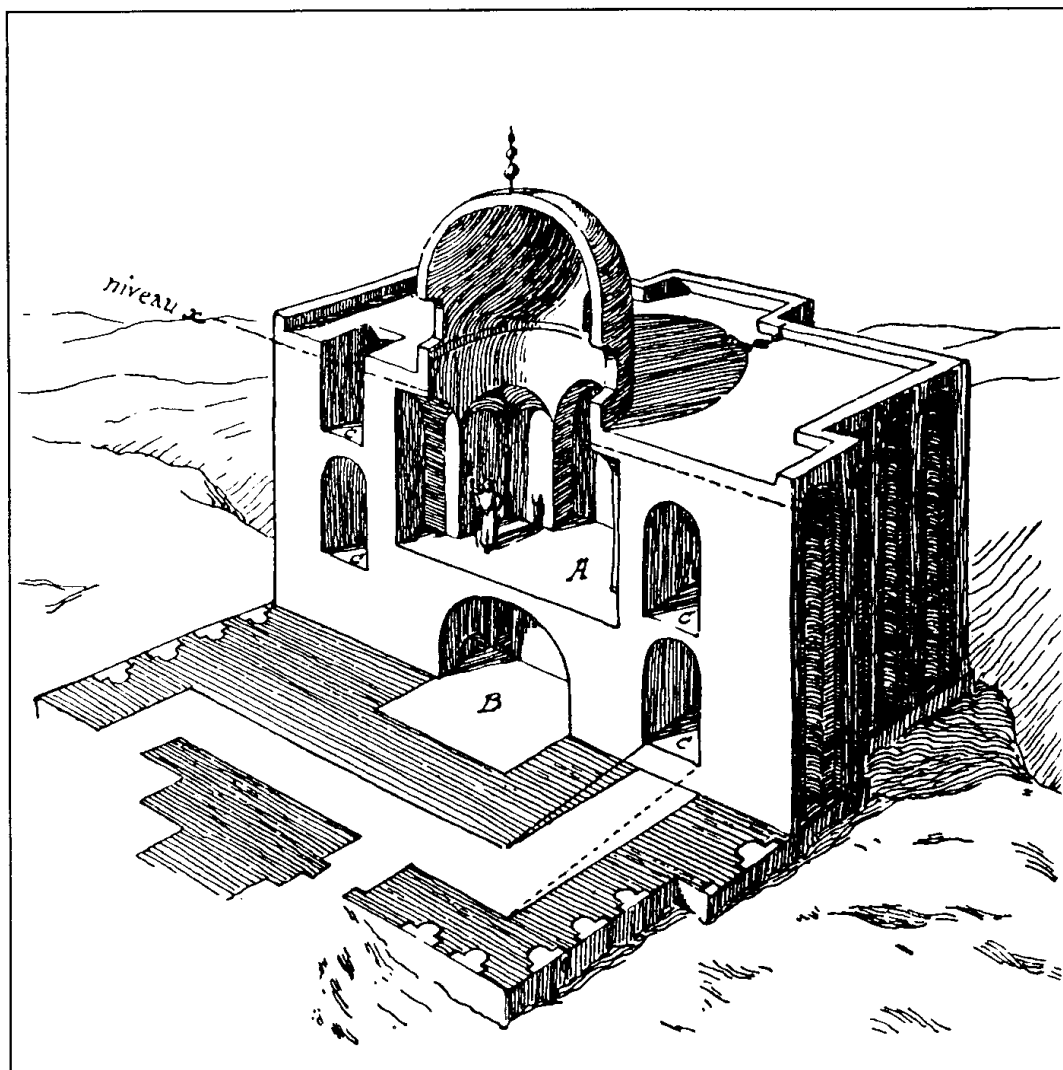


Fig. 4.
Qal'at Banī Hammād, Algeria: reconstruction section and plan (after Marçais)

Magione, clearly belong to the world of Islam.³⁸ The dominant iconographic theme in the ceiling of the Cappella Palatina, the pleasures of the court cycle, finds exact parallels in surviving beams from the ceiling of the Fāṭimid western palace in Cairo (1058): seated drinkers, musicians, dancing girls, and hunting

³⁸ Cappella Palatina: U. Monneret de Villard, *Le pitture musulmane al soffitto della Cappella Palatina in Palermo*, Rome 1950. Palermo cathedral: G. Bellafiore, *La cattedrale di Palermo*, Palermo 1976, figs 146–47. Cefalù: M. Gelfer-Jorgensen, *Medieval Islamic symbolism and the paintings in the Cefalù cathedral*, Leiden 1986. La Magione: Amari, *Storia*, III.881, n.2. For alternative views to that advanced here upon the origins of the Sicilian ceilings: D. Jones, 'The Cappella Palatina in Palermo: problems of attribution', *Art and Archaeology Research Papers*, 2, 1972, 41–57; Monneret de Villard, *passim*; J. Sourd-Thomine, 'Le style des inscriptions arabo-siciliennes à l'époque des rois normands', in *Études d'Orientalisme dédiées à la mémoire de Lévi-Provençal*, 2 vols, Paris 1962, I.307–315.

scenes.³⁹ The Islamic orientation of the ceiling is also revealed by the Arabic inscriptions which run around the borders of the main panels, reciting a litany of royal power, repeating over and over thirty royal epithets or *alqāb mamlakāt*: 'victory and perfection and perfection and ability and power and reputation and lasting good and wealth and acquisition and victory and power . . .'.⁴⁰

It should be stressed that the Sicilian palaces do not casually or accidentally resemble those of Islam, nor are they slavish copies which ignore the spirit of the originals. On the contrary, it is manifest that the architects, masons, plasterers, carpenters and painters employed in the royal palaces of Palermo all worked within a living and evolving tradition of design and craftsmanship. That nothing survives of palace architecture in Sicily before c.1130 does not prove, of course, that this tradition had died out in Sicily and had to be imported by the Normans after the foundation of the kingdom. But it is extremely difficult to imagine how ateliers of specialized craftsmen could have kept alive their arts and skills over the century of war and insecurity which separated the fall of the Kalbids from the foundation of the Norman monarchy.

Having made the distinction between those components of the Arabic facet of the Norman monarchy which were inherited from the Muslim rulers of Sicily, and those which were imported from the contemporary Muslim world after c.1130, and having seen that there is a strong case to be made that a source of these imports was the Fāṭimid court of Egypt, it is now necessary to discuss the evidence for relations between Palermo and Cairo.

By far and away the most informative piece of evidence for relations between the two courts is a letter from the caliph al-Ḥāfiẓ (1130–1149) to King Roger, dated to the winter of 1137–1138. The letter is quoted in full by al-Qalqashandī (1355–1418), the greatest of all Mamlūk writers upon the secretarial art, and has been the subject of a study by Maurice Canard.⁴¹ Space does not permit a thorough discussion of the letter here, and only five points will be stressed.

First, the Egyptian chronicler Ibn Muyassar reports that Norman military activity in Ifrīqiyya in 1123 and 1143 had prompted the exchange of ambassadors between Cairo and Palermo.⁴² It is thus intriguing to find in this letter the two rulers apparently collaborating in the Norman annexation of what were technically Fāṭimid lands. In a previous letter, Roger must have given an account of the

³⁹ (Abbreviations used in this note: MdV = Monneret de Villard, *Le pitture*; P = Pauty, *Les bois*.) Seated drinkers: MdV, figs 178–188, 193–199; P, pl. LIV. Musicians: MdV, figs 200–217; P, pls LII–LIV. Dancing girls: MdV, figs 219–220; P, pls XLIX, L, LIII, LVII. Hunting scenes: (birds of prey on prey) MdV, figs 157–62, 164, 166, 199, 246; P, pls L, LII–LIV; (mounted falconers) MdV figs 247–248; P, pl. LVI; (lion hunting from horseback) MdV, figs 233–34; P, pl. LVI.

⁴⁰ Amari, *Epigrafi*, II.32–42, no.6, pl. 3–4; Monneret de Villard, 31–33, 65–66, and plates. Compare, for example, with the inscriptions from the twelfth-century epigraphic wooden frieze reused in the mosque of al-Mu'ayyad in Cairo (1415–20) and now in the Museum of Islamic Art: J.D. Weill, *Les bois à épigraphes jusqu'à l'époque mamlouke (Catalogue général du Musée Arabe du Caire)*, Cairo 1931, 22–3, no. 646, and 24–5, no. 649.

⁴¹ Al-Qalqashandī, VI.458–463; M. Canard, 'Une lettre du caliphe fāṭimite al-Ḥāfiẓ (524–544/1130–1149) à Roger II', *Studi Ruggeriani*, I.125–146 (reprinted in M. Canard, *Miscellanea Orientalia*, London 1973). For the man and his work, see C.E. Bosworth, 'al-Ḥalkashandī', *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn, IV.509–511. For the sources of the *Ṣubḥ*, see Björkman, 75–86. The Arabic text of the letter with an English translation and commentary are given as an appendix in Johns, *Duana Regis*.

⁴² Ibn Muyassar, 63, 85.

capture of the island of Jarba by a Sicilian fleet in 1135–1136. In his reply, al-Ḥāfiẓ not only accepts Roger's explanation of his actions – the need to destroy a lawless nest of pirates – but even warmly commends them.

Second, al-Ḥāfiẓ's letter reveals that commercial relations were uppermost in the minds of the two rulers. Before 1126, Roger had sent one of his leading administrators, George of Antioch, who was later to become his vizier, as ambassador to Cairo. The embassy, which may be linked to the Fāṭimid embassy of 1123, was a great success, and George is said to have secured considerable financial advantage for his master.⁴⁴ In his letter, the caliph thanks Roger for the favourable treatment which a ship, trading in al-Ḥāfiẓ's personal interests, had received from Roger's officers. As a mark of his gratitude, the caliph promised to waive the customs at Alexandria and Cairo upon cargoes belonging to Roger himself, to his vizier George of Antioch, and to 'the two ambassadors who are yet to arrive'.⁴⁵

Third, the letter demonstrates that, upon at least one occasion, the Fāṭimid *diwān* instructed the Norman chancery, probably in the correct form of Arabic regnal titlature. Towards the end of the letter, al-Ḥāfiẓ refers to a gaffe committed by Roger's secretary in an earlier letter, and to the excuses which he had made in mitigation: 'As to [your] secretary's explanation', he writes, 'in answer to the accusation made against him – to wit, that, in translating from one language to another, the meaning may become confused and the sense altered, specially if a word is used which does not have the same meaning in both languages . . . his explanation has been accepted.' As Canard remarks, the term in question seems to have been a title.⁴⁶

Fourth, the passage just discussed demonstrates that al-Ḥāfiẓ's letter must have been at least the fourth in a regular correspondence between the two rulers. First was the letter in which Roger's secretary caused offence; next came the caliph's reply, correcting the error; then, the letter in which the secretary made his excuses; and finally came the surviving letter.

Fifth, and finally, in his concluding paragraph, the caliph refers to the exchange of gifts between the two rulers.⁴⁷ He acknowledges the safe arrival of Roger's gifts, and announces that his ambassador had been entrusted with gifts for the king. The gifts were listed in a separate inventory which has not survived, but they were undoubtedly rich and costly items befitting the status of donor and recipient, and they may have included regalia. The Berber historian Ibn Ḥamādu, writing in c.1220, described the ceremonial parasol (*al-miẓalla*) used by the Fāṭimids, and added: 'No dynasty other than the Fāṭimids is known to have used this parasol,

⁴³ Al-Qalqashandī, VI.459, lines 3–11; Canard, 'Une lettre', 129–131.

⁴⁴ Al-Tijānī, *Rihla*, ed. H.H. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, Tunis 1958, 333.

⁴⁵ Al-Qalqashandī, VI.460, lines 5–6; cf. Canard, 'Une lettre', 133–134. The ambassadors may have been from the Norman city of Salerno: F. Ughelli, *Italia sacra*, 2nd edn N. Coleti, 10 vols, Venice 1717–22, VII.399; Romuald, 233.

⁴⁶ Al-Qalqashandī, VI.463, lines 4–7; Canard, 'Une lettre', 144. Canard believed this passage to indicate that Roger's chancery used Greek, not Arabic, for correspondence with the Fāṭimids, but the secretary is undoubtedly excusing himself for an unhappy rendition of a western term, whether Greek or Latin, into Arabic (cf. Noth, 216).

⁴⁷ Al-Qalqashandī, VI.463, lines 8–19.

except for the King of the Europeans in Sicily . . . the latter received it amongst the other gifts which [the Fāṭimids] were accustomed to send them'.⁴⁸

In short, from as early as 1123 until at least 1143, relations between the courts of Palermo and Cairo were close and cordial. The two rulers regularly exchanged ambassadors, letters, and gifts. At least one item of Fāṭimid regalia was imported from the Fāṭimid to the Norman court, and upon at least one occasion the Fāṭimid *dīwān* sought to correct the usage of its Sicilian counterpart. This is exactly the sort of international climate in which Norman rulers and their officers could have modelled the Arabic facet of the Sicilian monarchy upon the Fāṭimid caliphate. After 1153, relations between Cairo and Palermo deteriorated rapidly, but, by then, the Islamic facet of the Norman monarchy had already developed an independent dynamic.⁴⁹

What of relations between the Normans of Sicily and other Muslim powers in the Mediterranean? The nearest Muslim neighbours to Sicily were the Zīrīds of al-Mahdiyya. Although the Zīrīds had made some attempt to reinforce Sicily at the time of the conquest, they had withdrawn from the struggle in 1075, and by 1086 had a pact of non-aggression with Roger I.⁵⁰ There is some evidence, too, of close and cordial relations between the Normans and the Hammādids.⁵¹ But this harmony, which seems to have had its roots in commerce, broke down in 1117, when the Roger II intervened on behalf of the rebellious lord of Qābis. The Zīrīds sought help from the Almoravids, and Roger retaliated harrying the Ifrīqiyyan coast, and by allying with Raymond-Berengar II, count of Barcelona: the quarrel rumbled on until at least 1128.⁵² Soon thereafter good relations were restored, for it was a 'dishonourable' peace between the Zīrīds and the Normans that provided the pretext for the Hammādīd attack upon al-Mahdiyya in 1135, which a Norman fleet helped to repel.⁵³ Thereafter, until the conquest of the Ifrīqiyyan littoral was begun in 1143, the Zīrīds were Norman puppets. In 1147, a Norman fleet occupied al-Mahdiyya, and brought an end to Zīrīd rule.⁵⁴

The preceding summary of relations between the Normans and their western Muslim neighbours reveals that this relationship was of a very different nature from that between the Normans and the Fāṭimids. Although contacts between Sicily and the Zīrīds were particularly frequent in the period leading up to and

⁴⁸ Ibn Ḥamādu, *Akhbār mulūk Banī ʿUbayd* (*Histoire des rois ʿObaïdites*), ed. and Fr. trans. M. Vonderheyden, Paris 1927, 15, 28; cf. Canard, 'Une lettre', 126. For the *mizalla* at the Fāṭimid court, see: al-Musabbihī, *Akhbār Miṣr*, ed. A.F. Sayyid and T. Bianquis, Cairo 1978, 61, 66, 70, 86, 99; M. Espéronnier, 'Les fêtes civiles et les cérémonies d'origine antique sous les Fatimides d'Égypte. Extraits du tome III de *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā* d'al-Qalqashandī', *Der Islam* 65, 1988, 49.

⁴⁹ Canard, 'Une lettre', 127.

⁵⁰ Malaterra, III.viii–ix, 61; Amari, *Storia*, III, 152–153. The non-aggression pact may have existed as early as 1078. In 1086 Roger was invited by the Pisans and Genoese to join them in a raid against al-Mahdiyya but declined on the grounds that he had a pact with the Zīrīds. Amari, *Storia*, III.160; Malaterra IV.iii, 86–87.

⁵¹ *Chronica Monasterii Casinensis*, ed. H. Hoffmann, MGH, XXXIV, Hannover 1980, IV.50, 516 (Peter the Deacon); Amari, *Storia*, III.375–376; H.R. Idris, *La Berbérie orientale sous les Zīrīdes, X–XII siècles*, 2 vols, Paris 1962, I.308–9.

⁵² Amari, *Storia*, III.376–379; Idris, I.318–24.

⁵³ Amari, *Storia*, III.379–398; Idris, I.319–24; D. Abulafia, 'The Norman kingdom of Africa and the Norman expeditions to Majorca and the Muslim Mediterranean', *ante* VII, 1985, 30–32.

⁵⁴ Amari, *Storia*, III.406–407; Idris, I.342–45.

⁵⁵ Amari, *Storia*, III.422–424; Idris, I.355–58.

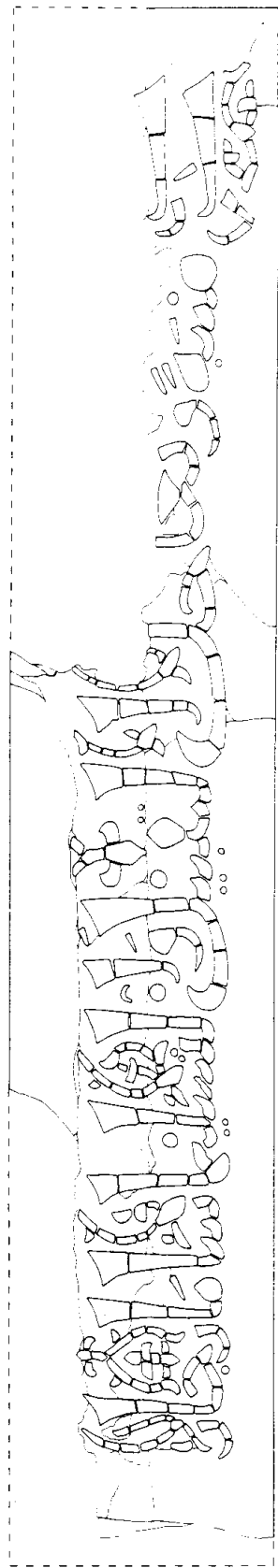


Fig. 5. Inscription No. 1

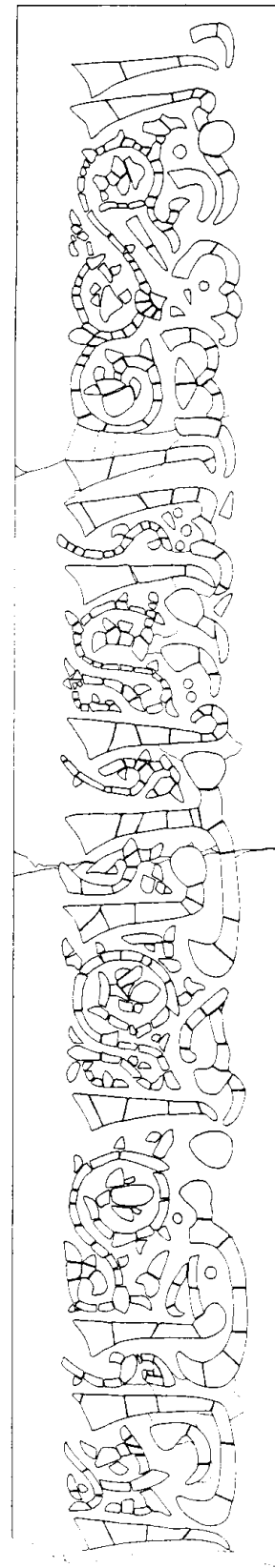


Fig. 6. Inscription No. 2

immediately following the foundation of the Sicilian monarchy, these were not exchanges between two equals, as between Roger and al-Ḥafiz. Sicily was always the dominant partner, now openly hostile and aggressive, now merely domineering. By or soon after 1130, the Zīrīds had been reduced to the rôle of helpless stooges, clinging desperately to the last shreds of independent power while the Normans prepared leisurely to do away with them altogether. It is difficult to believe that Roger and his ministers would have chosen to model the Arabic facet of the Norman monarchy upon these pathetic creatures.

It has now been shown that certain significant elements of the Arabic facet of the Norman monarchy were imported from the contemporary Muslim world after c.1130, and it has been argued that the most likely source of these imports was the Fāṭimid court of Cairo. In conclusion, I shall discuss one further piece of evidence which demonstrates beyond all doubt that the Normans modelled the Arabic facet of their monarchy upon the Fāṭimid caliphate of Egypt.

In the courtyard of the Galleria regionale della Sicilia in Palazzo Abatellis are fragments of two splendid Arabic inscriptions consisting of blocks of grey cipolino marble inlaid with characters in green porphyry and stylised floral decoration in red. The inscriptions are now set in concrete cases, and so are difficult to inspect and measure satisfactorily.

No. 1 (inventory no. 5105) measures 1.91m long, 0.32m wide and 0.065m thick (fig. 5).⁵⁶ The characters are approximately 0.20m high. The two long sides of the marble block are polished, while the short sides are rough, which suggests that the block was the jamb of a frame, so that the words *dār a[l-]* . . . would have been upon the architrave. The vertical line begins with what appears to be the word *minnatan*, 'graciously', but the word has been crudely repaired and the reading is uncertain.⁵⁷ Whatever the case, this line of the inscription obviously begins in the middle of a phrase, which presumably was carried on from the preceding frame, perhaps that on the right.

The vertical line may be read:



. . . *minnatan* (?). *Wa yu^cajilu 'l-taqbīla wa 'l-taslīma. Sāmā Rujjāru* . . .

' . . . graciously (?). And he will hurry to the kiss and to the greeting. Roger vied with . . .'⁵⁸

⁵⁶ B. Lagumina, 'Iscrizione araba del re Ruggero scoperta alla Cappella Palatina in Palermo', *Rendiconti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei, classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, 5th ser., 2, 1893, 231–234. I am most grateful to Prof. A.F.L. Beeston, St John's College, Oxford, for his invaluable advice upon both inscriptions.

⁵⁷ Lagumina tentatively reads the first word as *miṣṣar^{an}* (from the root *maṣṣa*, 'to suck' ?), and translates ' . . . il meglio [dei beni] (?)'. This is perplexing. He suggests that the word was originally written with a *mim* instead of a *ṣād*, but then altered.

⁵⁸ Lagumina translates: ' . . . il meglio [dei beni] (?); e si affretta a dare il bacio e il saluto. Ha conteso [nella gloria] Ruggiero . . .'.

The line is written in the metre *kāmil*, and contains part of an adulatory verse, which appears to refer to an act of homage paid to a ruler. There can be no doubt that the ruler was King Roger. In the first place, Roger is mentioned by name, and this can scarcely be a reference to Count Roger. In the second, the inscription was found *ex situ* in the south aisle of the Cappella Palatina, and so is associated with Roger's palace.⁵⁹ And, in the third, it is executed in the same technique as the surviving fragments of inscriptions from King Roger's palace in Messina, now in the Museo regionale di Messina.⁶⁰ These, too, seem to have come from a rectangular frame; they have characters of green porphyry inlaid into marble, and are composed in *kāmil*. The vertical fragment of the Cappella Palatina inscription reads *ḍār a[l]* . . . , 'the home of . . .', and this too recalls the Messina inscription where the royal palace is called *ḍār al-khulūd*, 'the home of eternity', a term for paradise.⁶¹ This inscription is not in itself particularly significant here, and its main purpose is to support the conclusion that the second inscription now in the Palazzo Abatellis also came from Roger's palace.

No. 2 (inventory no. unknown) measures 1.845m long, 0.327 wide, and 0.048 thick (fig. 6).⁶² The characters are approximately 0.020m high. The inscription was once kept in a cellar of the Cappella Palatina, and was given to the Royal Museum in Palermo by Vittorio Emanuele in 1863. There is good reason to assume that the two inscriptions were part of a single decorative scheme. They are both made in the same manner, and the scale of the two inscriptions is identical. The metre of the verse of No. 2, however, is *ramal* not *kāmil*, and so the two fragments are not part of the same inscription, although they obviously belonged to a single scheme of decoration. No. 2 seems to have been set horizontally, as part of a continuous band of inscription: perhaps, as we shall see below, the architrave of a rectangular frame. The bottom edge of the block has been smoothed, and four deep holes have been drilled into it, presumably for the pins which secured the block in its original setting. This, and the other two intact sides bear traces of what is presumably the original mortar. The left-hand side is broken.

⁵⁹ Lagumina describes the discovery of the inscription. In 1892, a new organ was installed by the architect Giuseppe Patricolo in the south aisle of the Cappella Palatina beneath the ambo. Several fragments of the inscription were found behind the marble dado, where they formed part of the blocking of an entrance to a stair leading down to the crypt. (This stair was reopened during restoration work in 1927.)

⁶⁰ M. Amari, 'Su le iscrizioni arabiche del palazzo regio di Messina', *Atti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei, classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, 3rd ser., 7, 1881, 103–112 (reprinted in Amari, *Epigrafi arabiche*, ed. F. Gabrieli, Palermo 1971, 123–136).

⁶¹ There are other echoes of the text of the Messina inscription in the two fragments from Palermo. In No. 1, the phrase *sāmā Rujjāru* recalls the following line from Messina (admittedly, a rather dubious reading by Amari): *sāmā al-kawākib bī Rujjāru l-malik*, literally, 'for me, King Roger strove to excel the stars'. Similarly, the reference in the Messina inscription to the 'beauty' (*jamāl*) in Roger's palace, recalls the exhortation in Palermo inscription No. 2 to 'contemplate the beauty that it contains' (*taʾmmal mā ḥawā-hū min jamālī*).

⁶² Amari, *Epigrafi*, I.31–2, no. V, tav. II, fig. 3.

It may be read:

...ر الـثم ركنه بعد التزّام وتامل ما حواه من جمال وا...

‘...r (?) *iltham rukna-hū ba^cda ’ltizāmī wa ta’mmal mā ḥawā-hū min jamālī wa ...*’

‘... kiss its corner after clinging [to it], and contemplate the beauty that it contains, and ...’⁶³

The verse apparently urges the visitor to perform an act of adoration by kissing the corner of a structure and by embracing it, and to wonder at the treasures therein.

What was this structure? The architect Giuseppe Patricolo, who discovered inscription No. 1, claimed that it ‘must have been part of the ancient chancel screen’ of the Cappella Palatina.⁶⁴ This is most unlikely. Although nothing is known about the form of the original chancel screen, it is surely most improbable that it would have incorporated profane Arabic verses written on this monumental scale. Another, more satisfactory provenance must be sought.

A first clue comes from the text of fragment No. 2 which suggests that it was originally placed close to the external corner of a structure. A second clue lies in the similarities between the fragmentary inscriptions from Palermo and the fragments of the much more substantially preserved inscription from Messina. As has already been mentioned, both inscriptions were executed in the same technique, one which is not found elsewhere in Sicily, and belonged to rectangular frames. The text of the Messina inscription leaves no doubt that it once adorned Roger’s palace: it refers to ‘this lofty palace’ (*dhā al-qasr al-mushayyad*), to ‘the palace of the sultans’ (*qasr al-salātīn*), and to the legendary pre-Islamic palace of al-Khawarnaq. Moreover, the exhortation ‘Enter, o peers of the realm’ (*yā ma^cshar al-mulk udkhulū*) suggests that the inscription belonged to a door to the palace. On this basis, Amari, calculating the total length of the Messina inscription at 30m, concluded that it must have framed two doors of the palace.⁶⁵ The echoes of the Messina inscription in the Palermo fragments suggest that they too adorned the palace, and the fact that the fragment No. 1 comes from a rectangular frame 1.91m high may indicate that it too belonged to the surround of a door. We are thus looking for a door, near a corner, in the palace.

The third clue is provided by where both fragments were found: admittedly out of their original settings but, nonetheless, both in the Cappella Palatina. This makes it likely (although far from certain) that they originally came from the palace chapel. Recent research upon the Cappella Palatina suggests that under Roger II the nave and side aisles did not function as part of the chapel but rather constituted a palace hall or aula, occidented upon the royal dias. If this interpretation is accepted, it follows that the palatine hall would have been the setting most appropriate to the inscription. The principal entrance has always been through the

⁶³ Amari translates: ‘[T]’appressa[?] e bacia il canto di questo [edifizio] dopo averlo abbracciato e contempla le belle cose ch’e’ racchiude. E ...’

⁶⁴ Lagumina, 231.

⁶⁵ Each frame would have consisted of a lintel 4m long, and two jambs each 5.5m tall.

present main door in the west end of the south wall, but the two smaller doors pierced through the west wall, on either side of the royal dias, and the door (now blocked) in the west end of the north wall are also original. All of these are located near to corners of the building, and thus fit the criteria for the original location of the inscription. Moreover, the exteriors of them all have been extensively remodelled at various times, so that virtually nothing remains of the original twelfth-century decoration. Thus, one or more of these doors is most likely to have been the original of the inscription.⁶⁶

Turning from the possible location of the inscription to its content; as Amari realised, fragment No. 2 contains an explicit and unmistakable reference to an essential part of the rite of the *hajj* or pilgrimage to Mecca. At the beginning and end of the *hajj*, pilgrims perform the *tawāf* or circumambulation of the Ka^cba, seven circuits, pausing each time to kiss the black stone embedded in the east corner (*al-rukn al-aswad*), and to press their breasts against the wall between the black stone and the door to the Ka^cba (*al-multazam*). The precise allusions to this rite contained in the language of the verse, and particularly in the use of the words *rukn* and *iltazam*, make its meaning utterly explicit.

Amari remarked that Muslim visitors to the Norman court would have been horrified by this invitation to adore the palace of a Christian king with the very rites reserved for the adoration of the Ka^cba (and this horror would have been all the stronger had the inscription adorned the palace chapel).⁶⁷ Amari was absolutely right, but he missed a crucial point. The Muslims of Sicily were Sunnī and professed allegiance to the ^cAbbāsīd caliph.⁶⁸ Certainly, they would have been shocked and incensed by such sacrilege, but not so loyal adherents of the Fāṭimid regime. The Fāṭimids were a branch of the Ismā^cīlīs, a Shī^cī sect, and they, alone amongst the dynasties of medieval Islam, encouraged their followers to adore them as manifestations of the divine.⁶⁹ Examples of panegyric survive which explicitly compare the Fāṭimid palace with *al-ḥarām*, the Meccan sanctuary, and suggest that it was considered appropriate to adore the palace with rites otherwise reserved to the *hajj*. An anonymous tenth-century north African poet unequivocally compared the Fāṭimid palace at al-Mahdiyya with the *ḥarām* at Mecca, and

⁶⁶ The palatine aspect of the west end of the chapel under Roger II was first suggested by Ernst Kitzinger in a paper to the 1981 Dumbarton Oaks Symposium upon Art in Norman Sicily. See also: S. Ćurčić, 'Some palatine aspects of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 41, 1987, 125–144; E. Borsook, *Messages in mosaic. The royal programmes of Norman Sicily 1130–1187*, Oxford 1990, 20–22; and W. Tronzo's forthcoming article in *Image and Word*. For the development of the west end of the chapel, see B. Brenk, 'La parte occidentale della Cappella Palatina a Palermo', *Arte medievale* 2nd ser., 4/2, 1990, 135–150.

⁶⁷ 'Ma qui l'adulazione arrivava all'empietà. I Musulmani avvezzi a girare intorno la Casa di Dio, la Caaba, a baciare la pietra nera incastrata in un canto di quella, doveano inorridire all'invito di adorare nello stesso modo la casa del re.'

⁶⁸ Ibn Jubayr, 332.

⁶⁹ W. Madelung, 'Ismā^cīliyya', *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn, IV.198–206; M. Canard, 'Fāṭimids', *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn, II.850–862. On Fāṭimid ceremonial and propaganda: M. Canard, 'L'imperialisme des fatimides et leur propagande', *Annales de l'Institut d'Études Orientales de la Faculté des Lettres d'Alger* VI, 1942–1947, 200–229 (reprinted in M. Canard, *Miscellanea Orientalia*, London 1973); M. Canard, 'Le cérémonial fāṭimite et le cérémonial byzantin. Essai de comparaison', *Byzantion* XXI, 1951, 355–420 (reprinted in M. Canard, *Byzance et les musulmans du Proche Orient*, London 1973); P.A. Sanders, 'The court ceremonial of the Fāṭimid caliphate in Egypt', Ph.D. thesis, Princeton University, New Jersey 1984. (It is to the latter work that I owe my knowledge of the passages of Fāṭimid panegyric cited below.)

added that 'Just as the pilgrim kissed the corner (*rukṇ*) [of the Ka^cba], so have we kissed the walls of your palace'.⁷⁰ And the Spanish panegyricist Ibn Ḥānī' (d.973?) described a visit to the Fāṭimid palace in Cairo in these words: 'We are carried by noble camels, across vast expanses of desert, on pilgrimage to the *ḥarām* of the *imām*. Our dust covered locks are blessed by our coming to kiss the corner of his palace'.⁷¹

Here, the primary significance of the inscription from Roger's palace in Palermo, which urges the visitor to adore it in a manner which orthodox Islam reserved for the Ka^cba, is that it can have been borrowed only from the Fāṭimids, because no other Muslim dynasty encouraged such heterodox practices. Added to the evidence for close and cordial contacts between the two courts throughout the second quarter of the twelfth century, this incontrovertible borrowing demonstrates that King Roger and his ministers did model the Arabic facet of the newly founded Sicilian monarchy upon the Fāṭimid caliphate of Cairo. They may, perhaps, have also imitated other models, although there is no proof positive evidence that they did, but they most certainly imitated the Fāṭimid caliphate.

But exactly how far did King Roger and his successors carry their imitation of the Fāṭimids? Did they, for example, actually appear before their subjects in Fāṭimid garb? Seven panels on the ceiling of the Cappella Palatina show representations of a seated ruler, flanked by a pair of attendants. He wears a three-peaked and jewelled bonnet, and a seamless robe of patterned or figured fabric heavily adorned with gold, with inscription bands on the neck, arms, cuff and hem. The ruler is bearded and has what appear to be European features. In his right hand he holds a wine-cup, and in his left a stylised flower or leaf (fig. 7). These Sicilian panels closely resemble representations of seated rulers in a pose traditional in the world of Islam since at least the tenth century.⁷² They are particularly close, for example, to a marble relief from al-Mahdiyya which

⁷⁰ Ibn ʿIdhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, ed. G.S. Colin and E. Levi-Provençal, 2 vols, Leiden 1948–1951, 184; trans., 261–262: 'Les poètes . . . firent des éloges qui frisaient l'infidélité, comparant Mehdiyya à la Mekke et disant d'autres choses indignes d'être citées . . . Les poètes d'Ifrikiyya firent . . . des poésies dont nous citerons quelques vers pour montrer ce que ce prince [ʿUbayd Allāh] jugeait permis et laissait dire en poésie: . . . 'Tu t'installas sur un noble sol qu'ont préparé pour toi tes glorieux messagers. Si le temple et ses entours, si les tombeaux qui s'y trouvent ont une haute importance, il est au Maghreb une noble demeure vers laquelle se tournent les faces des ceux qui prient et qui jeûnent: c'est la sacrée et respectable Mehdiyya, de même que l'on trouve au Tehāma la ville sacrée. Le *Mak'ām Ibrāhīm* peut n'y être pas, tes pieds en foulant le sol de cette cité font comme s'il y était; et si le pèlerin va à la Mekke donner un baiser au coin sacré (*rokn*), nous donnons le nôtre aux parois de ton palais!'

⁷¹ Ibn Ḥānī', *Dīwān*, ed. Zāhid ʿAlī, Cairo 1933, IX.12–13, 147–48. For Ibn Ḥānī': M. Yalaoui, *Un poète chiite d'Occident au IV^eme/X^eme siècle: Ibn Ḥānī' al-'Andalusi*, Tunis 1976.

⁷² For example: the medallion of the ʿAbbāsīd caliph al-Muqtadir (908–32) in Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Münzkabinett (H. Nützel, 'Eine Porträtmedaille des Chalifen el-Muktadir billah', *Zeitschrift für Numismatik* 22, 1900, 259–265; J. Sourdél-Thomine and B. Spuler, *Die Kunst des Islam*, Berlin 1973 [= *Propyläen Kunstgeschichte* 4], 240, pl. 155/a–b; the medallion of the ʿAbbāsīd caliph al-Tāʾīʿ and the Būyīd emir ʿIzz al-Dawla (975) in Istanbul, Arkeoloji Müze (M. Bahrami, 'A gold medal in the Freer Gallery of Art', in G.C. Miles, ed., *Archaeologica Orientalia in Memoriam Ernst Herzfeld*, Locust Valley, N.Y., 1952, 18–19; J. Walker, 'A unique medal of the Seljuk Tughrilbeg', in H. Ingholt, ed., *Centennial publication of the American Numismatic Society*, New York 1958, 691–95; Sourdél-Thomine and Spuler, 267, pl. 204/c–d). See also Sourdél-Thomine and Spuler, 311, pl. 268/c.



Fig. 7.
Palermo, Capella Palatina ceiling, painted panel (photo R. Hillenbrand)

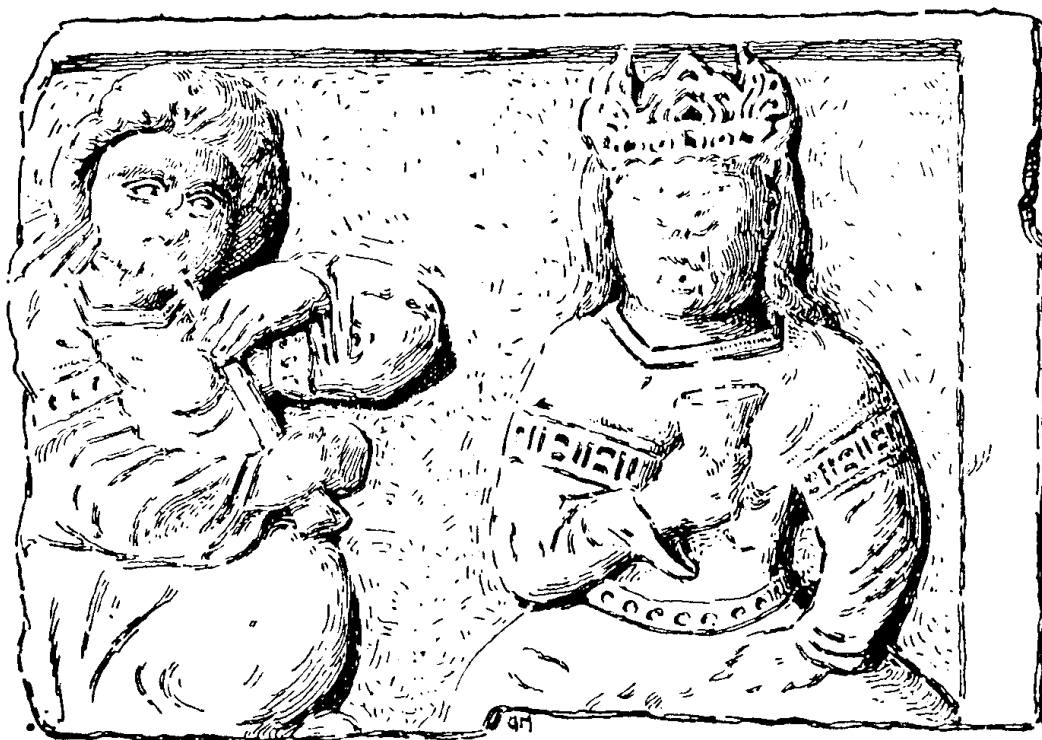


Fig. 8.

Al-Mahdiyya, Tunisia: carved marble relief (after Marçais)

probably portrays the Fāṭimid caliph (fig. 8).⁷³ Did the Sicilian king actually look like the seated rulers in these images, so that they are literally portraits of the king?

Before answering this question, it will be helpful to discuss what is undoubtedly the most familiar image of King Roger. This is the mosaic panel in S. Maria dell' Ammiraglio which shows Roger, dressed in the costume of the Byzantine emperor, receiving his crown from Christ.⁷⁴ In his magisterial study of the mosaics of S. Maria, Ernst Kitzinger points out the remarkable resemblance between the mosaic panel and a Byzantine ivory relief in the Pushkin Museum in Moscow which shows the emperor Constantine VII (913–959) receiving his crown from Christ.⁷⁵ As Kitzinger observes, the close resemblance of the mosaic to this relief can only be explained if it is assumed that an authentic Byzantine design served as a model for the mosaic panel. 'What degree of "realism" ', Kitzinger asks, 'may be attached to it [Roger's portrait] as a portrayal of the Norman king? Can it at one and the same time conform with an established prototype and be a recognizable portrait?' And, after listing and accepting the evidence that Roger did actually appear before his subjects in the attire of the Byzantine emperor, Kitzinger persists: 'Yet the question remains to be asked

⁷³ Tunis, Musée National du Bardo: Marçais, *L'architecture*, 117, fig. 76; M. Brett, *The Moors. Islam in the West*, London 1980, 65.

⁷⁴ Kitzinger, *The mosaics of St Mary's*, 189–197, 313–316, pls XXIII, XXV, 121–122, 165, 166–67, 171.

⁷⁵ Kitzinger, *The mosaics of St Mary's*, 190, n.344, pl. 190.

whether, or to what extent, the figure in the mosaic corresponds to that which contemporaries attending the King on a ceremonial occasion actually saw'.⁷⁶

Kitzinger answers these questions by way of a discussion of Roger's costume and insignia. He argues, on the one hand, that the material and written evidence for what Roger actually wore does not include the regalia depicted in the mosaic panel, and, on the other, that these regalia, and in particular the jewelled loros and open diadem, had long fallen out of fashion in the Byzantine court. He concludes that the mosaic panel is not a realistic portrait of King Roger, but, on the contrary, is based upon a much earlier pictorial model. The mosaic panel, he argues, should be considered to be what Ernst Schramm has called a 'pictorial mold', by which is meant 'a stereotyped form passed on regardless of whether it corresponds to reality because it was still felt to be suitable in terms of its content'.⁷⁷ In short, although it seems clear from independent evidence that Roger did appear before his subjects in the guise of the Byzantine emperor, the mosaic panel of the king in S. Maria is not a realistic portrait of the king, but an image of his authority, a symbol of his power.

Returning, now, to the representations of seated rulers from the ceiling of the Cappella Palatina, we have already seen that they correspond to an established prototype. There is, however, an important difference between the Islamic prototype of the panels from the chapel ceiling and the Byzantine model for the mosaic of King Roger. Byzantine artists representing the ruler could draw upon a wide repertoire of images, of which the ruler crowned by Christ was only one.⁷⁹ Thus, as Kitzinger stresses, the choice of that particular model was highly significant.⁸⁰ In complete contrast, the canon of Islamic representational art, from the ninth century until the fourteenth, contained virtually a single pose appropriate to the monarch, that of the seated ruler.⁸¹ Thus, the artists of the Cappella Palatina had only one prototype at their disposal, whether they were to paint a generic representation of royalty personified or the realistic portrait of a specific king. It follows that we cannot safely assume the panels from the royal chapel to be realistic portraits of the Sicilian king, and that we cannot take them to be evidence that he wore the costume of an Islamic ruler.

There is little independent evidence, written or material, upon this subject. Certainly, none of the surviving vestments of the Norman kings are derived from the Fatimid wardrobe, but this does not mean, of course, that other pieces of

⁷⁶ Kitzinger, *The mosaics of St Mary's*, 190–91.

⁷⁷ Kitzinger, *The mosaics of St Mary's*, 195. Cf. P.E. Schramm, *Herrschaftszeichen und Staatssymbolik*, 3 vols (Schriften der MGH, Deutsches Institut für Erforschung des Mittelalters, 13/i–iii), Stuttgart 1954, I.18: '“Bildmodel”: so möchte ich jene festen Formen bezeichnen, die – ohne Rücksicht darauf, ob sie der Wirklichkeit entsprachen – weitergegeben werden, weil sie dem Inhalt nach noch immer als passend empfunden wurden'.

⁷⁸ For the evidence that Roger appeared as the Byzantine emperor: K.A. Kehr, *Die Urkunden der normannisch-sicilischen Könige*, Innsbruck 1902 (reprinted Aalen 1962), 247, 265; Brühl, 67; Kitzinger, 'On the portrait of Roger II', n.3; D. Déer, *Der Kaiserornat Friedrichs II*, Bern 1952, 13–7; H. Enzensberger, *Beiträge zum Kanzlei- und Urkundenwesen der normannischen Herrscher Unteritaliens und Siziliens*, Kallmünz 1971, 89–92.

⁷⁹ A. Grabar, *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin*, Paris 1936.

⁸⁰ Kitzinger, 'On the portrait of Roger II'; Kitzinger, *The mosaics of St Mary's*, 195–96.

⁸¹ I know of no comprehensive study of this subject. E. Esin, 'Oldruğ-Tugruğ, the hierarchy of sedent postures in Turkish iconography', *Kunst des Orients*, 7/i, 1970–71, 1–29, illustrates the complexity and range of the theme. See also the works cited in n.72 above, and their bibliography.

Sicilian royal costume, now lost, were not in the Fāṭimid style.⁸² That this was indeed the case is suggested by the written sources. Ibn Jubayr, who visited the outer precincts of William II's palaces at Messina and Palermo in 1184–85, reports that the Sicilian king resembled Muslim rulers in many aspects of his rule, and, specifically, that 'the display of his finery is like the rulers of the Muslims' (*iḥār zīnati-hi bi-mulūk al-muslimīn*).⁸³ Here, the word *zīna*, translated as 'finery', could well refer to costume. Similarly, the great historian Ibn al-Athīr, who is probably reporting the testimony of the Zīrid prince Ibn Shaddād who visited Sicily in c.1156, records that the Sicilian court resembled that of Muslim rulers.⁸⁴ Ibn Jubayr seems to imply that the fashion for wearing Muslim dress had spread outside the court amongst the citizens of Palermo when he records that the Christian women 'dress in the costume of Muslim women . . . covered up and veiled'.⁸⁵ These sparse references do not amount to much, perhaps, but they are sufficient to suggest that, in all probability, the Norman kings did wear Islamic costume. The written sources do not, however, furnish details as to the precise nature of that costume, and, as we have seen, the representations of seated rulers from the ceiling of the Cappella Palatina cannot safely be used as evidence for what the Norman king actually wore. In short, the question whether the Sicilian ruler carried his imitation of the Fāṭimid caliph so far as to wear Fāṭimid vestments cannot be satisfactorily answered.

Did Roger's courtiers really embrace the walls and actually kiss the corner of his palace, as they were urged to do by the inscriptions from the Cappella Palatina? Again, the surviving evidence does not allow an unequivocal answer. Nonetheless, it seems to me clear that Roger's imitation of the Fāṭimid caliphate cannot have gone this far. The implicit meaning of the Fāṭimid rite was that the caliph, as the spiritual and biological descendant of the prophet Muḥammad, conveyed a holiness to his palace so that it became like the sanctuary of the Ka'ba at Mecca. Roger, for all his adoption and adaptation of the trappings of Islamic monarchy, was a Christian ruler, and he would never have knowingly permitted his courtiers to revere him in a rite which acknowledged by implication the authenticity of Muḥammad's mission and the sanctity of the Meccan sanctuary. Nor is it likely that Roger's courtiers would have done so. His Muslim subjects, as Amari remarked, would certainly have recognised the allusion to the Islamic pilgrimage. As Sunnī Muslims, they would have been horrified by the heretical blasphemy of the Fāṭimid rite had they recognised it as such. In any case, they would have been utterly repelled by its adaptation to a Christian ruler and his palace chapel.⁸⁶ His Christian subjects would not for the most part have been able to read the Arabic verses, still less to understand their meaning, and neither his Latin barons nor his Greek ministers are likely to have taken with enthusiasm to

⁸² For Sicilian royal costume: Bock, *Die Kleinodien*; H. Fillitz, *Die Insignien und Kleinodien des Heiligen Römischen Reiches*, Vienna and Munich 1954; A. Lipinski, 'Le insegne regali dei sovrani di Sicilia e la scuola orafa palermitana', in *Atti del Congresso internazionale di studi sulla Sicilia normanna, Palermo, 4–8 dicembre 1972*, Istituto di storia medievale, Università di Palermo, Palermo 1973, 162–194; Kitzinger, *The mosaics of St Mary's*, 192–93 and notes.

⁸³ Ibn Jubayr, 325.

⁸⁴ Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil fī l-ta' rīkh*, ed. C.J. Tornberg, 14 vols in 8, Leiden 1867–74, X.133.

⁸⁵ Ibn Jubayr, 333.

⁸⁶ The *saraceni palatii*, themselves confined to the court, participated as far as they were able in the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina: Ibn Jubayr, 326; Romuald, 234–36.

such an outlandish ritual. We may, I think, be confident that the rite was never performed in the Norman palace.

If this is correct, then it would seem to follow that the original meaning of the verses cannot have been understood by Roger and his ministers, and that those Muslims who did understand preserved a prudent silence. Therefore, the model copied in Sicily was not the rite itself, but rather the verse inscriptions which described it. Here we are on dangerous ground, for, as we have seen, almost nothing survives of the Fāṭimid palaces of Cairo, but it does seem to follow that they must have been adorned with inscriptions which included verses similar to those reproduced in Palermo. Reports of these would have been carried to Sicily, either by ambassadors to the Fāṭimid court or by artisans imported from Egypt, in such a way that it came to be believed at Palermo that verses urging courtiers to embrace the royal palace and kiss its corner were a characteristic symbol of Islamic royal authority, wholly appropriate to the Sicilian king.

This hypothesis incidentally helps to explain a puzzle. So far as I am aware, there exists no reference to the rite later than the caliphate of al-Muʿizz (953–75). Indeed, there seems to be no evidence, independent of the panegyric verses exemplified above, that these rites were ever actually performed at the Fāṭimid court.⁸⁷ It is thus difficult to imagine how information about the rite could have reached Palermo as late as the twelfth century. But if the model imitated at the Norman court was not the rite itself but rather the inscriptions containing the Arabic verses which described it, then this difficulty disappears.⁸⁸

It is ironic that, while it is the rite described in these verses that demonstrates incontrovertibly that the Norman kings modelled themselves upon the Fāṭimid caliphate, they did not imitate the rite itself, but merely the verse inscriptions which described it. There is a sense in which this characterises the whole imitation of the Fāṭimids by the kings of Sicily: they took as their model the external symbols of the caliphate, but ignored or remained ignorant of their intrinsic significance. This contrasts strongly with the Norman kings' imitation of Byzantium. As Kitzinger has shown, the model for the mosaic representation of King Roger in S. Maria was carefully chosen: it embodies Roger's ideal of absolute monarchic power, rejects the claims of the papacy over his kingdom, and constitutes an explicit challenge to the Byzantine emperor. It is 'an extraordinarily pregnant and concise statement in visual terms of Roger's concept of his own power and authority'.⁸⁹ In complete contrast, Roger's adoption and adaptation of Fāṭimid royal symbols had no ideological basis. Roger and his ministers may or – more probably – may not have been aware of the ideological foundations of Fāṭimid authority, but the king certainly laid no claim to them. Fāṭimid prototypes were chosen primarily because the caliphate was the most accessible and splendid exemplar of Islamic royal authority, not for the particular nature of the Fāṭimid monarchy. As the correspondence with al-Ḥāfiẓ shows, Roger and his ministers were fully aware that the caliph himself was little more than a puppet, and that the caliphate was a hollow institution, long dominated by a succession of virtually

⁸⁷ I owe this perceptive observation to Ms Jane Jakeman, a D.Phil. student of St John's College at the Oriental Institute, Oxford.

⁸⁸ If this is so, then it suggests that the inscriptions adorned the eastern palace first built for al-Muʿizz, and not the western palace which was completely rebuilt in 1058.

⁸⁹ Kitzinger, *The mosaics of St Mary's*, 191–97.

independent viziers.⁹⁰ The Fāṭimid caliphate was bankrupt, the Fāṭimid caliph was a powerless manikin, but the Fāṭimid palace was still a rich mine from which symbols of royal power could be extracted for the Norman court. Roger's model was neither the person of al-Ḥāfīz, nor the institution of the caliphate, but the gorgeous symbols of Islamic monarchy accumulated within the Fāṭimid palace. Roger stood outside it, and contemplated the beauty that it contained. He appropriated whatever symbol enhanced his own monarchy, but was attracted only by its external form, and cared nothing for its intrinsic meaning.

⁹⁰ Canard, 'Fāṭimids', 857–58 and bibliography.