

THE DEEDS OF COUNT ROGER
OF CALABRIA AND SICILY
AND OF HIS BROTHER
DUKE ROBERT GUISCARD

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BY GEOFFREY MALATERRA



TRANSLATED BY
KENNETH BAXTER WOLF

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To my brother,

RICHARD BAXTER WOLF,

the other historian in the family

Preface



In 1989 I took a leave of absence from Pomona College and spent the next two years at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. My original intention was to use this generous chunk of time to come to a broader understanding of Latin Christian views of Islam prior to the First Crusade. With this in mind, one of the very first sources that I consulted was Geoffrey Malaterra's *Deeds of Count Roger*, the principal source for the Norman conquest of Muslim Sicily. As I read I became more and more intrigued by the historiographical issues raised by the work of Malaterra and the other two contemporary historians of the Norman conquests in southern Italy and Sicily, Amatus of Montecassino and William of Apulia. The end result of my investigation was a book titled *Making History: The Normans and Their Historians in Eleventh-Century Italy*, published by the University of Pennsylvania Press in 1995. While I was working on this book, I was also preparing a translation of the *Deeds of Count Roger*, with the intention of publishing it in the wake of *Making History*. But by the time I was putting the finishing touches on the monograph, I was already being pulled in a completely different direction by my long-standing interest in St. Francis of Assisi. As it turned out, the translation would gather dust until I was finished with *The Poverty of Riches: St. Francis of Assisi Reconsidered* (Oxford University Press, 2003).

My decision to return to the *Deeds of Count Roger* and prepare it for publication reflects at a general level my commitment to the exclusive use of primary texts in my undergraduate history courses. More specifically, this particular source proved to be a goldmine of information pertaining to two of my favorite subfields within the realm of medieval European thought: historiography and Christian views of Islam. Historiographically speaking, Geoffrey Malaterra's portrayal of the Norman accomplishments in southern Italy and Sicily is an intriguingly complex one, on the one hand praising Roger and Robert for their successes in the region and yet on the other offering a subtle critique of the "lust for domination" that led them there. Geoffrey's

equivocal interpretation of the Norman conquests seems to have reflected his ambivalent position as a monk in newly conquered Catania who, on the one hand, had been trained to recognize the ephemeral nature of human statecraft and, on the other, benefited directly from the patronage of a count whose campaigns had opened the door to the reestablishment of the Latin Christian church in Sicily.

Beyond its contribution to our appreciation of medieval historiography, the *Deeds of Count Roger* also fills a gap in the available literature pertaining to the earliest phase of Latin European expansion at the expense of Islam. The principal accounts of the First Crusade—which culminated in the conquest of Jerusalem in 1099—have long since been available in English.¹ And with the recent publication of Barton and Fletcher's *The World of the Cid*,² anglophonic students now have access to the principal accounts of the early *Reconquista*, which for all intents and purposes began with the Castilian absorption of Toledo in 1085. The *Deeds of Count Roger*, our main source for the Sicilian campaigns that ended in 1090, fits both chronologically and geographically right in the middle between these other two more famous examples of Latin Christian offensives against Islam.

This translation of the *Deeds of Count Roger* is based on the critical edition of the Latin text prepared by Ernesto Pontieri for the venerable *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores* series.³ The section numbers and paragraph breaks reflect those found in this edition. I have used footnotes sparingly and most often to elucidate some aspect of the text rather than commenting on the accuracy of the account or referring the reader to pertinent secondary sources for follow up. I have translated the names of the people mentioned in the text into their English forms, unless there is no obvious English equivalent. For place names, I have, with few exceptions, opted for the modern (typically Italian) versions, if it is clear what their modern analogues are. Otherwise I have left them in their original Latin form. The maps—which are based on the ones found in Donald Matthew's *The Norman Kingdom of Sicily* (1992) and which have been borrowed and thoroughly adapted here

1. Most important of these are the anonymous *Gesta Francorum* and the *Historia Hierosolymitana* of Fulcher of Chartres. Rosalind Hill, ed., *The Deeds of the Franks and the Other Pilgrims to Jerusalem* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1962); and Fulcher of Chartres, *A History of the Expedition to Jerusalem, 1095–1127*, tr. Frances Rita Ryan, ed. Harold S. Fink (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1969).

2. Simon Barton and Richard Fletcher, tr., *The World of El Cid: Chronicles of the Spanish Reconquest* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

3. Ernesto Pontieri, ed., *De rebus gestis Rogerii Calabriae et Siciliae comitis et Roberti Guiscardi ducis fratris eius auctore Gaufrido Malaterra monacho Benedictino*, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, 2nd ed., vol. 5, pt. 1 (Bologna: Nicola Zanichelli, 1925–28) (hereafter, Pontieri, *De rebus gestis*).

with the permission of Cambridge University Press—contain only those southern Italian and Sicilian place names that are actually mentioned in the account and that have identifiable modern analogues.

The introductory essay that precedes the translation begins with a short overview of the complicated history of the Norman conquests in southern Italy and Sicily. The remainder of the essay contains my own insights about Geoffrey Malaterra as a historian, borrowed with some modification from the corresponding chapter in *Making History*. The comparisons between the *Deeds of Count Roger* and contemporary accounts of the First Crusade and the early *Reconquista*, I leave to my readers.

Acknowledgments



Though it has been over thirteen years since I left the Institute for Advanced Study, I am, as evidenced by the present volume, still benefiting from the two years that I spent there. I am grateful to its School for Historical Studies and, in particular, to Giles Constable for the opportunity to launch this project. Key to its completion has been the indispensable effort of a remarkable Pomona College undergraduate, Sarah Lamm, a medievalist in the making and a fixture in my ongoing medieval Latin tutorial. Her read of the translation, combined with her good sense as to what in the way of explanatory notes would make this source accessible to an undergraduate audience, helped move this project along. I would also like to thank the University of Pennsylvania Press for granting me permission to adapt a chapter from *Making History* for use as part of the introduction of the present volume as well as Cambridge University Press for permission to reprint and adapt the maps, which originally appeared in Donald Matthew's *The Norman Kingdom of Sicily*. Last, but not least, I am grateful to Michael Neuss, another of my talented students, for his efforts in preparing the index.

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