Let Each Invoke the God he Worships: A Muslim Traveler's Account of 12th-century Sicily

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by

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ABSTRACT

This project studies the religiously and ethnically diverse communities of twelfth-century Sicily. This society was noteworthy for the high degree of religious and cultural accommodation relative to other Christian polities of that era. The thesis focuses on a particular primary source: *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*. The recorded observations of Ibn Jubayr (1145-1217 CE), a scholar and poet from Almohad Granada who was shipwrecked on Sicily on his way back from a pilgrimage to Mecca, are contextualized within his own cultural perspective and experience. The thesis makes comparative studies of other societies throughout the region through other sources. Using these sources, it engages with the ongoing historiographical debate which interprets events during this period as being one of cultural interchange and development against the classical "clash of civilizations" narrative. It also argues that contemporary religious movements were an important part of the political landscape.

INDEX WORDS: Mediterranean History, Medieval History, Islamic History, Sicily

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DEDICATION

For my mother Cristine and my father Derald, who nurtured in me a love of humanity's shared stories and taught me to labor in service to the truth.

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1 Introduction

On the 4th of February 1169 CE at around 8 AM, an earthquake of an estimated magnitude between 6.4 and 7.3 on the Richter scale struck Eastern Sicily. It was a major natural disaster and is believed to have resulted in at least 15,000 deaths, the near-complete destruction of the city of Catania, an eruption of the nearby volcano Mount Etna, and a tsunami that flooded the coast from Messina to the Simeto River, with strong shocks being felt as far away as Reggio Calabria on the mainland. The Muslim traveler Abu al-Husayn Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Jubayr al-Kinani (better known to us simply as Ibn Jubayr) relates a story that he heard during his stay in Sicily about the earthquake and their Norman Christian King William II.[1]

> It was told to us that when a terrifying earthquake shook this island [the King] in alarm ranged round his palace and heard nothing but cries to God and His Prophet from his women and pages. At sight of him, they were overcome with confusion, but he said to them, 'Let each invoke the God he worships, and those that have faith shall be comforted.'[2]

William, who would have been only 15 years old at the time, was an unusual example of a religiously tolerant Christian ruler to this Muslim traveler. But as the King of Sicily and a member of the House of Hauteville, William was hardly unique or unprecedented in his sentiment. Nor was it as simple as a case of the king being unwilling or unable to persecute Muslims. He and the other members of his dynasty were instrumental in embracing and

[1] M. S. Barbano et al., "In Search of Tsunami Deposits Along the Eastern Coast of Sicily (Italy): The State of the Art," *Recent Progress on Earthquake Geology*, (2011): 112-3.
[2] Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, trans. Ronald Broadhurst (London: Camelot Press, 1952), 341.

promoting a type of religious and cultural cosmopolitanism typical of Norman rule in Sicily at this time.

Ibn Jubayr's account in his *rihla*[3] of his four month-long sojourn from December 1184 to April 1185 in the Norman Kingdom depicted Sicily as a land of bewildering religious tolerance and diversity for this era in European history. He wrote at length about his amazement at the cordiality between Christian and Muslim neighbors, the many Muslims of wealth and status that he encounters, and of the widespread freedom that Muslims had in the expression of their faith (although he expresses his amazement at the Normans' accommodation alongside frequent prayers for God to drive out the infidel rulers and restore the land to their rightful Muslim overlords). At the same time, he wrote with admiration about the fantastic wealth, military power, and cultural sophistication that he observed. Even considering the admittedly hyperbolic nature of his prose, it is clear that the Kingdom of Sicily in the 12th century was an unusual Christian kingdom in its approach to its different religious communities as well as a demonstrably successful state in its cultivation of a strong economy, a powerful military, public safety, and an efficient administration. By examining *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, as well as corroborating evidence for some of the things he claims to have seen, it is possible to prove that the cosmopolitanism of the Norman kingdom was not just the result of the blending of different cultures on the island, but a direct consequence of the policies of the Norman rulers who promoted what would have been (to them) alien ideas and foreign officers in their royal court.

The Kingdom of Sicily, which was founded by Roger II Hauteville on Christmas Day in 1130 with the religious sanction of Pope Innocent II, is an often-cited example of peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims in Europe in the Middle Ages. It is also a much-

[3] The *rihla* (Arabic: رحلة, lit. "journey") here refers to a genre of medieval Arabic literature that usually describes the author's experience taking the pilgrimage to Mecca, but the itinerary can often extend far beyond the original route.

discussed example of the blending of Muslim and Christian (both Latin and Greek) culture. Roger's coronation was the result of generations of Norman adventurism in Southern Italy and it united Norman lands on the Southern Italian Peninsula with the island of Sicily into a powerful new polity in the Mediterranean. The Norman conquest of the island had been completed by Roger's father, Roger I, the Count of Sicily, who accepted the surrender of the last Muslim-held stronghold of Noto on the island in 1091, ending 260 years of Muslim rule. The Norman conquest led to the immigration of large numbers of Normans, Lombards, and other Europeans to Sicily, but did not result immediately in the mass displacement of Sicilian Muslims.[4] When the Muslim capital of Palermo (which they referred to as *al-Madinah* or *Balarm*) surrendered to Roger in January 1072, the Muslim population was given guarantees of protection of their lives, religion, and laws.[5] The Normans had come to rule Sicily, but it was clear that they had neither the means nor the inclination to drive out the existing population.

The Sicilian portion of Ibn Jubayr's *Travels* was, for the author, an unplanned and mostly unwelcome accident. Originally from Muslim Spain, his knowledge of religious jurisprudence, literature, and poetry eventually secured him a position as a secretary to the Almohad governor of Granada, Abu Sa'id Uthman bin Abd al-Mu'min. In 1182 he was forced under threat by this governor to drink seven cups of wine with him, despite his religious protestations. This bizarre episode of aristocratic bullying took a sudden turn when, seized by remorse, the governor then showered Ibn Jubayr with seven cups of gold dinars. Soon after he decided to seek a well-timed leave of absence and put this windfall to use on a pilgrimage to Mecca. He departed in February of 1183 in the company of his friend, the physician Abu Ja'far Ahmad ibn Hasan.[6] Having

[4] Sarah Davis-Secord, "Muslims in Norman Sicily: The Evidence of Imam al-Mazari's Fatwas," *Mediterranean Studies*, 16 (2007), 48.
[5] Ibid, 49.
[6] *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, s.v. "Ibn Jubayr."

already completed the religious requirements of the pilgrimage and visiting the lands of the Ayyubid Sultanate, the Abbasid Caliphate, and the Crusader States[7] he and the other pilgrims were then shipwrecked when swept into the famously treacherous straits of Messina. Much to his surprise, King William II himself was on the scene surveying the affair and paid from his own coinage the cost of sending out boats to ferry the shipwrecked passengers to shore.[8]

Thus began Ibn Jubayr's now-famous stay in Sicily. During the intervening months, he would observe at many different points the evident results of the Norman court's enforcement of their own particular brand of religious tolerance, and the many ways it impacted the island's culture, its robust economy, its military might, and its administrative structure. He and his party would travel across the northern shore of the island, through the great city of Palermo, in order to secure passage on a ship from Trapani at the western edge of the island back to his homeland in Spain.[9]

His travels give us valuable insight into the reality of life in the Mediterranean world at the time. Studies about this region's history have traditionally regarded its cultures and communities as wholly distinct and divided along religious and political lines in a way that prevented the transmission of ideas and people, but there is new interest in exploring the history of this region from a revisionist perspective. This new scholarship instead wishes to examine the Mediterranean in a way that emphasizes the roles played by disparate peoples and cultures of Europe, Africa, and Asia in an era when Muslims, Christians, and Jews all engaged with each other in both conflict and collaboration. This thesis focuses on the example of Sicily as a young

[7] Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels*, 16.
[8] Ibid, 336-8.
[9] Ibid, 353.

society born from the migration of a new group from Northern Europe whose entrée into the region would have a seismic impact on its history.

Beginning in the tenth century, a new ethnic and cultural identity began to emerge in Northern France whose members would come to have far-reaching effects on Mediterranean politics. Norse Vikings, principally from Denmark but also some from Norway and Sweden, had been conducting raids and establishing settlements in the territory of the Kingdom of West Francia since the death of Charlemagne. These raids eventually culminated in one such Scandinavian leader, known to history as Rollo, making a treaty with King Charles III, known as Charles the Simple. In exchange for his swearing an oath of allegiance to the Frankish king and his followers' conversion and baptism to Christianity, Rollo was granted the lordship of the newly created Duchy of Normandy, named so for the "Norsemen" origins of its new rulers. By doing so, Charles was able to eliminate the threat posed by Rollo's band of warriors, as well as to create an effective barrier against other Scandinavian adventurers from sailing up the river Seine to attack Paris.[10]

These "Normans" as they came to be known proved adaptable to their newly settled life. Through intermarriage with the local Franks and adoption of Frankish customs, the descendants of Rollo and his captains were transformed into French-speaking Christians within a single generation.[11] Their society was culturally and religiously French but retained the warrior energy and adventurism of their Viking ancestors. Before long, ambitious Norman knights were looking for new challenges and new lands to conquer.[12] Their military accomplishments were noteworthy and resulted in the establishment of Norman rule over many far-flung territories. Perhaps the

[10] Judith Green, *The Normans* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022), 36.
[11] Ibid, 44.
[12] Ibid, 51.

most famous of these conquests was the invasion of the Kingdom of England by William the Conqueror in 1066, but around the same time other groups of Norman warriors were setting out on adventures of their own whose consequences would reverberate throughout Europe and the Mediterranean and helped to change the course of history.[13] Most germane to our subject was the Norman invasion of Southern Italy which also began in the 11th century. Their entry into the tangled webs of conflicts among the established powers would eventually lead to their rule over the southern half of the Italian peninsula and the island of Sicily, where Norman kings established their capital in the Muslim city of Palermo. These descendants of Rollo and his captains formed the ruling class of the Kingdom in which Ibn Jubayr found himself shipwrecked during his account of his travels.

This thesis will be arguing for the existence of the kind of interconnected and cosmopolitan Mediterranean world in the twelfth century which scholars are now coming to favor. To do so, it is focusing primarily on a single portion of a single source, the Sicilian chapters of *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*. By contextualizing Ibn Jubayr's writings with examinations of his biographical information and comparisons with other sources and other contemporary regions, the example of Sicily in the 12th century gains a much broader utility in describing the circumstances of the Mediterranean world at the time. The Norman Kingdom represents a place that by virtue of its central location, high levels of diversity and accommodation, and its sophisticated culture situates it as not far removed from any of its neighbors. It is also a useful juxtaposition against the more conflict-riven societies on the periphery of the Mediterranean world, such as the Crusader States of the Levant or the Christian and Muslim rival kingdoms in the Iberian Peninsula. Ibn Jubayr, who was writing his account of

[13] François Neveaux, Claire Ruelle, and Howard Curtis, *A Brief History of the Normans: The Conquests That Changed the Face of Europe* (London: Robinson: 2008), 11.

Sicily in the midst of his travels throughout the region, helps to make this case through the amazement and bewilderment at their society that he expresses on the page.

In Chapter One of this thesis, there will be relatively little discussion about life in the Norman Kingdom or Ibn Jubayr's experiences there. Instead, Ibn Jubayr's cultural and religious identity will be explored as a means of contextualizing what he wrote. This is a critically important step in interpreting his observations owing to the very different Mediterranean world which he inhabited and traversed. These aspects of his identity are also an area prone to conjecture as there is relatively little biographical information about the man. The complex history of Muslim civilization in the Iberian Peninsula will be explored in further detail as will his personal familial and professional connections to it. From there, the genre of literature in which he was writing will be examined alongside what we can discern about his intended readership for clues about what he hoped to communicate with his writings. Finally, a brief exploration of the history and contemporary circumstances of the Almohad Caliphate of which he was a seemingly loyal subject will be conducted in order to help determine what impact their state philosophy had on the production of the travelog and on what Ibn Jubayr chose to write about. His identity as a religious pilgrim, a court poet, and a student of the world he lived in must be considered when attempting to qualify his words.

In Chapter Two, the narrative of Ibn Jubayr's *Travels* and his experiences will take a backseat to a discussion of the Mediterranean world at the time of his voyage. Establishing the geopolitical circumstances that helped to drive historical events in the region represents a critical component of the context in which Ibn Jubayr's worldview developed and how that influenced his perspective. Beginning with a brief exploration of historical periodization around the Early Muslim Conquests and the end of antiquity presents an opportunity to engage with some of the

foundational arguments and ideas that have characterized the historiography of this era. Moving on to newer and more scholastically relevant ideas we will examine the juxtaposition that existed in the many religious conflicts of the era, especially regarding how religious missions tended to attract foreign interventions that local rulers often had difficulty coping with. We will look then to better understand the perspectives of rulers who had religiously heterogeneous populations and the ways in which they leveraged their relationships with those communities. By examining the entirety of the twelfth-century Mediterranean and making comparative studies of other territories, the unique circumstances that defined life in Norman Sicily will become clearer.

Chapter Three will explore the conditions of life and culture in Sicily as Ibn Jubayr experienced them. His impressions and commentaries on the strength, wealth, and sophistication of the Kingdom, properly contextualized with the personal worldview established in Chapters One and Two, clarify what made Norman Sicily so interesting and compelling for him. The examination of his comments will begin what he can tell us about the operation of the state itself and what roles the differing cultural groups had on the kingdom's operation, including the influence of Greek mariners, Muslim administrators, and perhaps most surprisingly malcontent Latins. From there the material and intellectual culture of the island will be explored for the many influences that went into the creation some of its most impressive accomplishments which can still be viewed today as part of the landscape itself. Finally, the much-vaunted wealth of the kingdom, perhaps what made it most famous during its time, will be examined as an outgrowth of their great diversity and the sponsorship of its minority communities.

The argument that this thesis hopes to make by studying the political and cultural circumstances of the Norman Kingdom of Sicily alongside those of the wider twelfth-century Mediterranean is that a populous, diverse, and dynamic world existed there which was far more

defined by mutual exchange and development than by simple armed conflict between civilizations. Furthermore, it hopes to contextualize the many instances of violence which occurred between rival communities as a factor that helped to instigate these changes alongside other forms of contact like trade, migration, and the proliferation of the arts and sciences. In the specific case of Norman Sicily, as Ibn Jubayr experienced it, we see an example of how religious and cultural accommodation and, in some cases, active promotion of a culture by the ruling class helped to define their society's most important features and contribute to their growth and success.

This thesis also aims to engage with the historiographical debate about the Medieval Mediterranean world. This debate posits the great sea as a meeting place of three continents and site of great cultural confluence against the classical perception of this region as a kind of no man's land where the diametrically opposed civilizations of Christianity and Islam vied for dominance. This "clash of civilizations" model of history, popularized in part by the likes of Edward Gibbon, remained popular throughout the long nineteenth-century and still influence popular thought to this day. These historians viewed the Middle Ages much as Renaissance era thinkers did, as an interruption in the march of progress for Europe, first established by Classical Greece and Rome and ultimately recovered by the great nation states of modernity. Historians today have begun to view this era quite differently thanks to the reexamination of the existence of ongoing contacts between Latin, Greek, and Muslim communities. It includes discussions of interreligious warfare, but instead of regarding these campaigns as intractable holy wars it examines them as the consequence of tensions surrounding transformations which were taking place within their respective societies. [14]

[14] The existing scholarship about the Norman Kingdom of Sicily is currently benefitting a great deal from a community of historians who are far too numerous to name each individually, but major recent contributions to the

This study will be making use of a few terms which may be unfamiliar to modern readers but are necessary for accurately distinguishing between contemporary cultures and not confusing features of Medieval geography with that of the modern era. When discussing the situation in the Iberian Peninsula it would not be appropriate to use the word Spain to refer to any part of it. The nation of Spain, whose name is derived from the Roman province of Hispania, would not exist for another several centuries. Instead, a distinction will be made between the Christian-ruled portion in the north and the Muslim-ruled portion in the south, which is referred to as "Al-Andalus" and its people as "Andalusi." Similarly, the term "Ifriqiya" will be used to refer to a region corresponding to the coastal zones of the modern-day countries of Tunisia, Libya, and Eastern Algeria, with the area to the west referred to as the "Maghreb." The term "Latins" will be used as a demonym referring to Europeans of the Roman Catholic denomination as opposed to Greek Christians. Ibn Jubayr himself uses demonyms that might be unfamiliar to modern readers as well. Notably, he refers to all Northern Europeans in his travels as "Franks," a term that was in popular use in the Muslim world to describe the ethnic group they associated with the Crusaders. The term "Rumi" which is derived from the name for the Romans is utilized to refer primarily to Greek Christians, but Ibn Jubayr also uses it sometimes to refer to Italians and other

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field of studying cultural syncretism within the kingdom have been made by the following scholars: David Abulafia, *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean* (London: Penguin Books, 2012); Brian Catlos, *Infidel Kings and Unholy Warriors: Faith, Power, and Violence in the Age of Crusade and Jihad* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015); and Allen Fromherz, *The Near West: Medieval North Africa, Latin Europe and the Mediterranean in the Second Axial Age*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016) all examine historical contacts, interactions, and cross-cultural transference of ideas in the Mediterranean within the context of their geographical and cultural landscape. Joshua Birk, *Norman Kings of Sicily and the Rise of the Anti-Islamic Critique: Baptized Sultans* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Sarah Davis-Secord, *Where Three Worlds Met: Sicily in the Early Medieval Mediterranean* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017); Jeremy Johns, *Arabic Administration in Norman Sicily: The Royal dīwān* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); and Hiroshi Takayama, *Sicily and the Mediterranean in the Middle Ages* (United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis, 2019) look more specifically at the example of Norman Sicily and the cultural exchanges which took place between the diversity of communities present there. Most of these works will be referenced more specifically later in this thesis, but their impact on this branch of studies is important to note early for the great influence they are having on the field and more specifically on this project.

Southern Europeans. Whether he fails to make any distinction as a matter of convenience or ignorance is not clear. When providing translations from Arabic I have elected not to use diacritic markings in the text, except when transliterating the characters ‘ayn (‘) and hamza (’). This choice was made for the sake of ease of reading. Finally, a few terms will be used interchangeably when describing the cultural identity of the Kingdom of Sicily, including Normans, Sicilians, Siculo-Normans, and Arab Sicilian. Although there is some distinction to be made in the precise meaning of those terms, they have been judged to be close enough in their meanings for the purposes of this thesis.

2 Pilgrim, Poet, and Scholar: The Religious and Cultural Identity of Ibn Jubayr

Early on in the month of Jumada al-Awwal in the year 579 of the Hijri calendar (22 August to 20 September 1183 CE), Ibn Jubayr wrote about his visit to one of the holy sites in the city of Mecca:

> The new moon rose on the night of Monday the 22nd of August when we had been in Mecca - may God Most High exalt it - eighteen days. The new moon of this month was the most auspicious our eyes had seen in all that had passed in our life. It rose after we had already entered the seat of the venerable enclosure, the sacred Haram of God, the dome in which is the maqam of Abraham, the place from which the Prophet's mission was sent out, and the alighting place of the faithful spirit Gabriel with inspiration and revelation. May God with His power and strength inspire us to give thanks for His favor and make us sensible of that amount of privilege he has made our portion, finally accepting us and rewarding us with the accustomed generosity of His beneficent works, and giving us of His gracious help and support. There is no God but He.[15]

For Ibn Jubayr and his company, their arrival at this sacred destination was the fulfillment of a lifelong ambition. The pilgrimage known as the *Hajj* was then as it is today a mandatory duty for all Muslims to undertake at least once in their lifetimes so long as they are physically and financially able to do so. [16] Realistically, few 12th-century Muslims living as far

[15] Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels*, 77.
[16] The Hajj (Arabic: حج) can only be completed between the dates of the 8th to the 12th or 13th of the month of Dhu al-Hijjah of the Muslim calendar (Arabic: ذو ٱلحجة). When performed at any other time of year the pilgrimage constitutes a lesser pilgrimage known as an Umrah (Arabic: عمرة).

away from Mecca as he did in the Iberian Peninsula would have been able to fulfill this duty, regardless of their personal wealth or status. Although he would have to wait for another seven months in order to perform the necessary rites to complete the *Hajj*, his presence there alone placed him in a select group who would have been considered to be extremely fortunate by their peers and countrymen. This aspect of his travels and the opportunity to share the experience was the key purpose for him composing his *rihla*.

Understanding the value of Ibn Jubayr's travelogue for accurately describing Norman Sicily or any other place he discussed requires proper contextualization of the observations and ideas that he presented based on his own personal background. This chapter examines the biographical information that scholars have uncovered on Ibn Jubayr, along with examples of his writing, to attempt to clarify his worldview. By doing so it is possible to better explain what he claims to have witnessed during *The Travels* and to try and fit his perspective into the cultural landscape through which he was navigating. This chapter begins with a consideration of his personal ethnic and religious identity as an Andalusi Muslim of Arab extraction and how the history and current political and cultural situation of his people helped to influence his writings. Following that an examination of the *rihla* as a literary genre will explore what those stylistic conventions meant for his work and how he presented his observations. Finally, we will consider the influence that might have been imparted by the Berber-dominated Almohads, who ruled his homeland, patronized his art, and certainly would have been included among his intended audience.

At first glance this information appears to have little to do with the Norman Kingdom of Sicily in the twelfth-century, but these details are essential to assess the value of *The Travels* and its significance as a primary source. Only by first carefully exploring the potential conflicts the

author might have had towards accurately portraying the truth can any worthwhile claims about the historical significance of those events be further explored. Beyond establishing or qualifying the author's credibility, exploring the narrator's background and potential biases also reveals much about their native culture and the sensibilities of their intended readership. Thus, these explorations also have the effect of enhancing the overall value of the work in describing the greater cultural context of the Medieval Mediterranean, of which Norman Sicily was an important constituent part. By taking a look at the author, who he was, what he was writing, and for whom, the immense historical value of this somewhat obscure manuscript is revealed not just for understanding Norman Sicily but for understanding the entire world of the author's experience.

2.1 Native Son of Al-Andalus

One of the most important considerations to keep in mind while we examine the personal perspective of Ibn Jubayr as he conducted his travels is the particular influence of his native Andalusi culture. Ibn Jubayr was born in the year 1145 CE in the city of Valencia in what is today the country of Spain. He was of Arab ethnic extraction, being a member of the Kinana tribe and descended from a soldier named 'Abdal-Salam ibn Jubayr who had migrated to the Iberian Peninsula as part of an army dispatched in the 8th-century by the Caliph in Damascus to put down a revolt of Berber soldiers that had broken out. [17] He received his education in the town of Xàtiva where his father was part of the local bureaucracy, and he would eventually move to

[17] The banu Kinana (Arabic: بنو كنانة) were based in the Tihama coastal region of Hejaz. Many modern-day Arab tribes trace their lineage to the Kinana.

Granada, where he worked for the Almohad governor, and also where he was living at the time of his departure towards Mecca. [18]

His employment there along with his writings establish his credentials as a devout Sunni Muslim adhering to the Hanbali school of Islamic jurisprudence, which put his beliefs in line with the officially endorsed religious stance of his patrons in the Almohad Caliphate. He makes several references to his homeland during *The Travels* by comparing it favorably to the places he was visiting, indicating either a sense of personal loyalty or even homesickness in the text. His deep family connections to the history of Islam in the Iberian Peninsula as well as his status as a functionary in the current Islamic regime of the region make him a quintessential native son of Al-Andalus and give context to the anxieties he repeatedly expresses about the contracting of Muslim-ruled territory in the Mediterranean.

The region of the Iberian Peninsula, which is today territorially divided by the modern nations of Spain and Portugal, was in the Medieval period divided between competing Christian-ruled kingdoms in the north and Muslim-ruled territories in the south. The Christian kings traced their descent from the old Visigothic kingdom which had all but entirely replaced the rule of the Roman Empire in the region during the period of late antiquity.[19] The period of Muslim rule in Iberia began with an invasion of the Visigothic kingdom by soldiers of the Umayyad Caliphate in 711 CE and constitutes the furthest extent into Europe of the early Muslim expansions. [20] This army was composed largely of Arab and Berber soldiers and was led by the Arab general Tariq ibn Ziyad.[21] The administration was dominated by ethnic Arabs and characterized by

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[18] Ronald Broadhurst, introduction to *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, by Ibn Jubayr, 15.
[19] The Latin term for the provinces of the Iberian Peninsula was "*Hispania*", from which the name of the modern country of Spain derives.
[20] Firas Alkhateeb, *Lost Islamic History: Reclaiming Muslim Civilization from the Past* (London: Hurst & Company, 2014), 111.
[21] Tariq ibn Ziyad (Arabic: طارق بن زياد) is the namesake of the Strait and the Rock of Gibraltar, which is a Spanish derivation of *Jabal Tariq* (Arabic: جبل طارق), meaning "mountain of Tariq".

mistreatment of Shia Muslims and disenfranchisement of non-Arabs leading to considerable interethnic tension in the Caliphate's territory, evidenced by the many revolts among non-Sunnis and non-Arabs such as the one which brought Ibn Jubayr's ancestor to settle in Iberia. [22] This was a typical feature of governance in the Umayyad Caliphate and would heavily contribute to their downfall at the hands of the Abbasid Revolution in the mid-8th-century CE.[23] The name by which Muslims of the era referred to the region was Al-Andalus[24] and its people as Andalusi. These terms have been adopted by Medieval historians today to refer to the former Islamic territories and the demonym and cultural identity of its people, as distinct from the Iberian Christians in the north. During Ibn Jubayr's lifetime, Muslim Al-Andalus was united under the rule of the aforementioned Almohad Caliphate which had its capital in Marrakesh in modern day Morocco and whose territory included the majority of the Maghreb.[25] Inspired by the new doctrine of their Mahdi Ibn Tumart, who claimed both Arab and Berber ancestry, the Almohads were ethnic Masmuda Berbers (as opposed to the Sanhaja Berbers who dominated the Almoravids) and were relative newcomers at the time, having only absorbed Al-Andalus into their domain a few decades hence at the time of Ibn Jubayr's pilgrimage.[26]

Ibn Jubayr frequently expresses his anxiety about the threat posed by Christian rulers to the Muslim lands through which he travelled. This fear of Christian expansionism appears to have been held in common by many other Muslims around the Mediterranean during this time, but as an Andalusi Muslim he would have been aware of the specific history of his own

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[22] Firas Alkhateeb, *Lost Islamic History*. 122.
[23] *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, s. v. "Umayyad."
[24] Arabic: الأَنْدَلُس. The etymology of this name has traditionally been derived from the name of the Vandals, a Germanic tribal people who established kingdoms in previously Roman territory in the 5th-century CE.
[25] Arabic: المغرب. Literally "the west," can also be understood to mean "the place where the sun sets." This name is used to this day to refer to the geographical region of Northwest Africa.
[26] Allen Fromherz, "The Berber Empires in Granada (6th–7th/12th–13th Centuries). Revolution or Continuity?", in *A Companion to Islamic Granada* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 105-6.

homeland and the many struggles between Christian and Muslim-led armies that took place there. Al-Andalus represented the northwestern extreme of Muslim territory and the furthest extent of Muslim conquest into Western Europe. It crucially shared a land border with many Christian kingdoms such as Castile, Léon, Portugal, and Aragon along with other shorter-lived domains. As such, it was one of the easiest and most frequent targets for attempts at Christian conquest. By Ibn Jubayr's lifetime, a historical narrative had begun to emerge that depicted these many conflicts on both sides as a kind of religious mission to either defend their lands against infidel encroachment or to redeem enemy lands to their rightful owners.[27] As is usually the case, the reality of these conflicts defied this simplistic explanation. Christian and Muslim rulers in Iberia frequently allied with each other against other local rivals and long periods of friendly relations between the two religious groups are just as common in the region's history.

This kind of elasticity in religious loyalties is famously displayed in the epic poem *The Song of my Cid*, where the titular character Rodrigo Diaz de Vivar earns distinction fighting both for Christian and Muslim rulers during his career, before leading a religiously heterogenous army in conquering his own private fief in the Muslim town of Valencia.[28] The importance of El Cid as a Spanish national hero and icon of the *Reconquista*[29] represents a juxtaposition of the historical reality of interreligious conflict and accommodation in Iberia against the mythologized representations of the past which unfortunately often still dominate the public imagination. Although the poem advocates a specifically Christian perspective, his interactions with Muslims as related in the epic hint at a degree of cultural exchange and accommodation. This is evidenced

[27] David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 200.
[28] Anonymous, *The Poem of the Cid*, trans. Lesley Byrd Simpson, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 49-53.
[29] "*Reconquista*" translates to mean "reconquest" in both Spanish and Portuguese. As a historical concept, it reinforces the idea that Christian rulers were reconquering territory lost to the Umayyad invasion.

in part by the epithet of "El Cid" itself, which is derived from the Arabic honorific "*sayyid*" meaning "sir", "lord", or "master".[30] The idea of the Reconquista only began to be formally established in Spanish historiography in the nineteenth-century, long after the final collapse of Muslim rule with the fall of Granada in 1492. There is no known contemporary source that uses this term, but both Christian and Muslim sources from this time do express an interpretation of these conflicts as "holy wars" albeit without any obvious revanchist background.[31]

Ibn Jubayr expresses repeated surprise at seeing fair and gentle treatment of Muslims who live in Christian dominated lands during his travels. His expectation for the kind of treatment he might face from Christians is consistently that they will attempt to kidnap him and his fellows and sell them into slavery. These fears are not entirely unfounded, as the Mediterranean slave trade was an active and widespread institution which primarily enslaved Muslims for export to Christian-ruled lands and Christians for Muslim-ruled lands.[32] The Christians' treatment of him impressed him, partly because it is the kind of treatment that was familiar to him as the social contract afforded to Christians and Jews living in Muslim-dominated lands.[33] As a native of Al-Andalus, he was accustomed to witnessing this kind of accommodation towards religious minorities thanks to the sizeable non-Muslim population of his homeland and the well-established Muslim legal traditions which protected them. Muslim scripture and Islamic jurisprudence terms Jews and Christians as well as religious groups common elsewhere such as Zoroastrians and Mandaeans as "peoples of the book"[34] and grants them legal status in Muslim

[30] Arabic: سيد. This honorific remains in widespread use throughout the Arabic speaking world, most notably in military context.
[31] Simon Barton and Robert Portass, introduction to *Beyond the Reconquista: New Directions in the History of Medieval Iberia (711-1085): In Honour of Simon Barton* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 4-5.
[32] Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels*, 27, 43, and 52-3.
[33] Ibid, 53 and 296.
[34] Arabic: أهل الكتاب (romanized: *'ahl al-kitab*).

communities as *dhimmi*.[35] The precise terms under which this status is afforded varies widely throughout Islamic history, but in general it protected an individual's right to life, property, and freedom of worship so long as they remained loyal to the state and paid a special poll tax known as the *jizya*.[36] While traveling in Sicily[37] and in the Crusader states of the Holy Land[38] he witnessed the inverse of this social arrangement with Muslims being afforded protected status in exchange for their loyalty and payment of a special additional tax.

However regrettable he may have found the reality of the social roles of master and subject being reversed between Christians and Muslims, he still seemed to take it as a marker of civilized behavior that contradicted his expectations of Christian savagery.[39] This raises questions about the status of Muslims living under Christian rule in the Iberian Peninsula. Further research into these communities would help to clarify what basis Ibn Jubayr's seeming prejudice towards Christians had in reality, but whether well-founded or not these ideas have a major impact on his writing. His experience as a Muslim traveling in Norman Sicily and elsewhere among non-Muslims has greater historical utility when his specific perspective as a Sunni Arab from the cosmopolitan lands of Al-Andalus is properly considered.

2.2 The Rihla and Ibn Jubayr's Audience

Another important consideration to keep in mind when examining Ibn Jubayr's account of his travels, especially when attempting to discern any potential bias or agenda in his work, is the forms and practices of the literary genre in which he was writing. His account of his travels

[35] Arabic: ذمي. Also called *mu'ahid* (Arabic: معاهد) or collectively called *'ahl ad-dhimmah* (Arabic: أهل الذمة).
[36] Arabic: جزية.
[37] Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels*, 339-40.
[38] Ibid, 316.
[39] Ibid, 300.

fits into a classification of Arabic-Muslim literature known as a *rihla*.[40] The rihla was a popular form of medieval and early modern Arabic literature that amounts to a kind of travelog. It typically describes a journey that is undertaken with the intent of performing the Hajj, but popular examples frequently include voyages to other destinations, some of which can far exceed the confines of the original route. Muslim culture at the time placed a strong emphasis on travel as a means of increasing one's personal knowledge, encapsulating this idea in the concept of *ar-rihla fi talab al-'alm* or "travel in search of knowledge,"[41] and published accounts of journeys like this were considered to be of high educational value.[42] Ibn Jubayr's *Travels* were written very early on in the body of literature that makes up this genre and it came to be regarded as an archetype for it by other authors. Although he would not have consciously been following its forms and conventions, knowledge about what the rihla genre represented, what it aimed to achieve with its writing, and who the intended audience happened to be represents a study worthy of consideration when interpreting his observations in Sicily, Mecca, and wherever else he happened to record his visits.

However, many detours and side treks a rihla author such as Ibn Jubayr might make in the course of their journey, the religious core mission of the work is never too far afield from the narrative. The rihla as a literary genre had particular significance for Muslims living in the Maghreb and Al-Andalus regions, as the great distance between their homelands and the holy cities of Mecca and Medina meant few individuals could ever hope to make the journey themselves.[43] This is clearly true for Ibn Jubayr's *Travels* as well, as he devotes a great deal of

[40] Arabic: رحلة (lit."journey" or "trip.")
[41] Arabic: الرحلة في طلب العلم.
[42] *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, s. v. "Rihla."
[43] Dale Eickelman, *Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, Migration, and the Religious* Imagination, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 71.

the text to describing the experience of traveling as a pilgrim and to describing the performance of the religious rituals of the Hajj itself. This is perhaps best exemplified by his extensive description of the Kaaba and the Masjid al-Haram, the Great Mosque of Mecca that contains it. This description, along with its attendant descriptions of the processions and prayers that he claims to have witnessed, runs on for over twenty pages in the translated edition of the text and goes so far as to even include enumerations of the amount of bricks in each wall and measurements for them.[44] He also frequently commented on what accommodations local rulers made for the needs of pilgrims, bemoaning the greed of customs officials and exploitative ferrymen who rob and abuse the pilgrims[45] and lauding praise upon the generosity and piety of others who provide them with victuals, lodgings, and means of travel.[46]

Ibn Jubayr's political leanings are also on frequent display throughout *The Travels* and are deeply intertwined with his religious messages. His worldview, which is discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, held that the Islamic world was facing contracting territorial borders and a true existential threat in the form of Christian aggression. Arriving in Alexandria in Egypt, which was at that time part of the domain of Saladin, he seems to go out of his way to praise the Sultan who even then, prior to his recapture of Jerusalem, was known throughout the Muslim world as a great leader in the struggle against the Crusaders.[47] At times his work even seems to serve as a recruitment tool among his own people. While traveling in Syria, a country that was also under Saladin's rule at the time and that he mostly seems to have been extremely impressed by, he exhorts energetic and ambitious Maghrebis to come seek knowledge and their fortunes by immigrating to these lands. His imperative tone regarding the ongoing fight against what he

[44] Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels*, 77-100.
[45] Ibid, 31-2.
[46] Ibid, 45.
[47] Ibid, 313.

viewed as Christian occupation in the Levant includes calls for brave, young men to travel from the Maghreb in order to join the ongoing holy wars.[48]

Aside from the glowing praise he lauds upon Saladin, Ibn Jubayr makes no attempt to conceal his negative feelings about other foreign cultures and ethnicities. In a tone that is familiar to other rihlas, he routinely castigates foreign Muslims and their rulers for what he views as their lax morality and impious customs. After arriving in Jeddah from the port of ʻAydhab,[49] he declares that the country should be subjected to a *hisbah* and that its black-skinned people have less reason than animals, an uncomfortable if not uncommon assertion that is seemingly against the spirit of community with fellow Muslims.[50] This racial insensitivity is also on display as he describes his interactions with Muslims from Khorasan,[51] whom he describes as barbarous, uncouth, and obnoxious in their performance of religious rituals.[52] This disregard for the dignity of any culture he finds foreign is reminiscent of his expressions about European Christians,[53] whom he refers to as pigs, and describes as being filthy and stinking in their lifestyles.[54] If he had any such similar feelings about the inferiority of ethnic Berbers to Arabs, he tactfully omits them. Instead, he asserts the moral superiority of his patrons in the Almohad Caliphate. A more thorough exploration of the Almohads, their influence, and Ibn Jubayr's relationship with them

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[48] Ibid, 298-9.
[49] ʻAydhab (Arabic: عيذاب) was an important medieval port city on the Red Sea. It was destroyed in 1426 by the Mamluk sultan Al-Ashraf Sayf ad-Din Barsbay. The site of the former city is located in the Hala'ib Triangle disputed territory between the modern nations of Egypt and Sudan.
[50] A *hisbah* (Arabic: حسبة), which translates most directly to mean "accountability", in this instance refers to a penitential whipping. Ibn Jubayr advocates that this whipping be done with a sword. Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels*, 66.
[51] Khorasan (Arabic: خراسان) is a historical Arabic name for a country that is roughly analogous to modern day eastern Iran and Afghanistan. It also lends its name to one of the modern provinces of Iran.
[52] Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels*, 186.
[53] Ibn Jubayr uses the blanket term "Franks" (Arabic: فرنجة) to refer to anyone of Northern European ancestry, especially those residing in the Holy Land.
[54] Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels*, 318.

follows below, but all the praise he heaps upon them throughout his journey indicates that he expected a friendly readership for his work among them.

As mentioned before, Ibn Jubayr's rihla is often considered by scholars of Islamic history and literature to have been the prototypical work of the genre itself. Accepting that possibility invites a comparison between his work and that of other rihlas. In particular it begs comparison with the rihla of Ibn Battuta, which is generally agreed to be the famous example of the genre and is sometimes titled simply as *The Rihla*.[55] His travels are reported to have begun in the year 1325, nearly a century and a half later than those of Ibn Jubayr and include decades of voyages that took him as far away as China and earned him the distinction of being possibly the most well-traveled individual in history before the advent of human flight. Like Ibn Jubayr, Ibn Battuta's journey began as a Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca and originated in the extreme West of the Islamic world. As a devout Sunni Muslim and native of Morocco, which was by this time no longer politically united with Muslim Iberia, he had many cultural attributes in common with Ibn Jubayr and this provides some greater utility for their ability to establish context and continuity for their respective communities.[56] Ibn Battuta seems to have been much more preoccupied with witnessing and communicating marvelous new sights and experiences to his readership than his predecessor and the main point of difference between them is that he undertook many more voyages that had no obvious religious aims. However, there are also many problematic issues with Ibn Battuta's work, many of the things he claims to have seen and done strain credulity and portions of his rihla have been deemed to actually be plagiarized from Ibn Jubayr.[57] Despite this

[55] The formal title of Ibn Battuta's rihla is *A Masterpiece to Those Who Contemplate the Wonders of Cities and the Marvels of Traveling* (Arabic: تحفة النظار في غرائب الأمصار وعجائب الأسفار, romanized: Tuhfat an-Nuthar fi Ghara'ib al-Amsar wa 'Aja'ib al-Asfar).
[56] Dale Eickelman, *Muslim Travellers,* 122.
[57] *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, s. v. "Ibn Battuta."

and other factors that undermine his credibility, it still makes sense to consider these works as intellectually and culturally related and representative of their respective historical societies.

Exploring Ibn Jubayr's reasons for writing *The Travels* and where this book fits into the corpus of medieval Islamic literature is a necessary step in evaluating its historical value. What he wrote about and what he claims to have seen has as much to do with his intended audience at home as it does with his own personal sensibilities. Completing his pilgrimage and becoming a *Hajji* was the fulfillment of a lifelong ambition that a person like Ibn Jubayr most probably never expected to be able to achieve.[58] By recording his experiences and phrasing them in such a way as to help his countrymen understand and relate to them, he was performing an act of compassion that would help his readers to experience vicariously the religious exultation that he felt when visiting the birthplace of Islam. More importantly for this work, it also reveals what he and his readers, and thus other members of his native culture, would have found most interesting or unusual in the foreign lands he visited. In this way Ibn Jubayr not only teaches us about the features of daily life in a place like Norman Sicily or Ayyubid Egypt, but also in his homeland of Al-Andalus, then under the culturally influential rule of the Almohad Caliphate.

2.3 The Almohads, a Berber Islamic Empire

As mentioned above, Ibn Jubayr served as a clerk in the court of the local ruler of Granada, who was himself under the authority of a great Muslim power known as the Almohad Caliphate, which at the time ruled over a vast expanse of territory that included Al-Andalus and the majority of Northwest Africa. His association with them was what enabled his undertaking of

[58] Hajji (Arabic: الحجّي) is an honorific title that is given to a Muslim that has successfully completed their Hajj at least once. It is also sometimes used more generally as an honorific term for elders or other respected members of a Muslim community.

the Hajj in the first place, and he makes repeated favorable references to their good rulership and their piety throughout his journey.[59] They also seem to represent his intended readership, as he also makes repeated references to things that they would have been familiar with as a means of comparison to what Ibn Jubayr is describing. As such, when studying *The Travels* to try and discern the historical reality of what he describes against what his potential preconceptions and biases might be, it is necessary to clarify what the nature of his relationship with the Almohads was and what impact his association with them might have had on his work.

The Almohads represent a critically under-studied subject in the field of history today. Unfortunately, there is not enough room in this thesis to properly do justice to the incredible impact they had on Muslim culture and Medieval Mediterranean history. However, I do not believe it would be possible to accurately contextualize Ibn Jubayr's writings without examining the most important features of their society and the circumstances of his relationship with them. In the introductory chapter I discussed the possibly apocryphal story about the Almohad governor forcing his retainer to consume large quantities of wine and then gifting him gold dinars as a form of recompense. This episode is supposed to be what inspired his decision to undertake his pilgrimage, but recent scholarship has cast doubt on the veracity of this story as it seems out of character for the puritanical Almohads, and it would be unusual for a Hajj to be penitential in nature.[60] For his part. Ibn Jubayr gives no reason for his travels beyond the fulfillment of his religious duty and his consistently glowing praise of his Almohad patrons give no indication of hard feelings towards their ruling class. Rather, his point of view on the relative moral superiority they possessed tells us that he was not only obviously familiar with the operations of the Almohad state but that he was also an enthusiastic advocate of theirs.

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[59] Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels*, 358.
[60] Ibid, 358.

Considering also that the Almohad elite represented the most likely intended audience for his travelogs, exploring their historical origins also helps to illuminate Ibn Jubayr's personal thoughts, feelings, and motivations during his journey.

The Almohad domain, which can be rightly described as a Berber-dominated imperial state, originated as a puritanical religious movement among the tribes inhabiting the High Atlas Mountains range in modern day Morocco. Their founder was a scholar of Islamic jurisprudence and the son of a minor chieftain in the Masmuda tribal confederation named Ibn Tumart.[61] At the time of his birth, the Maghreb region he hailed from was ruled by the Almoravids, whose rise to power as a puritanical religious movement among the Berber tribes of North Africa in many ways presages the trajectory of the Almohads as well. [62] As a young man Ibn Tumart traveled widely in the pursuit of his education, first to Cordoba in Al-Andalus and later to the great cities of Cairo, Baghdad, and Damascus after the typical Medieval Muslim fashion of the previously mentioned "*ar-rihla fi talab al-'alm*", also undertaking the Hajj as part of his travels.[63] Arriving in the east in the early 12th-century, it seemed clear to many at the time that the Islamic world was under attack. Jerusalem had fallen to the Crusaders in 1099 along with many other previously Muslim-ruled cities and the Abbasid caliphs in Baghdad, who were meant to be the leaders of the entire Muslim world, had been reduced to the status of figureheads under the control of their Turkish military elite.[64] This perceived lack of genuine power and authority is referenced as a "sumptuous confinement" by Ibn Jubayr during his travels in Baghdad, who

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[61] Allen Fromherz, *The Almohads: The Rise of an Islamic Empire* (London: I. B. Taurus, 2010), 19.
[62] Both the Almohads and the Almoravids' names are bastardizations of their names in Arabic. The name Almoravid is derived from the Arabic Al-Murabitun (Arabic: المرابطون) which translates to mean "'those from the ribats", a kind of hill fortification built for volunteer holy warriors. The Almohads are so-called for their Arabic name Al-Muwahidun (Arabic: المُوَحِّدُون), whose name means "those that profess the unity of God". *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, s. v. "Al-Muwahiddun."
[63] *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, s. v. "Ibn Tumart".
[64] Hugh Kennedy, *The Caliphate: The History of an Idea*. New York: Basic Books, 2016, 107.

expresses admiration for the person of the Caliph while bemoaning their political subservience.[65] He also notes how in Sicily the Christian Norman rulers permit the recitation of public prayers with intercessions for the Abbasid Caliph rather than the Almohads, likely due to the distant power of Baghdad representing a lesser threat.[66] Recent scholarship has emerged arguing that the Abbasids were experiencing a kind of Silver Age where they were beginning to reassert their temporal authority, but observations that would support this theory are absent from Ibn Jubayr's account.[67]

In this environment Ibn Tumart encountered the ideas of the Persian scholar Al-Ghazali,[68] one of the most prominent and influential thinkers in Muslim history. Crucially, Al-Ghazali's philosophy was at odds with the Maliki school of jurisprudence, the officially endorsed brand of Islam among the Almoravids. Almohad official history states that Ibn Tumart actually met Al-Ghazali while in Baghdad. During this encounter Ibn Tumart is supposed to have told him that the Almoravids were burning copies of his work and was then commanded by Al-Ghazali to return his homeland and restore the true faith to his people. Ibn Tumart gathered a large following south of the Almoravid capital of Marrakesh and eventually declared himself to be a descendent of the prophet Muhammad and the *Mahdi* of Islam.[69] Despite suffering a disastrous defeat at the Battle of al-Buhayrah and Ibn Tumart dying shortly thereafter, the Almohad movement proved to be resilient and energetic enough to regroup and continue the struggle. This is largely thanks to the way in which Almohad leadership was able to successfully incorporate traditional Berber tribal structures into their movement, giving them an effective

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[65] Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels*, 236-7.
[66] Ibid, 348.
[67] Hugh Kennedy, *The Caliphate*, 133.
[68] Full name: Abu Ḥamid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad aṭ-Ṭusiyy al-Gazzaliy (Farsi: أبو حامد محمد بن محمد ٱلطُوسي ٱلغزالي).
[69] The Mahdi (Arabic: ٱلمهدي, lit. "the guided") is a messianic figure in Islamic eschatology who is believed to be destined to lead the Muslims to rule the world and banish all evil.

base from which to continually threaten the lowland dwelling Almoravids. This close association with their roots as mountain-dwelling tribesmen continues to be a source of strength and stability for the Almohads and influences their culture and administration throughout their history.[70]

Ibn Tumart's successors even went so far as to take the title of Caliph,[71] which was first done so by 'Abd al-Mu'min in 1147.[72] Doing so was a very significant action on their part for the implications that holding such a title had for their relationship with the rest of the Muslim world and especially with any other rulers also bearing that title. The Arabic title, which translates to mean "successor," dates to the early history of Islam and was first utilized by the direct successors to the prophet himself. Thus, a ruler bearing the title means the title can be understood to be claiming both political and religious suzerainty over all of the world's Muslims.[73] The Almohads were the first non-Arabs of historical significance to claim the title and it marked them as being in opposition to the contemporary Abbasid Caliphate, mentioned above, and the Fatimid Caliphate, a Shia dominated regime that originated in the Maghreb but was now headquartered in Egypt. The Almohad ambition of realizing their ultimate control over these and all other Muslim territories is referenced by Ibn Jubayr with his plea that "God soon correct and purify" the Muslims he encounters "with the swords of the Almohads."[74] On the subject of whether or not the Almohads had the right to claim rulership over all Muslims, Ibn Jubayr appears to have been an emphatic supporter.

The rise to power of the Almohads came largely at the expense of the Almoravids, whose strength and authority had begun to weaken considerably at the time of Ibn Tumart's movement.

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[70] Fromherz, *The Almohads*, 100.
[71] Arabic: خليفة (romanized: *khalifah*).
[72] Full name ʿAbd al-Muʾmin ibn ʿAli ibn ʿAlwi ibn Yaʿla al-Kumi Abu Muḥammad. (Arabic: عبد المؤمن بن علي or عبد المومن الـكـومي)
[73] *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, s. v. "Khalifah."
[74] Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels*, 73.

The Almoravid's reduced military and political power is evidenced by their increasing reliance on foreign mercenaries and relaxation on restrictions governing the worship of Christianity.[75] Their downfall had serious implications for their territory in Iberia. As Almoravid rule began to splinter in North Africa, their rule over the Muslims of Al-Andalus also fractured and disappeared. This gave way to an interregnum period that is termed the Second Taifa[76] period in Andalusi history. The *taifas* are best understood as Muslim petty kingdoms in Al-Andalus, centered around urban power centers such as Granada, Seville, Valencia, and others.[77] The previous taifa period followed the collapse of the Second Umayyad Caliphate (also known as the Caliphate of Cordoba) and political unity had been restored to Muslim Iberia by Almoravid intervention. Similarly, to the First Taifa period, the political fragmentation of Al-Andalus represented an opportunity for Iberian Christian rulers to expand their territory at Muslim expense. The fall of important Iberian Muslim cities such as Lisbon, which fell to the nascent Kingdom of Portugal in 1147 with the aid of an English Crusader army, spurred the Andalusis to request Almohad reinforcements. The Almohads succeeded in halting further Christian advances into Al-Andalus but did not recapture most of the territory lost and soon asserted themselves as the rulers of their erstwhile Iberian allies. If Ibn Jubayr felt any resentment towards this seizure of power he effectively concealed it in his writings, painting the Almohads instead as the mighty defenders of Islam and rightful rulers of all Muslims.

The Almohad policy of expansionism and defense of Islam soon brought them into direct and violent contact with the Norman Kingdom of Sicily of which Ibn Jubayr wrote at length. Late in the long reign of Sicily's founding monarch King Roger II, the Siculo-Norman domain

[75] *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, s. v. "Al-Murabittun."
[76] Arabic: طائفة, meaning party, band, or faction.
[77] *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, s. v. "Taifa."

extended its territory into Ifriqiya and expanded to include much of the North African coast. These gains were consolidated into what is known as the Kingdom of Africa. Similar to the progress of the Norman invasion of Muslim-ruled Sicily, their rule of this majority Muslim territory relied on promoting protections for Christians, utilizing Muslims in the civil government, and extracting special taxes on Muslim subjects.[78] Even before the occupation, there were significant economic and cultural ties between Sicily and Ifriqiya. These ties were strengthened during the period of Norman rule, and further mercantile connections were made between Ifriqiya and northern Italy.

Almohad soldiers, who were motivated by their mission of religious expansionism as well as by Sicilian predations on their maritime shipping lanes, were able to conquer this territory during the reign of Roger's successor, William I. Widespread persecution of the Christians in this region soon followed and little today remains of the Christian community that existed there since antiquity.[79] Contemporary chroniclers blame the Sicilian defeat on the intransigence and impiety of King William (known by his epithet William "the Bad").[80] However, most scholars familiar with the conflict explain the defeat as a combination of King William having to divide his attention by putting down a revolt of Norman barons on the mainland and the Almohads being able to enlist local support from a dissatisfied Muslim populace.[81] The treaty they concluded in 1180 represented a major geopolitical shift in the Mediterranean and was referenced by Ibn Jubayr during his travels.[82]

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[78] Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels*, 339-40.
[79] Fromherz, *The Almohads*, 176.
[80] Hugo Falcandus, *Liber De Regno Sicilie*, trans. Graham Loud and Thomas Wiedemann, (Manchester: University of Manchester Press), 78.
[81] Matthew King, "The Norman Kingdom of Africa and the Medieval Mediterranean", PhD diss., (University of Minnesota, 2018), 138.
[82] Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels*, 354.

Ibn Jubayr, at least insofar as he is willing to state in his travelog, was a loyal subject and sincere advocate for the Almohad rulers that he served. His religious beliefs appear to be in perfect harmony with what we know of the officially endorsed Zahiri Sunni Islam of their government, and he also repeatedly affirms their expansionist doctrine and claim to be the rightful authority over the entire Muslim world. His anxieties about the threat of Christian expansionism are well-reflected in Almohad doctrine and policy, but that is hardly surprising considering his other views on relations with his Christian political neighbors. Those fears were rooted in the shared history that pervaded the Mediterranean region. Not only did he have a vested interest in promoting the patron of his work, but his experiences and culture, while assuredly different in many important ways, also shared much in common with them. The chapter of the complex history of Arab-Berber and Christian-Muslim relations that Ibn Jubayr's life took place in stands out for the many accomplishments and many calamities that grew out of the characteristic diversity and dynamism that is similarly on display in the Norman Kingdom of Sicily that he visited on his return journey home.

2.4 In the Pilgrim's Path

Ibn Jubayr's travelog represents an extremely valuable resource in history for the first-hand account he gives of Norman Sicily and the many other places he traveled. However, its potential must be tempered by careful consideration of how the author's own cultural background impacted his observations. By doing so, his descriptions gain greater credibility and tell us more accurately about the historical circumstances of those communities. They also, in turn, give us greater insight into other regions that are left out of his travels, most notably the

region of his homeland thanks to the comparisons he offers along the way. Studying who he was, along with what he wrote, is a necessary step in our analysis of *The Travels*.

The biographical information that we have about Ibn Jubayr and his identity as a court functionary of Arab descent with deep roots in the nobility of Al-Andalus gives us an opportunity to combine our study of Norman Sicily with the scholarship that exists about contemporary events in the Iberian Peninsula. Interfaith contacts and conflicts in that region during this period have revealed how both Muslim and Christian rulers stoked or utilized religious animosities to provide justifications for their aggressive campaigns, only to discard those sensibilities in peacetime.[83] This phenomenon, and how it might have shaped Ibn Jubayr's perspective and writing, will be explored in greater detail in the next chapter. His relationship with the Berber Almohads and his participation in the operation of their regime is also of significant historical value, as studies of this impactful movement are only in recent years beginning to be adequately explored in Western scholarship. It also represents a valuable piece of Islamic history, thanks to the religious nature of his journey and the many deep personal expressions of faith that he makes throughout.

The objective of this thesis is to explore what *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr* can accurately reveal about the Norman Kingdom of Sicily and its place in the Mediterranean world of its time. Looking through the eyes of this lone Andalusi pilgrim invites the reader to experience the world as he saw and felt it. Placing his words in their appropriate cultural context not only allows us to become immersed in the experience of being something akin to an Andalusi poet and scholar ourselves and achieve a higher appreciation of his work, but it also gives historians an even wider application for the source of information this native son of Valencia has left behind for us.

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[83] Brian Catlos, *Infidel Kings and Unholy Warriors*, 103-4.

3 Christendom and the Dar al-Islam: The Religious and Political Boundaries of the 12th-century Mediterranean

In the month of Shawwal in the year 580 of the Hijri calendar (5 January through 2 February 1185 CE), Ibn Jubayr found himself trapped in the port of Trapani on the extreme western coast of the island of Sicily. His long-awaited journey home was being delayed indefinitely due to an impending military expedition for which the city had become a staging ground. Ships, soldiers, and supplies were being amassed and royal authority had ceased all traffic exiting the port. The news also reached him that all other ports throughout the Kingdom of Sicily had been placed under similar restrictions. It is a testament to the strength and authority of King William II's regime that he was able to coordinate and control the affairs of his realm's considerable length of coastline and that a single port was not sufficient to serve the needs of his expeditionary force. The rumor mill among the civilian populace, as it is wont to do, had become preoccupied with speculating as to what the fleet's possible destination might be. He describes this atmosphere in *The Travels*:

> The people of Trapani are making conjectures as to the destination of the fleet this tyrant is preparing. As to its numbers, some say there are three hundred sail, between galleys and dromonds, while others say there are more, and that a hundred ships carrying victuals are to accompany it. May God frustrate it, and turn fortune against it.[84]

[84] Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels*, 354.

Ibn Jubayr joins in the speculation weighing many possible separate targets for the Sicilian fleet. He opines that its destination could be Alexandria in Egypt, the island of Majorca, or the coast of Ifriqiya.[85] All of these destinations shared in common that they were lands which were ruled by Muslims. His expression of hope that the almighty intervene and cause a Sicilian defeat is in line with his many other references to any potential military engagements between Christian and Muslim-led armies. Indeed, throughout his journey he never strays very far from the frontlines of interreligious conflicts in the Mediterranean. From his homeland in the Iberian peninsula, where the Almohad Caliphate stood against the expansionist Christian kingdoms of the north, to the holy lands in the Levant and Hejaz where Saladin was battling to reconquer the lands of the Crusader States, and finally to the shores of Southern Italy, where Norman rule had replaced the authority of Muslims a century hence, the background of military struggle that shadowed him on his voyage gives an impression that war between the followers of Muhammad and Christ was an inescapable feature of life during this time period. Ibn Jubayr's personal perspective emphatically endorses this world view, helped to shape his writing and the message he hoped to convey to his readers.

This image of Mediterranean life in the Middle Ages finds expression elsewhere among other contemporary writers, both Muslim and Christian. It also remains dominant in the public imagination about our shared history to this day.[86] It is an idea that is not entirely without merit. As stated above, throughout his very extensive travels in the Mediterranean Ibn Jubayr never strayed too far from recent and potential future battlefields where Christian and Muslim-led

[85] Ifriqiya (Arabic: إفريقية) was a geographical region comprising what is today modern Tunisia and parts of eastern Algeria and western Libya. It was analogous to the Roman province of Africa Proconsularis, from which its name was derived.
[86] Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2000), 13.

armies might clash. However, it is a gross oversimplification to present these conflicts as purely religious in nature or unambiguous as to which side the faithful might fight on. Furthermore, the daily lived experience of Sicilian Muslims, the hybridization of culture on display there, and the place Sicily occupied in Mediterranean geopolitics make it an important example of how these two communities interacted aside from fighting with each other for dominance.

Understanding the cultural context that informed Ibn Jubayr's perspective as he wrote his account of his travels and what made Norman Sicily such a noteworthy destination requires a holistic understanding of the state of affairs and especially of political conflicts in the Mediterranean world of his time. Ibn Jubayr, with his background as an Islamic court functionary and an educated Muslim of noble pedigree (albeit a minor one), would have had a high level of awareness not only of contemporary events throughout the region but also a great deal of knowledge about the long and tumultuous history against which they occurred. To him and others like him, current events in the Mediterranean were part of an ongoing series of conflicts that dated back many centuries to the foundational events of their respective cultures. This "clash of civilizations" perception of the history of Christian-Muslim interactions remains influential in the public imagination and, unfortunately, helps to shape political action and philosophy to this day. Although this idea does contain an element of truth (wars between Christian and Muslim leaders were indeed a frequent occurrence), it fails to appropriately contextualize the individual conflicts and has a tendency to gloss over other more peaceful interactions between the two groups. It is an important aspect of an historian's work to examine perspectives like these and help to establish the proper context in order to communicate this history in a way that is a more honest representation of past events and the prospects for interactions between Western and Islamic cultures today.

In this chapter, I will be examining how religion and the geopolitics of the 12th century Mediterranean intersected, while also incorporating the references Ibn Jubayr made to the history of Christian and Muslim interactions in the region. Additionally, I will be providing some background information based on earlier histories that help to build the context for his particular view of the region's political and religious boundaries. To do so, I will begin by examining the medieval perspectives of the history of how these borders came to exist and how that vision of history impacted Ibn Jubayr's worldview. From there I will turn to the contemporary events of Ibn Jubayr's time and how these events either reinforced or ran counter to his preconceived notions of interreligious contacts. Finally, I will turn specifically to the example of Norman Sicily and the place in which the island's unique society fit into the Mediterranean geopolitics of its time.

3.1 Muhammad and Charlemagne

As stated above, the Mediterranean World in the twelfth century can be justly described (at least in part) as a battlefield with shifting territorial boundaries characterized by ongoing struggles between differing Muslim and Christian powers. These religious and political boundaries, which dated back many centuries to the early Muslim conquests which followed the death of the prophet, surrounded the Mediterranean Sea with Muslim-ruled territory along its southern edge and at its eastern and western peripheries and were involved in frequent warfare with the Christian-ruled regions they surrounded. However, stopping the analysis with this simplistic Christian-Muslim divide fails to do justice to the complex contemporary backgrounds

in which these conflicts were rooted.[87] It also tends to completely gloss over the many conflicts taking which were taking place between coreligionists and discounts the importance of many ongoing forms of peaceful contact between Christian and Muslim-ruled areas, especially regarding trade and the transmission of ideas between different cultures. These phenomena are most readily observed in frontier regions home to large numbers of both groups such as twelfth-century Sicily.

Historically, the public imagination of this period, along with many important scholars, have chosen to focus on instances of conflict between these groups and have discounted the importance of or outright ignored all other forms of contact between them. The influential Belgian historian Henri Pirenne famously stated in his posthumously published 1937 book *Mohammed and Charlemagne*[88] that the timeline of the Early Middle Ages ought to begin with the 8th-century Islamic conquests in the Mediterranean, which he argues isolated Northern Europe from the Mediterranean world system previously established under the Roman Empire of antiquity. He argues that due to this change in the political status quo, trade between the two groups had effectively become impossible and non-violent interactions between them were so infrequent as to be deemed negligible.[89] He goes on to explain by citing numismatic evidence and the paucity of gold coinage in Europe along with the shrinking of urban centers in favor of country villages and hill forts, that up until the Muslim conquests, the European economy remained oriented south and eastwards towards the sea in a pattern that reflected what existed during the period of Roman rule. Muslim dominion in the south had cut the northerners off from their supply of precious metals, papyrus, and the market for their natural resources. The

[87] Maya Soifer, "Beyond *Convivencia*: Critical Reflections on the Historiography of Interfaith Relations in Christian Spain," *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 1, no. 1 (2009): 20.
[88] The original work was published in French with the title *Mahomet et Charlemagne*.
[89] Henri Pirenne, *Mohammed and Charlemagne*, trans. Bernard Miall, (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), 165.

consequences of this upset led to the formation of post-Roman independent European systems and cultures that were fully realized during the reign of the Carolingian empire. To summarize in a separate work Pirenne stated that, "Without Islam, the Frankish Empire would probably never have existed, and Charlemagne, without Muhammad, would be inconceivable".[90]

Pirenne's arguments are no longer considered to be part of the academic mainstream and were controversial even at the time of the book's publication. Nonetheless, they remain influential for their impact in generating scholarship which set out to refute them and they initiated important discussions about periodization and ongoing Christian-Muslim contacts within the field of Medieval history.[91] The decades following Pirenne's death saw the publication of many works that sought to argue that the Arabs represented a "civilizing" influence in the places they conquered, rekindling classical learning and urban life throughout formerly Roman territory.[92] Regardless of their outcome, the Arab conquests mark an epochal shift in Mediterranean history and should be considered as foundational to creating the world that Ibn Jubayr inhabited.

Understanding the ways in which religion intersected with geopolitics in the Medieval Mediterranean and how those forces impacted Ibn Jubayr's personal perspective, and the unique situation of Norman Sicily, requires an examination of those boundaries and an awareness of how they came to exist and of the territorial shifts that took place in the century preceding his life. As an educated Andalusi Muslim of Arab extraction, he would have had a high level of awareness of this history, and it likely shaped his worldview in many important ways. Roman

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[90] Henri Pirenne, *Medieval Cities: Their Origins and the Revival of Trade*, trans. Frank Halsey (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), 27.
[91] Emmet Scott, *Mohammed & Charlemagne Revisited: The History of a* Controversy (Nashville: New England Review Press, 2012), 21.
[92] David Abulafia, *The Great Sea* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 258.

influence on the region remained strong among both Christian and Muslim-ruled regions. Many vestigial features from the Roman period can be observed in things like place names, architecture, and styles of civil and military administration.[93] The empire, which had dissolved in the West following numerous internal struggles and external invasions by "barbarian" tribes during the 5th century,[94] still existed as a rump state during Ibn Jubayr's travels in the so-called Byzantine Empire with its capital in Constantinople.[95] Although much weakened compared to its classical predecessor, Byzantium was still a major power in the Mediterranean, controlling the Aegean and the Anatolian coast alongside access to the Black Sea. The Levantine coast, which had been conquered by Muslim armies in the 7th century along with Egypt and Mesopotamia and had by Ibn Jubayr's lifetime been fully integrated into the Muslim cultural sphere, had been conquered by the forces of the First Crusade during the previous century. The entirety of the North African coast was under Muslim rule and had been so since the early Muslim conquests, save for a brief period of Christian domination over Ifriqiya by the Siculo-Norman Hautevilles, who had forged their kingdom at the expense of Muslim-ruled territory. The Iberian Peninsula was divided between Christian kingdoms in the north and Muslim emirs in the southern region of Al-Andalus. The advent of the the Almohad Caliphate's dominion over the south had followed the fall of several Muslim emirates to Christian expansion. The kind of Mediterranean world that Pirenne was arguing for in the 7th and 8th centuries appears to be on display in the 1100s through these interreligious conflicts and the drawing of these religious and political borders.[96]

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[93] Ibid, 220.
[94] The word "barbarian" is used here for expediency to refer to the mostly Germanic-speaking tribes which migrated into Western Europe during late antiquity. In Roman usage it was derived from the Greek word "barbaros" (Greek: βάρβαρος) to mean any non-Roman tribal person or group.
[95] The Greek-speaking Byzantines saw themselves as the rightful continuation of the Roman Empire. Styling their state as the Βασιλεία Ῥωμαίων (romanized: *Basileía Rhomaion*) and themselves was Ῥωμαῖοι (romanized: *Rhomaioi*).
[96] Emmet Scott, Mohammed & Charlemagne Revisited, 55.

Pirenne's thesis and the many works that emerged to challenge or support it are principally concerned with what precipitated a perceived collapse of classical civilization in Europe and the genesis of the so-called "Dark Ages" in European History, which were characterized by illiteracy, political disunity, and economic and cultural stagnation. This periodization and the concept of the Dark Ages has been hotly contested by Medieval historians to the point where it is no longer considered to be an accurate description of the Early Middle Ages.[97] But even if we were to accept this periodization as accurate, it still remains to be noted that the era of Ibn Jubayr's lifetime came long after the end of this epoch. The Mediterranean world had changed a great deal in the intervening 500 years. Political disunity in the Muslim world had mostly halted their territorial expansion and given European Christians opportunities to build strength and embark on their own campaigns of conquest or reconquest. Still, any religious motivation for these conflicts should be carefully examined as it rarely tells the complete story. The historical example that Norman Sicily represents is important for being able to show that these conflicts did as much to spur cultural development as they did to stagnate it,[98] but the destructive aspects of religious war should not be wholly discounted in our analysis, nor should we underestimate the impact that ancient history had on Medieval cultures perception of themselves and their neighbors.

In many ways, this work is also a response to the Pirenne thesis, attempting to show an example of one such scenario in Norman Sicily that refutes his assertion that the Mediterranean had become a Muslim Lake and thus represented a barrier to the transmission of culture. Pirenne contended that the Muslim expansions changed the trajectory of societal development in Europe

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[97] Elizabeth Brown, "The Tyranny of a Construct: Feudalism and Historians of Medieval Europe," *The American Historical Review* 79, no. 4, (1974), 1063-4.
[98] David Abulafia, "The Crown and the Economy under Roger II and His Successors," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 37, (1983): 1-14

by divorcing them from their Roman roots.[99] This idea appears to be seriously undermined both by the evidence of the continuity of many Roman-style institutions both among Christians and Muslims and by the frequent adoption of the other's customs in newly conquered lands. In Norman Sicily, we see an example of this cultural syncretism in the ways in which the Hautevilles adopted and promoted foreign styles and customs in their administration. Greek sailors and shipbuilders, whose presence on the island dated back far earlier than the Muslim conquest, provided much of the expertise for the maritime power wielded by both Muslim and Christian rulers there. Their commercial and cultural connections to Ifriqiya also predated both the Muslim and Norman conquests. Norman Sicily famously emulated Fatimid Egypt's administrative infrastructure, but they did so by simply embracing the system that already existed when their conquest succeeded. Furthermore, though they may not have been aware of it at the time, those institutions themselves were patterned largely after the Roman system that early Muslim conquerors themselves adopted. In this way, we can witness how the Kingdom of Sicily represents a historical case where war and conquest did not have a disruptive effect on societal development but rather tended to encourage newcomers to assimilate old structures into their own to create new hybrid systems that drew inspiration from a variety of sources. Although I agree with Medieval historians who say that Pirenne was wrong in many of his assertions and that it reflects a prejudice against non-Christian contributions to modernity, I do not believe it would be appropriate to discount his thesis entirely.[100] One of the reasons why Norman Sicily seemed so unusual to men like Ibn Jubayr as he remarked on it in his *Travels* was because, for much of the rest of the Mediterranean of his time, the analogy of the sea as a barrier between civilizations seems to have rung true. But throughout the history of war and peace in the

[99] Pirenne, *Mohammed and Charlemagne*, 15.
[100] Brian Catlos, *Infidel Kings and Unholy Warriors* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 4.

Mediterranean, this barrier often became much more permeable than our Andalusi pilgrim might have liked to believe.

3.2 Unholy Warriors

Both Christian and Muslim rulers throughout the Mediterranean region faced many pressures in maintaining their authority over their frequently diverse subject populations. For many individuals experiencing or observing this cultural cosmopolitanism, prejudice and fear led them to be highly suspicious of the potential threat that these communities posed to the dominant group.[101] Paradoxically (for them, perhaps) rulers tended to act as if the largest threats to the continuation of their regimes came from their religious and cultural peers. Minority groups within a ruler's domain could be utilized in a variety of ways, which will be discussed in further detail below, that helped to strengthen their authority, but appearing to favor these groups had the potential to seriously undermine them and even provoke rebellion by disgruntled members of the majority population. Mediterranean rulers often had to appease the less tolerant members of their own religious and cultural ruling class by forcefully asserting their dominance over minority communities and at least appearing to promote the spread of the true faith among them. Skilled rulers carefully cultivated the means to subvert the aims of their realm's ideologically motivated factions or to even co-opt their political power to advance their personal interests. This could be a dangerous political maneuver, as it often had the side effect of destroying the relationship between those rulers and protected minority communities that might otherwise be among their most ardent supporters. Moreover, these puritanical factions, once established, could continue to amass power and threaten to overthrow and replace their erstwhile noble sponsors.

[101] Hugo Falcandus, Liber de Regno Sicilie, 139.

This kind of political tight-rope walking between the orthodox and syncretist factions in their courts lay at the heart of many of the systems we can observe at work in the 12th-century Mediterranean and those systems had a determining influence on how the major historical events of the era unfolded.

We've already discussed the political and religious divisions in the Iberian Peninsula in the previous chapter by discussing how this environment helped to shape Ibn Jubayr's personal perspective as a native of that region. To briefly summarize the situation, these boundaries consisted of Muslim rulers and a majority Muslim population under the suzerainty of the Marrakesh-based Almohad Caliphate in the south, and Christian rulers of a majority Christian population in the north divided among a few independent kingdoms. Observing how the Almohads came to dominate the Muslim portion of Iberia gives a good impression of the geopolitics of the region. Interreligious conflicts had been threatening the Muslim principalities of the south, the so-called *taifa* petty kingdoms discussed in the previous section. The taifa rulers, facing an existential threat from their Christian neighbors, recruited Muslim Berber soldiers from North Africa to fight alongside them as allied and mercenary reinforcements. These African warriors went on to assert themselves over the taifas as protective overlords of Al-Andalus, halting further Christian expansion. The Almohads of Ibn Jubayr's time themselves were the second wave of Berber reinforcements in Andalusi history. The story of their rise to power very closely resembles the intervention of the Almohads' old enemies the Almoravids, who intervened in Iberian affairs a century earlier. Although these two groups differed in many important ways including their specific doctrine of faith, they were alike in that compared to their Andalusi subjects they were far more orthodox in their beliefs and far less accommodating to non-Muslims under their rule and their period of domination witnessed a marked decrease in

the participation of Christians and Jews in the administration of the state and a likely decrease in their overall numbers.[102] In both the cases of the Almoravids and the Almohads, the taifas courted the assistance of their more extreme coreligionists but were eventually overwhelmed by them. It begs the question of how sincere Ibn Jubayr, an Andalusi of noble birth, was in his glowing praise of his Almohad patrons and to what extent he and others like him viewed the Berbers as foreign conquerors.

In a similar fashion, the Iberian Christian kingdoms in the northern peninsula had to balance the aid they could garner from their hard-liner coreligionists with the benefits of having the trust and support of Muslim communities both within their realms and at their borders. In their wars of expansion against the taifas, groups of other European Christians from further north in the continent who had far less familiarity and experience with Muslims often came to play a role as religiously motivated reinforcements.[103] One notable example took place during the Siege of Lisbon in 1147, in the Second Taifa Period which took place between the fall of the Almoravids and the rise of the Almohads in Al-Andalus. A force of English, German, and Flemish Crusaders en route to the Holy Land to join the ongoing Second Crusade were convinced to lend their assistance to King Alfonso I of Portugal who was engaged in an offensive against the Taifa of Badajoz. The city surrendered after four months on terms that afforded religious and personal protection to its Muslim inhabitants but was sacked by the northerners who either disregarded or did not understand the treaty terms following their entry to the city. The majority of the crusaders then forsook their mission to the Holy Land in favor of settling in the newly conquered territory and an Anglo-Norman bishop was invested as the

[102] *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, s. v. "Al-Muwahiddun."
[103] David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 43.

bishop of Lisbon, thus beginning a long historic relationship between England and Portugal.[104] Alfonso had won the day and captured a great city for his kingdom but had caused the devastation of it and its people and had dishonored the peace he made with its former rulers. Just as the religious conflict in Iberia drew in Muslim neighbors to the south so it also sparked the intervention of Christians from the north. In both these cases, the foreigners also represented a more hard-liner brand of their respective faiths who had little regard for the well-established means of accommodation that existed between those religious communities.

The circumstances which led to the Norman dominion over southern Italy and Sicily were remarkably similar to those instances of foreign intervention which took place in the Iberian Peninsula in that religion played a motivating factor in their migration to the region, but they were also very different in how their leaders soon broke with their religious authorities in order to pursue an independent agenda. By the time the Normans began to arrive in Italy in the 11th-century, there were numerous competing groups vying for dominance. Byzantine and Lombard rulers struggled with each other over mastery of the southern peninsula, Muslims in Sicily and in a few coastal enclaves launched raids and probing invasions northward, and the Papacy and the Holy Roman Emperors both sought to assert their supreme authority over all of Italy. Having initially arrived as pilgrims visiting holy sites in Rome, the Normans were soon recruited by nearly all the belligerents involved to fight as mercenaries in the many ongoing wars for dominance over the region.[105] Their success in this function led to their leaders being granted lands and titles by their employers, which inspired the arrival of more Norman adventurers to reinforce their fellows and seek their own personal fortunes. After their Lombard sponsors made

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[104] Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades. Volume II, the Kingdom of Jerusalem and the Frankish East, 1100-1187* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), 258.
[105] John Julius Norwich, *The Normans in the South, 1016-1130: The Normans in Sicily* Vol. I, (London: Faber & Faber, Limited, 2018), 3.

peace with the Byzantines against whom they were rebelling, the Norman contingent elected one of their own, William "Iron Arm" Hauteville, to lead them in their continued struggle for land and glory. William's tenure as the leader of the Normans in Italy helped to establish the fortunes of his family, but as elsewhere in the Mediterranean world the success of their cause was assisted by the endemic infighting of their opponents.[106] The Hautevilles continued to amass territory and another Hauteville leader known as Robert Guiscard launched an invasion of Sicily in 1061, where Kalbid authority had now disintegrated, giving way to the rule of Sicily's own taifa period.[107]

The conquest of Sicily was completed by Robert's brother Roger Hauteville, nicknamed Roger Bosso. His son and successor, also named Roger, was able to secure a papal investiture as king of the newly created Kingdom of Sicily and he was crowned as King Roger II in Palermo on Christmas Day 1130.[108] This rapprochement with the papacy was yet another front on which the Norman presence in Southern Italy disrupted political and religious affairs. The pope who granted Roger his crown was in fact an antipope[109] named Anacletus whose candidacy was supported by Roger after the death of Pope Honorius II, against whom Roger had been in open warfare.[110] The animosity between the newly established Norman kingdom and the papacy would continue and their conflicts would often overlap with other Italian political struggles, especially those between the papacy and the rulers of the Holy Roman Empire. This combined with the Hauteville family's ties to other Norman rulers in England, France, and the Crusader

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[106] Ibid, 32.
[107] Ibid, 45.
[108] The regnal name Roger II might seem confusing here, as he was the first ruler to claim the title of King of Sicily by any name.
[109] An antipope refers to a person who claimed the title of pope but is not recognized by the Roman Catholic Church as legitimate, usually due to a case of a disputed election or their deposition.
[110] John Julius Norwich, *The Kingdom in the Sun, 1130-1194: The Normans in Sicily* Vol. II, (London: Faber & Faber, Limited, 2018), 57.

States tied Sicilian affairs with political developments in Northern Europe and the Mediterranean and acted as a bridge linking those two separate spheres together.[111] Looking backwards from here to the religious nature of their initial migration to the region, we can observe once again how foreign interventions based on the recruitment of holy warriors to fight against an infidel enemy often led to the subversion of those leaders' own authority, even when that sponsor was no less than the supreme authority of that religion as it was with the bishop of Rome and this band of unruly warriors from the north. The previous rulers of southern Italy had courted the martial skill and piety of the newcomers only to find themselves sidelined, overwhelmed, and forced to kneel to the authority of their erstwhile servants.

3.3 Infidel Kings

The image of the Medieval Mediterranean as a place riven by interreligious warfare may have held true in many important respects, but the reality of daily life and how societies were structured shows a contrasting image of religious communities existing in relative harmony with each other. This seeming dichotomy of existence lays at the heart of what made the Norman Kingdom of Sicily such a dynamic and creative society and helps to explain the great success the kingdom enjoyed in its cultural and political pursuits. While Sicily represents certain unique qualities particular to its own history, it also has a great deal in common with other Mediterranean cultures and communities and there are clear and influential precedents that were adopted from neighboring communities. Internal cultural and religious diversity was the rule of life in the medieval Mediterranean more often than not, and the rulers of these places needed to

[111] Ibid, 301.

win the willing cooperation of the non-believers among their subjects if they hoped to retain power.

Culturally savvy rulers in frontier regions like Iberia or Sicily learned how to balance pressures from external forces towards orthodoxy with strategically minded domestic policies of religious accommodation. By doing so, they were able to leverage the talents and resources of their non-believer subjects in service to the state. This coexistence and cooperation even went so far as to include military matters, and the most powerful armies of the region were often integrated forces that took advantage of their diverse populations.[112] In the case of Sicily, this is readily evident in the makeup of the Norman Kingdom's armed forces. Sicilian military adventures usually depended on a mixed arms force that included Muslim infantry and Greek sailors alongside the much-vaunted Norman cavalry.[113] Nor is this phenomenon limited to strictly military matters. As we will explore in the next chapter, the administrative state of Norman Sicily, which is considered to be remarkably advanced when compared to its Christian European neighbors, depended heavily on and greatly benefited from the efforts of its non-Latin subjects.

An excellent comparative example of another Mediterranean society that was able to leverage the separate talents of a diverse population was that of Norman Sicily's closest strategic ally, the Fatimid Caliphate in Egypt. The Fatimids originated as a Shi'a Arab dynasty in Ifriqiya in the early 10th century. At the apex of their power, their authority had extended to include a swath of territory stretching from Algiers to the Hejaz and also included a client dynasty ruling over Sicily. In their rise to power, they had moved their capital East to the Nile-straddling city of

[112] Brian Catlos, *Infidel Kings and Unholy Warriors*, 5.
[113] Ibid, 127.

Fustat and went on to found a new city, Cairo.[114] The many accomplishments of the Fatimid state were thanks largely to the leveraging of the many talents of their diverse population which included a substantial and diverse Christian population of Copts, Greeks, Armenians, and Ethiopians as well as numerous other foreigners including Slavs, Turks, Berbers, Nubians, and Central Africans.[115] This reliance on functionaries from a variety of religious and ethnic groups is perhaps best exemplified by a succession of both Christian and Muslim Armenian viziers such as Badr al-Jamali, whose sponsorship of his fellow Armenian Christians alongside his promotion of the Shi'a Muslim government becomes even more impressive when considering his background as a mamluk slave.[116] The Caliph himself was part of a vastly outnumbered minority religious group within his own realm. The apparatus of state which maintained their power was dependent on the employment of courtiers, clerics, and eunuchs from a widely diverse range of backgrounds. Many of the policies and structures of the Fatimid Caliphate would be adopted into the governmental functioning of Norman Sicily thanks to their close association with each other and their similarly diverse populations. By the time Ibn Jubayr arrived in Alexandria in March of 1183 the Fatimid regime had ceased to exist, being replaced by the authority of Saladin's Ayyubid Sultanate more than a decade hence. He remarks on this transition favorably, thanks to his endorsement of Saladin as a proper Sunni Muslim and defender of Islam against some of its most hated enemies, the Crusaders.[117]

The territorial conquests of the First Crusade had a seismic impact on the geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean. European Christian warriors, collectively referred to as "Franks" by

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[114] The Arabic name of Cairo is al-Qahira (Arabic: القاهرة) which translates to mean "the conqueror" and references the Fatimid ruler's victory in Egypt.
[115] Brian Catlos, *Infidel Kings and Unholy Warriors*, 184-5.
[116] The word mamluk (Arabic: مملوك) is usually understood to refer to non-Arab, especially Turkic, Armenian, and Caucasian-descended (meaning from the Caucasus Mountains region), slaves.
[117] Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels*, 48.

their Muslim adversaries,[118] had been recruited to serve as mercenaries assisting the Byzantine Empire in its reconquest of Anatolia. For many reasons that are hotly debated to this day, they ultimately went rogue and undertook an armed pilgrimage towards Jerusalem, conquering and plundering their way down the Levantine coast and establishing a series of Christian-ruled domains as they went.[119] The Crusader States themselves, whose very existence represented a gross and evil injustice to Ibn Jubayr and his fellow Muslims, also had to contend with the complications inherent in ruling over a large community of non-believers. Perhaps surprisingly given the decidedly religious nature of their mission, they were also able to exploit their religious diversity to benefit the state. Ibn Jubayr makes repealed references to the peaceful contentment and prosperity enjoyed by Muslim farmers within their territory,[120] alongside exasperated disparagement of Muslim rulers who fail to afford their subjects the same treatment on their side of the frontier.[121]

How these examples of differing groups interacting in other regions of the Mediterranean relates to Sicily has as much to do with how rulers might ignore or repudiate such factions within their own country. Count Roger I, the father and predecessor of the Kingdom's founder Roger II, is said to have received a delegation from King Baldwin of Jerusalem proposing a joint military expedition. The plan, as his fellow Christian monarch laid it out, was to have the Sicilians provide naval support in the form of transport, supplies, and reinforcements where needed to a large Crusader force who would invade and hopefully conquer Ifriqiya and establish it as an independent Christian kingdom. In response, the Norman Count is famously said to have lifted

[118] Arabic sources throughout the period of the High Middle Ages used the term "*al-Afrang*" (Arabic: الإفرنج) to refer collectively to all foreigners from northwestern Europe.
[119] *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, s. v. "Crusades."
[120] Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels*, 300
[121] Ibid, 301.

his leg, let out a great fart, and said, "By my faith, here is far better counsel than you have given."[122] If the idea of spreading the faith through force appealed to him at all, those feelings failed to overcome his more practical concerns as a ruler with so many Muslim subjects. He could less afford to break faith with the treaties he had signed with Muslim neighbors than he could to risk offending the sensibilities of his fellow Catholics.

3.4 The Middle Island

The target of the of the expedition for which the was gathering in Trapani during Ibn Jubayr's stay proved to not be any Muslim-held town or fortress, but rather a Christian target. The Sicilian force sailed towards the Balkans where they made landfall near Thessaloniki and marched on Constantinople in order to overthrow the House of Komnenos as rulers of the Byzantine Empire.[123] King William may have elected for this target for a number of different reasons. It may be that he sincerely had no wish to break his treaties with the Muslim powers of north Africa. It might also be the case that he had too much to lose by risking his relationship with his country's chief trading partner. It is also possible that he didn't wish to test his army's loyalty in a battle against Muslims, seeing as how Muslim troops made up about half of their number.[124] If that is the case, it is interesting to note that he did not seem to harbor the same fears about his Christian contingent when battling the Greeks. The previous century's Great Schism and the East-West animosity generated during the Crusades may have finally reached a point where sectarian issues provided him with all the justification he needed to launch an invasion. This high degree of antipathy between the Latins and Greeks is evidenced by the excessively

[122] Hubert Houben, *Roger II of Sicily: A Ruler between East and West*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 18.
[123] John Julius Norwich, *The Kingdom in the Sun*, 323.
[124] Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels*, 387.

violent behavior exhibited by both armies in their destruction of settlements, victimization of civilians, and the lack of quarter offered to defeated soldiers.[125] It is not clear whether the Normans intended to conquer the Empire outright or if they merely wished to replace the current emperor with one more friendly to their own agenda, but the history of Byzantine-Sicilian relations already included many previous attempts by both parties to bring the other under their direct rule.[126] The expedition ended in failure, with the Norman army being pushed back to Sicily after some early victories were reversed by Byzantine reinforcements.[127] This was not the first attempt by the House of Hauteville on the imperial purple and had the Norman Kingdom survived much longer they would almost certainly have continued this ambitious foreign policy.[128]

Based on Ibn Jubayr's account, the Norman Kingdom of Sicily was a major player in the region's geopolitics. The island of Sicily represents a major geopolitical force in and of itself by mere virtue of its physical characteristics. It is the largest of the Mediterranean islands, being nearly 10,000 square miles in size, and it occupies a geographically central location within that body of water. It is separated from the northern coast of Africa by a mere 87 miles and from the Italian mainland by the Strait of Messina which is less than two miles wide at its narrowest point, constituting a strategic choke point for maritime traffic. Thanks to all of these features, it dominated all sea-borne traffic passing east to west or north to south, drawing in merchants, soldiers, and settlers from every direction. At the time of Norman rule, it was known to be heavily populated and possessed abundant agricultural resources, making it also extremely wealthy. Its unification with the southern portion of the Italian peninsula under the Hautevilles

[125] Norwich, *The Kingdom in the Sun*, 325-6.
[126] Ibid, 35.
[127] Ibid, 342.
[128] Herbert Houben, *Roger II of Sicily*, 76.

and the creation of the royal title during the reign of King Roger had a seismic impact on the geopolitics of the Mediterranean. With its advantages of geography and wealth along with the political power wielded by its monarch, the kingdom's expansionist mission must have seemed to Ibn Jubayr and other observers to be extremely likely, if not inevitable, to succeed. His prayer that God might intervene with a miracle to halt their ambitions was sincerely, perhaps desperately, made while he languished in Trapani within sight of the expedition's armada.

The geopolitical consequences of the capture of Sicily by Christian rulers were felt throughout the Mediterranean largely thanks to the circumstances of its location. This can also be witnessed unfolding in a parallel fashion with the island's historically previous fall to Muslim invaders in the 9th century and again even earlier with the role its conquest played in the rise to power of the Roman Empire during antiquity. Understanding the full scope of these shifts is assisted by comparative analyses of other such occurrences in the region around the same time, such as those taking place in the Iberian Peninsula and the Levant. The extent to which these historical episodes influenced each other is not immediately obvious and requires further study in order to fully understand them. But, in the observations of an individual like Ibn Jubayr, who was an exceptionally well-informed person, someone involved in the politics of his time, and who had the opportunity to visit all of these locations, we have an excellent resource into how his contemporaries might have experienced those events. In his case, having already considered how his background and target readership informed his perspective, his travels guided him through the complex and shifting physical landscape in which the religious and political borders between the two worlds of Christendom and the Dar al-Islam were being erased, redrawn, and often overlapping with each other.

4 Kingdom in the Sun: The Normans and Multiculturalism in the Kingdom of Sicily

During the month of Ramadan in the year 580 of the Hijri calendar (6 December 1184 through 4 January 1185 CE) Ibn Jubayr wrote about his stay in the Kingdom of Sicily's capital city Palermo:

> It is the Metropolis of these islands combining the benefits of wealth and splendor and having all that you could wish of beauty, real or apparent, and all the needs of subsistence, mature and fresh. It is an ancient and elegant city, magnificent and gracious, and seductive to look upon. Proudly set between its open spaces and plains filled with gardens, with broad roads and avenues, it dazzles the eyes with its perfection. It is a wonderful place built in the Cordoba style, entirely from cut stone known as *kadhan*. A river splits the town and four springs gush in its suburbs. The King, to whom it is his world, has embellished it to perfection and taken it as the capital of his Frankish Kingdom – may God destroy it.[129]

This effusive praise of the city's magnificence and beauty, alongside his customary prayer that God destroy it is yet another example of the strange mixture of admiration and outrage that Ibn Jubayr felt while traveling through the island. The Normans' capacity to adapt and assimilate into a non-native environment are on prominent display in the appearance of their capital. The cultural benefits of integrating the island's Muslim population into the Christian kingdom's social framework had apparently resulted in the creation of a civilization that even someone who counted themselves among their sworn enemies had to begrudgingly admit to

[129] Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels*, 348.

admiring. Putting aside his religiously and politically motivated antipathy, it seems as if he found Palermo's beauty to be inspiring as well as terrifying.

The Hauteville policies, which promoted the separate talents of their diverse population can be considered as a conscious effort by its leaders to harness their society's creative and intellectual potential alongside the abundant natural resources granted by their geography.[130] Ibn Jubayr observed Muslims and Christians living harmoniously in all of the great cities he visited, and he judged Sicily's Muslim communities to be both safe and prosperous. He encountered Muslim communities alongside Christians in Messina, Cefalu, Termini, and Trapani, as well as an entirely Muslim town at Alcamo. But the most memorable descriptions of Muslim culture in Sicily come from his time spent in the capital city of Palermo. His interactions with Christians on the island often elicited fear and suspicion because he assumed that the only natural reason for Christians to be so courteous towards Muslims is to seduce them toward conversion.[131] The city, which he refers to as *Al-Madinah*,[132] had Muslim communities who possessed their own suburbs containing their own mosques and markets, and they hear the call of the *mu'azzin*.[133] The city had a *qadi*[134] who served the Muslim community, as well as a *masjid jami'* or 'cathedral mosque'[135] alongside several ordinary mosques, many of which were used as schools for

[130] Sarah Davis-Secord, *Where Three Worlds Met: Sicily in the Early Medieval Mediterranean*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 189-90.
[131] Ibid, 345-7.
[132] *Al-Madinah* (Arabic: المدينة) translates to mean simply "the city" and was the official name of Palermo during the period of Muslim rule. The name *Balarm* (Arabic: بلرم), which derives from the city's name *Panormus* (Greek: Πάνορμος) of antiquity, was also in common use.
[133] The *mu'azzin* (Arabic: مؤذن) in Islam is an individual responsible for reciting the calls to prayer.
[134] A *qadi* (Arabic: قاضي) is a judge who serves as the head of a *shari'a* court and is considered to by Muslims to be an expert on religious matters who advises his community.
[135] A *masjid jami'* (Arabic: مسجد جامع) is distinguished from ordinary mosques in that they are meant to host the Friday prayers and serve as the main mosque of a city.

religious study.[136] The availability of Muslim education inside the borders of a Christian realm was a bewildering thing to witness for the shipwrecked pilgrim.

Ibn Jubayr's biases against Christians may have helped to shape the stories he told, but even when he is speaking in a manner that can be characterized as suspicious or reluctant, certain truths about the place can be discerned through his writing. Before entering Palermo, he makes many observations about the state of commerce and security on the road, including a humorous exchange with a pair of locals whom he judges to be Christians. One of the men shouts to Ibn Jubayr and his companions (presumably, in Arabic) that they ought to carefully guard their persons lest unscrupulous customs officials rob them under the pretense of tax collection. The other then admonishes his friend for suggesting that these foreigners should have any reason to fear while under the King's protection and bids them farewell, assuming the Muslims to be traders, and wishes them luck and wealth in their business dealings. Ibn Jubayr reflects on this exchange with his characteristic distrust of Christians, believing their words to have been some strange attempt at conversion on their part.[137]

The society that the Hauteville royals were able to cultivate on the island proved to be highly advantageous for generating wealth, power, and creativity combining all the best attributes of their constituent cultures. In this chapter, we will examine the various features of that society, what the separate cultural groups were able to contribute, and to what extent the Hauteville royals helped to promote their inclusion. Beginning with an examination of the major groups individually, the effectiveness of the Greeks as valued engineers and shipwrights and the Muslims as loyal and talented administrators is juxtaposed with the perhaps surprising impact of the Latins as a destabilizing force which threatened the unity of the kingdom. Afterwards, the

[136] Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels*, 348-9.
[137] Ibid, 347.

creative potential of this hybrid culture will be examined through the Siculo-Norman's historical capacity to generate works of engineering, art, and science that were considered to be revolutionary at the time. Finally, the kingdom's commercial system will be explored, alongside its capacity to influence politics, foreign relations, and expansion, for clues as to how the success of Sicily played into the wider history of the region of the central Mediterranean. All of these features have left their physical legacy in the artifacts and appearance of Sicily today and Ibn Jubayr's writings help us to better experience them in their complete and contemporary historical context.

4.1 Muslim Clerks, Greek Sailors, and Norman Rebels

The Hauteville rulers of the Kingdom of Sicily have a historical reputation for their ability to leverage the dynamic talents of their diverse population in the furtherance of their authority.[138] The creation of their united polity of the insular and peninsular portions of their domain gave them access to a broad range of resources that when properly wielded were instruments of considerable strength and power and its people were perhaps the greatest asset they possessed.[139] The previous Greek and Muslim periods of rule on the island laid the foundations necessary for maintaining a high standard of education conducive to the development of a skilled labor force and the long-standing history of cosmopolitanism made them well accustomed to working together with their neighbors of other ethnic and religious communities. When the Norman rulers chose to embrace this diversity they incurred certain risks

[138] John Julius Norwich, *Sicily: An Island at the Crossroads of History* (New York: Random House, 2015), 60-61.
[139] Herbert Houben, *Roger II of Sicily*, 105.

to their internal stability, but for as long as their dynasty endured it managed to pay off in several important ways.[140]

One of the most important institutions in maintaining and expanding the might and authority of the Kingdom of Sicily was its large and powerful Navy. Sicily's strategic location, which was discussed at length in the previous chapter, made it a logical site from which to project naval power. As the island changed hands throughout its history, it frequently also became an important naval base for its occupiers. During the period of Muslim rule in the 9th century it was the point of embarkation for many raids against the mainland, including one on Rome itself which resulted in the looting of the highly sacred tombs of Saint Peter and Saint Paul. This brazen attack led to a new program of fortification building in the city and a consolidation of power by the papacy.[141] More importantly for Sicilian history, it demonstrates a continuation of naval power centered in Sicily that dated back to antiquity. The Italian sailing traditions, which experienced great expansion and success during the Crusader era, had their roots in methods copied from the Arab-Sicilians, who had in turn learned their techniques from the ethnically Greek residents of Sicily who remained from their period of rule over the island.[142] By the time of Ibn Jubayr's *Travels*, the maritime republics of Italy, including Pisa, Genoa, and Venice, were coming to dominate Mediterranean shipping, but they did so under the security offered by Sicilian warships. On his journey to the Holy Land and his return voyage home he booked passage on ships that were captained by Genoese sailors.[143] The traditions of Greek sailors and shipwrights met with a curious example of cultural blending in Sicily with the appointment of prominent Greek Christians to the post of "*Amiratus Amiratorum.*" This title is

[140] Brian Catlos, *Infidel Kings and Unholy Warriors*, 151-2.
[141] Fromherz, *The Near West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 58.
[142] Leonard Chiarelli, *A History of Muslim Sicily*, (Santa Venera, Malta, 2018), 38.
[143] Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels*, 28.

based on the Latinization of the Arabic title "*Emir*" which is roughly synonymous to "prince" and can be translated to mean "Emir of Emirs." Throughout the existence of the Norman Kingdom, the men who served as grand admirals with this title were among the most influential statesmen in Europe for their high positions of authority in the kingdom, and thanks to their status as non-Normans they represented less of a threat to the Hauteville rulers who invested them with such great power. These titles and traditions of the Sicilian navy proved to be enormously influential in maritime culture to this day and it is from the illustrious careers of these great sailors that the military rank of admiral, in use in Western Europe since at least the 13th-century, derives its name.[144]

Far from merely accommodating Muslims living in Norman Sicily, the Kingdom can rightly be described as depending on them for the functions of state.[145] In a system that modeled itself on the government of Fatimid Egypt, Roger II established an administrative corps of Arabic-speaking pages who became the key functionaries in the Kingdom's administration, and Arabic became the principal operating language of the court.[146] This practice intensified during the reigns of his son William I and grandson William II.[147] Ibn Jubayr makes early mention of these men in *The Travels* saying, "[The King] has much confidence in Muslims, relying on them for his affairs, and the most important matters, even the supervisor of his kitchen being a Muslim."[148] These administrators were recruited from among the same pool of black eunuch slaves that made up the bulk of Fatimid Egypt's slave population, and were commonly employed in the Byzantine Empire as well.[149] They were generally brought as children, baptized into

[144] David Abulafia, *The Great Sea*, 321-2.
[145] Jeremy Johns, *Arabic Administration in Norman Sicily* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 7.
[146] Herbert Houben, *Roger II of* Sicily, 148.
[147] Brian Catlos, *Infidel Kings and Unholy* Warriors, 176.
[148] Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels*, 340.
[149] Brian Catlos, *Infidel Kings and Unholy Warriors*, 170-1.

Christianity, and raised in the royal household. Although they were officially Christians, Ibn Jubayr asserts that they continued to practice the Muslim faith in private and with the implicit knowledge that the King was aware of their true faith but elected to allow their secret worship.[150]

Many scholars have noted the highly bureaucratic nature of Norman Sicily. The monarch did not attempt to exercise direct rule over the Kingdom, instead relying on his hierarchical administrative corps as well as an inner council composed of powerful Latin clergy and nobility.[151] The Hautevilles had come to rely on their nominally ex-Muslim servants, who could by their mere existence simultaneously improve their relations with Muslim allies, legitimize their rule among their Muslim subjects, and never pose a direct threat to their regime by being themselves ineligible to overthrow and replace them. If one of these Palace Saracens ever displeased the King, their supposed apostasy (a grave capital offense) gave them a convenient reason to quickly dispose of them. Their crime would only ever be an issue if and when the King chose to bring it up.[152] These civil servants provided a useful counterbalance against the interests of the one group that the Hautevilles had legitimate reason to fear and distrust, that of their fellow Latin Christians.

This promotion of the separate talents of their diverse population and the investment of power given to their members was not always embraced or appreciated by another one of the Kingdom's cultural groups, that of the royals' own people, the Norman and Lombard barons and bishops of the realm and with the Pope himself, their closest neighbor to the north. Some of the most scathing critiques of their rule come from these sources who appear to resent what they viewed as the foreign and impious actions and manners of the royals. One might assume that

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[150] Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels*, 341-3
[151] Hiroshi Takayama, "Central Power and Multi-Cultural Elements at the Norman Court of Sicily," *Mediterranean Studies* 12, (2003): 11.
[152] Brian Catlos, *Infidel Kings and Unholy Warriors*, 177.

their shared cultural identity and religious beliefs would make this group natural allies against an internal threat posed by the foreigners and non-believers, but instead the opposite proved to be the case at several points throughout the Kingdom's history. Due to the circumstances which dictated the Norman expansion in Southern Italy, the Hauteville royals were forced to consign the early territories they acquired to their many knights and retainers, but they were able to seize control of most of the land in Sicily itself as their personal fief. This had the effect of creating two separate cultural realities, where the insular portion of the Kingdom embraced cultural syncretism and accommodation alongside a Muslim-style administrative state, and the peninsular portion was far more uniformly Latin and was governed in the decentralized style of feudal Europe.[153] These separate systems encouraged a certain degree of inner harmony, in that the Latin nobility and clergy were largely permitted to operate in the manner that suited them on the mainland and the islanders were free to continue the practices that made their society so successful. Ibn Jubayr demonstrates a keen awareness of this distinction when he reflects that if his shipwreck had occurred while off the coast of the mainland, the best he could hope for would be to be sold into slavery by the people there.[154]

The royals had good reason to distrust their own people and to promote foreigners as their most trusted vassals, as the Norman and Lombard barons attempted insurrection against them at nearly every opportunity. Roger II's son King William I faced numerous challenges from the baronial class from very early on in his reign. The Latin chronicler Hugo Falcandus is among his harshest critics. Taking issue with the promotion of one of his baptized Muslim ministers, Peter, he asserts that the man was "A Christian only in name and dress but a Saracen at heart like

[153] Herbert Houben, *Roger II of Sicily*, 148-9.
[154] Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels*, 338.

all the eunuchs of the palace."[155] This internal threat to royal power also greatly impacted the Kingdom's foreign relations. This is evidenced by the papal-sanctioned invasion of their territory by the famed Holy Roman Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa. The emperor's army marched southward, acquiring allies along the way to enforce his claim of suzerainty over the lands of Italy. This event also took place during the reign of the embattled King William I and was launched with the promise that the emperor would pay his allies with the much-coveted great treasury of the Sicilians. This invasion, like the barons' revolt, ultimately failed and the emperor retreated in disgrace leaving Pope Adrian IV to the mercy of William's treaty terms.[156] Though the Hauteville monarchy survived these many conflicts, there were consequences of them which weakened the kingdom. While the King was occupied with quelling revolts and fending off invaders, the Almohads had swept into Ifriqiya from the west and taken hold of Roger's Kingdom of Africa. Hamstrung as he was with domestic issues, William sued for peace and abandoned the Norman's foothold on the coast of Africa. All that the barons' revolt had managed to accomplish was to undermine the power of their own kingdom and expose a foreign Christian community to conditions that would lead to their ultimate destruction.

4.2 Architecture, Art, and Science

It should be of no great surprise that one of the most enduring and prominent legacies of Norman Sicily's heterogeneous culture exists in the artifacts of their artistic accomplishments. Ibn Jubayr makes frequent mention of this phenomenon in what he terms to be the "Cordoba style" in the appearance of Sicilian towns. [157] The appearance of the island's cities was

[155] Hugo Falcandus, *Liber de Regno Sicilie*, 78.
[156] John Julius Norwich, *The Kingdom in the Sun*, 35.
[157] Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels*, 344-6.

sufficiently similar to what he was accustomed to that he was clearly made to feel more at home during his time there. This material culture existed alongside an intellectual culture that blended the greatest strengths of their disparate communities and drew in the talents of people throughout the Mediterranean world.

One of the clearest and most striking examples of the multi-ethnic hybrid culture of Norman Sicily is preserved in the many surviving specimens of Arab-Norman architecture that can be found throughout the island. The Norman ruling class brought many aspects of their own culture into Sicily in the form of their building constructions, and the presence of mixed Greek, Arab, and Latin building styles created a unique and impressive art form. The skylines of Sicily's wealthy port cities in the twelth-century were dominated by a mixture of Greek domes, Arab friezes, and Romanesque towers. Given the prominence of many of these buildings in the old quarters of Sicily today, it is clear that the ruling class of Sicily embraced this Arab-Norman art style. Muqarnas vault ceilings, common in Muslim architecture, and the gilded iconography of Byzantium can be found decorating the interiors of Norman castles and cathedrals. One site where this cultural fusion can still be witnessed today is in the Church of Saint Mary of the Admiral in Palermo. This building, which is also known as the *Martorana*, has undergone many additions and restorations since it was first opened in 1143, but there are many portions of it from the original construction which still survive.[158] The architectural forms of the buildings include recessed niches and exterior friezes which strongly evoke North African and Fatimid Egyptian styles, and it is adorned throughout with dedicatory inscriptions in Latin, Greek, and Arabic.[159] Ibn Jubayr wrote about his visit there on Christmas Day in 1184 saying, ". . . it is

[158] Herbert Houben, *Roger II of Sicily*. 113-5.
[159] Leonard Chiarelli, *A History of Muslim Sicily*, 303.

beyond dispute the most wonderful edifice in the world."[160] He judged this Christian church to be so beautiful that it provoked from him a prayer that God shield Muslims from seduction towards Christianity because of its overwhelming grandeur.[161] The church eponym "of the Admiral" is a reference to one George of Antioch, a Syrian Christian and holder of the grand admiral title *amiratus amiratorum* who rose to be one of the principal ministers and military commanders in King Roger II's service. Another architectural namesake of his can be found in the Bridge of the Admiral which is also located among Palermo's historic buildings. Both structures are part of a series of UNESCO World Heritage sites titled the "Arab-Norman Palermo and the Cathedral Churches of Cefalu and Monreale", paying tribute to their value as part of the diverse and influential history of the Mediterranean world.

Aside from influencing the building styles of Norman Sicily, their multicultural social landscape also helped to set their standards of fashion and beauty. Ibn Jubayr comments on what he determined to be the Muslim-inspired styles of the Sicilians very early on during his visit, remarking that King William II and his pages exhibited Muslim styles in dress and social etiquette to a level that he judged to be markers of the high civilization of his court. He remarks that ". . . no Christian King is more given up to the delights of the realm, or more comfort and luxury-loving," when describing the retinue of resplendently dressed pages, horsemen, youths, and handmaidens who followed his entourage.[162] This comment may seem at first to evoke accusations of cultural appropriation or disparagement of the immodest luxury he displays, but when put into its appropriate historical context it actually mirrors similar approving remarks that he makes about certain Muslim rulers during *The Travels*.[163] To a person such as Ibn Jubayr,

[160] Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels*, 348.
[161] Ibid, 349.
[162] Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels*, 340-1.
[163] Ibid, 236.

whose career depended on the generous endowments of noble patrons, lavish expenditures on food, fashion, and general luxury were seen as a marker of cultural refinement and enlightened rulership.

Even much earlier in the reign of the Hautevilles, the modes of Muslim-inspired fashion were well established in Sicilian society. This is evidenced in much of the artwork, clothing, and jewelry left behind from this period, but is perhaps most famously exemplified by the so-called Royal Mantle of Roger II. This impressive cloak is made from valuable red silk imported from the Byzantine Empire and is decorated with pearls from the Persian Gulf, enamel, jewels, and extensive gold embroidery. This intricate needlework includes *tiraz*[164] bands containing Arabic calligraphy that cites the date of its crafting in the royal workshops of Palermo, given as the Hijri year of 528.[165] Its Muslim style embroidery also depicts a pair of golden lions attacking camels while flanking a palm tree, a clear message of victory and domination over Muslims by the Norman King.[166] This mantle would go on to be part of the regalia of the Holy Roman Empire. This integration of Muslim styles being promoted by the royals apparently influenced the fashion of commoners as well, as Ibn Jubayr comments on the sumptuous veils and jewelry worn by the women of Palermo as they took part in the Christmas Day celebrations in the city.[167] Based on his descriptions it seems that Muslim-inspired fashion had become entrenched as a prominent part of Siculo-Norman high culture.

The Hauteville sponsorship of alien cultures and the knowledge and creativity they could offer also extended into the realm of the sciences. By doing so it is clear that they were

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[164] Tiraz (Arabic: طراز) is the name given to the style of embroidery including Arabic calligraphy. It is often used to decorate garments that are meant to indicate official honors and dignity for the wearer.
[165] Corresponds to the years 1133-34 CE.
[166] Jochen Sokoly, "Textiles and Identity," *A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture*, ed. Finbarr Barry Flood and Gülru Necipoğlu (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2017): 290.
[167] Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels*, 348-50.

attempting to raise the standard of learning in their society and become a center for the advancement of the sciences as well as the cultural arts. The education of Norman royals included a program of study in Latin, Arabic, and Greek from tutors who represented all of those cultural backgrounds, and many intellectuals from all around the Mediterranean chose to migrate to their capital in the hopes of entering their service. This appeal was especially true with regard to the field of medicine and Muslim doctors were highly prized and actively recruited throughout the country. Immigrant doctors like these were given a high standard of living in their new country and were given positions of high trust and esteem by the royals.[168] This policy appears to have led to the creation of a sophisticated medical network on the island by medieval standards. Ibn Jubayr writes that he encountered hospitals throughout the towns of Sicily which he describes as being familiar to those which existed in the developed regions of the Muslim world.[169]

This affinity for and promotion of Muslim intellectual culture appears to have paid off with respect to attracting great thinkers and producing works of cultural and scientific value. One famous example of this is reflected in the life and career of the geographer Muhammad al-Idrisi.[170] Al-Idrisi was the scion of a noble family from Al-Andalus who was dispossessed of its lands when a rival family conquered Málaga from them during the first Taifa period. In time, he would become widely famous for his expansive and startlingly accurate (by the standards of the time) world map which he produced while in Sicily. Al-Idrisi's interest and expertise in world geography is evidenced in the story of his education, as his own travels beginning as early as the age of 16 took him at least as far as Anatolia in the east and all the way to York in the north of

[168] John Julius Norwich, *The Kingdom in the Sun*, 57.
[169] Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels*, 346.
[170] Full name: Abu 'Abdullah Muhammad al-Idrisi al-Qurtubi al-Hasani as-Sabti (Arabic: أبو عبد الله محمد الإدريسي القرطبي الحسني السبتي).

England. Conflict and instability in the Muslim world led him to willingly accept a position in Roger II's court. He was considered to be something of a renegade in this respect for his willing residence at the court of the Christian King, a lifestyle choice that was heavily frowned upon in some Muslim traditions.[171] During his residence there he completed what is considered to be his magnum opus, the highly detailed world map and accompanying book known as the *Tabula Rogeriana*.[172] This great work was commissioned by the King in 1138 and took around 15 years of work to complete. It included divisions of the globe into the seven climatic zones which were represented in Ptolemy's work (at the time still considered to be the standard of knowledge in that field) and was achieved largely through exhaustive interviews with widely travelled Muslim merchants. King Roger himself is said to have been an enthusiastic audience to these merchant's tales and apparently took great delight in their retelling. The final product included a copy of the map, which showed the entire Eurasian landmass along with much of the African interior, engraved on a silver disc six feet in diameter and weighing about 300 pounds.[173] This piece was prominently displayed at the Hauteville court in Palermo but was sadly lost during the civil unrest that accompanied the reign of William I, which is discussed in greater detail above. Nevertheless, it and its surviving smaller and less valuable copies were indicative of the interest Roger and his successors had in the advancement of natural sciences. It was yet another aspect of their endorsement of foreign ideas and methods of learning and it resulted in the production of many revolutionary works that enhanced the power and prestige of the Kingdom of Sicily.

Despite the significant amount of time that has passed since the fall of their civilization, the influence of this Arab-Norman culture is still readily apparent to the travelers and scholars of

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[171] *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, s. v. "Al-Idrisi."
[172] Lit. "The Map of Roger" in Latin. Also known by its Arabic name "نزهة المشتاق في اختراق الآفا" (lit. "The Excursion of One Eager to Penetrate the Horizons").
[173] Herbert Houben, *Roger II of Sicily*, 102-4.

the 21st-century. Roger's royal mantle can be viewed today in the Schatzkammer Imperial Treasury in Vienna and reproductions of Al-Idrisi's map are displayed in libraries and museums devoted to Muslim cultural history all around the world.[174] Ibn Jubayr's astonishment at the Siculo-Normans' relative advancement and sophistication was only possible thanks to the royal sponsorship that foreign ideas and fashions were given at their court.

4.3 Sicilian Grain and African Gold

The power and influence that the Norman Kingdom of Sicily was able to wield was derived in large part from the fantastic wealth that its rulers were able to access. This economic power enabled the programs of expansion that the Hautevilles pursued both in the realms of their administrative bureaucracy and in their military adventures. Muslims, both inside the kingdom and in foreign lands, played an essential role in the successful operation of that economy. Like many other aspects of Sicily's society, this was a system which had been established during the previous period of Muslim rule and the Normans and the Hautevilles left it largely intact when they assumed control. The abundantly fertile agricultural lands of the island produced grain in such quantities and so cheaply that it undermined agricultural production in Ifriqiya, leading to a reliance on food imports to that region. The merchant class based in Tunis and the other coastal towns traded with Sicily buying grain and other produce with gold coinage. This gold was in turn obtained with relative affordability through their connections with the trans-Saharan trade network that existed between sub-Saharan Africa and the northern coast.[175] The Normans

[174] King Roger II of Sicily, *Coronation Mantle of Roger II of Sicily*, 1133, Kaiserliche Schatzkammer, Vienna; Muhammad Al-Idrisi, *Nuzhat al-mushtaq fi ikhtiraq al-afaq*, 1325, manuscript, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris; Muhammad Al-Idrisi, *Nuzhat al-mushtaq fi ikhtiraq al-afaq*, c. 14th-15th centuries, manuscript, Bodleian Library, Oxford.
[175] Robert Lopez, and Irving Raymond, *Medieval Trade in the Mediterranean World*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 34.

adopted this commercial system with little to no alteration, and the gold revenues had an amplifying effect on the kingdom's wealth as gold was relatively scarce in northern Europe at this time.[176] This mutually beneficial relationship promoted the flourishing of a Muslim merchant class in Sicily whose generated wealth enriched the coastal and interior towns of the island and did much to further the power and grandeur of the Norman royals.[177]

It is telling for how important this commercial relationship must have been that it endured mostly without interruption through the many outbreaks of violence between Norman Sicily and Muslim Ifriqiya. Roger II's invasion and short-lived conquest of what he termed the Kingdom of Africa was in many ways a simple furtherance of this economic relationship, with the Sicilians seeking to take formal control by overseeing and protecting the trade network at both ends. This is evidenced by the relative lack of resistance the Sicilian forces faced during the invasion and the readiness with which local rulers, whose power also depended heavily on the maintenance of this grain for gold trade, were integrated into Roger's short-lived Christian kingdom in the modern-day nations of Tunisia, Libya, and Algeria.[178] Norman suzerainty seemed to be an acceptable set of terms for the merchant princes of Ifriqiya. Even the Almohads' subsequent invasion and conquest of Ifriqiya during Roger's son William I's reign, despite being launched as a holy intervention to drive out Christian rule, did little to disrupt the long-term trade relationship.[179] Religious orthodoxy and hostility took a backseat to the advantages offered by tolerance and cooperation in the narrow Strait of Sicily.

As discussed in a previous chapter, King Roger II's father, Count Roger I Bosso, once received a delegation from the Crusader States lobbying him for support of a crusade to conquer

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[176] Ibid, 76.
[177] Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels*, 351.
[178] Herbert Houben, *Roger II of Sicily*, 83.
[179] Lopez and Raymond, 74.

Ifriqiya. His dismissal of their proposal, accentuated by a well-timed bit of flatulence, can be taken as a disregarding of the religious motivation for the expedition. This impression of the Norman ruler's interaction with his coreligionists can be accurately understood this way, but his reasons for not wanting to sponsor the Crusaders went beyond his lack of interest in holy missions and had as much to do with protecting his dynasty's ambitions in the region. Roger's remarks following the dismissal acknowledge the importance of the trading relationship he had with Ifriqiya stating that, "I shall lose the money I draw each year from the sale of my produce." He went on to explain that he intended to conquer Ifriqiya for himself in due time, "Africa is always within our range; when we have become strong enough, we will conquer it."[180] His ambition, however temporarily, was of course realized during his son's reign of.

Sicily's non-Christian subjects also represented a more direct form of revenue for the kingdom than their role as traders and intermediaries with other Muslim communities. Their status as a religious minority under the direct control of the monarch meant that they could be subject to special taxes. Ibn Jubayr was able to witness this system at work during his travels, remarking that the rulers exacted special taxes on farmed wheat and the produce of fruit tree orchards twice yearly. He records these exactions on the island's Muslims alongside his characteristic prayers that God abolish this rule and award recompensation to the true believers.[181] Ibn Jubayr witnessed similar interactions in the Crusader States while traveling there and would likely have been aware of similar arrangements among the Muslims living in the Christian-ruled sectors of his native Iberian peninsula.[182]

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[180] Herbert Houben, *Roger II of Sicily*, 18.
[181] Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels*, 339-40.
[182] Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels*, 301; Olivia Remie Constable, *Trade and Traders in Muslim Spain: The Commercial Realignment of the Iberian Peninsula, 900-1500*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 29.

This seemingly widespread administrative arrangement had its roots in a policy of Muslim rule that dated back at least as far as the early Muslim conquests of the 7th and 8th centuries known as the *jizya*.[183] The jizya, along with the often-synonymous land tax known as the *kharaj*, had important religious and political significance in Muslim history and was one of the key mechanisms through which Muslim conquerors and rulers interacted with their non-Muslim subjects. [184] Custom and religious jurisprudence dictated a standard form of treaty that Muslim conquerors would offer the residents of newly conquered places. Once a settlement surrendered to Muslim-led forces, the individuals there would generally be offered three separate choices, they could either defy their new rulers and be executed, convert to Islam and join the *ummah*, or pay the *jizya* and join the *dhimmah* as a legally sanctioned protected person.[185] The exact application of these treaty terms varied in different circumstances, but it was sufficiently widespread to normalize such interactions. Over time this lump sum tributary payment evolved into a regular tax and constituted a large portion of a Muslim ruler's revenue in many places, which often led to friction between conservatives who wished to convert the non-believers and the rulers who relied on that tax income. Based on the precedence established by the Muslim conquests, Christian rulers in Sicily and elsewhere with large Muslim subject populations appear to have simply inverted this system, placing Muslims in a tributary relationship. This arrangement held symbolic and practical meaning in displaying the dominant and subservient components of the interfaith relations. It also had the tendency to force less privileged elements of society to accept conversion as an alternative to poverty and often led to the destruction or serious degradation of their communities.[186] However, it also played an important role in

[183] *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, s.v. "Jizya."
[184] *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, s.v. "Kharaj."
[185] *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, s.v. "Ummah.""
[186] Constable, 126-8.

establishing the standards of peaceful relations between the religious groups and creating an alternative to the complete annihilation of one side in open warfare. Norman Sicily took the lessons of both Muslim and Christian conquerors to heart and utilized this Muslim-descended policy to create their peaceful and prosperous society while still enforcing their dominion over their conquered peoples.

4.4 The Outsider's Advantage

Ibn Jubayr's assessment of the hybridization of Siculo-Norman culture as advanced and aesthetically pleasing is primarily focused on what he recognizes from his native Andalusi Muslim culture being reflected back to him in the forms of the kingdom's fashion and architecture, but travelers from all over the Mediterranean would have been able to recognize similar features to their own alongside his. The visual representation of all of the disparate elements of their society was a key feature in what promoted the relative harmony that these groups experienced while living there. Centrally located in the Mediterranean as they were, their hybridized culture served as a means of bridge-building with their neighbors and creating a place where even a somewhat judgmental and conservative Muslim pilgrim could not help but feel at home.

It is a testament to the wise rulership of the Hautevilles that they chose to promote the separate talents of their country's populace rather than suppress or exile their communities for the sake of internal unity. Their Kingdom of Sicily represented a vision for the entire Mediterranean world in this way, and their expansionist policies sought to integrate foreigners and their cultures into the empire they were building. Between the Lombards, Italians, Greeks, and Muslims, the Normans were a heavily outnumbered ruling class. The Hauteville dynasty

chose to turn this numerical disadvantage into a source of strength and elevate themselves to the position of impartial mediator and potential patron for anyone who impressed them or proved themselves useful.

The greatest threats to their rule consistently came internally from their social peers among the Latin nobility and clergy. Their opposition to the royal agenda of cultural syncretism seems to have been a calculated risk for the rulers who accepted it trusting in their ability to successfully fend off any challenges from the north. For over a century this policy paid off considerably well. The sophisticated state, advanced culture, and legendary wealth which made the Kingdom of Sicily such a force in Mediterranean politics attracted the attention of the great powers of the time and appear to have been poised for even greater power and influence if circumstances had allowed. Ibn Jubayr's anxiety paired with his admiration gives us a historically intriguing impression of how contemporaries viewed the Sicilians' place in the Mediterranean world. Had the dynasty survived much longer they would certainly have continued to have a tremendous influence on the region's history.

5 Conclusion

The Norman Kingdom of Sicily as an independent polity would not endure long after Ibn Jubayr's visit. King William II died with no heir on 11 November 1189 at the age of only 35. After his death, a Hauteville dynastic war of succession ensued between his cousin Tancred, the illegitimate son of King Roger II's eldest son, and his aunt Constance, who was married to the Holy Roman Emperor Henry VI. Tancred, nicknamed "the Monkey King" for his short stature and unattractive appearance had the support of most of Sicily's nobles who feared being overtaken by the German influence of the Hohenstaufen imperials.[187] Tancred led successful campaigns to repel imperial invasions into Apulia and took steps to ensure the succession of his son, also named William, but died rather prematurely in 1194 at the age of 56. The young King William III reigned for 10 months before the Empress Constance and her husband overwhelmed and deposed him, possibly being blinded and castrated in the process.[188] If this did indeed occur, it can be considered as yet another foreign influence on the Latin rulers of Sicily who appear to have adopted a practice common in Byzantine history for removing potential claimants to the throne.

Sicily and Southern Italy became integrated into the Imperial domain. Henry and Constance's son Frederick inherited the title of King of Sicily in 1198 and went on to become the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II in 1220. Frederick, called "*Stupor Mundi*"[189] by his contemporaries for his command of many languages and interest in many fields of science and the arts, relocated the imperial capital to Palermo and appears to have greatly embraced his Sicilian royal heritage. In an attempt to better protect Sicily's Muslims whose community had

[187] John Julius Norwich, *The Kingdom in the Sun*, 356.
[188] Ibid, 386.
[189] Latin meaning "wonder of the world."

been heavily diminished by violence and migration during the years of civil war, Frederick resettled what remained of their number to a colony in Lucera in Apulia on the Italian peninsula.[190] Here they were granted imperial protection and allowed freedom of worship in exchange for providing a levy of personal bodyguards to the emperor. After his death in 1250 this colony began to fade into obscurity and was ultimately wiped out in 1300 by the forces of King Charles II of Naples.[191] Its remaining members were either killed, forcibly converted, or sold into slavery. This was the final event resulting in the extinction of the Sicilian Muslim population, but their legacy had endured in the many physical artifacts of their cultural and intellectual achievements that remained, as well as in the works of contemporary authors like Ibn Jubayr who bore first-hand witness to this vibrant and dynamic historical community.

It has been my desire throughout the research and writing of this thesis to present a view of the Medieval Mediterranean as a diverse, dynamic, and cosmopolitan region whose lands were made up of a myriad of communities whose existence and experience with each other ranged the entire spectrum of warlike and peaceful exchange and crossed all boundaries of culture, religion, and history. Ibn Jubayr's travels allowed him to witness and write about so many of these places and communities, but his unplanned several months long stay in Sicily placed him in a microcosm of that diversity. In the great towns of the Norman Kingdom, we can see an example of how these communities existed in a tenuous but productive relationship with one another. This allows us to think critically about the entire historiography of this region and era and begin to contribute to the ongoing revisionist work that seeks to reframe our discussions about its events and their significance.

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[190] Julie Taylor, *Muslims in Medieval Italy: The Colony at Lucera*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005), 201.
[191] Ibid, 223.

There is a great deal more that I believe can be learned through an even more thorough study of the history of Norman Sicily and the *Travels of Ibn Jubayr*. So much more remains to be said for the Hauteville's relationship with the Papacy and how that influenced their social policies and the ramifications it had for Italian politics. The lingering influence of Muslim culture on Southern Italy in general has a long-running debate that I relish the opportunity to engage with. The ways in which the Hautevilles impacted Ifriqiya during their period over domination there and the consequences it had for Christian-Muslim relations could likely be the subject a book unto itself. All the familial drama that unfolded between the Sicilian Normans and their relationships with their countrymen elsewhere in England, France, and the Holy Land can teach us so much about the intersection of sex, gender, and politics in the Middle Ages in a space spanning across three continents. I am convinced that the splendor, beauty, and creativity which this relatively short-lived hybrid culture generated has further lessons to share.

It has been argued by academics and philosophers like Edward Said and Kwame Anthony Appiah that the very identity of Western Civilization, which can be traced back to Medieval ideas about Christendom, are rooted in the idea of being opposed to Islamic civilization.[192] If this is indeed true, as it often appears to be, then our cultural identities have done a great deal to hamper the development of productive relationships throughout our shared history. Islamophobia in the West, and distrust of the West in the Islamic world, still has the effect of stymying development and generating conflict in a way that feels sometimes like little to no progress has been made since the Crusader era. For many, the mental image of minarets rising in the great

[192] Kwame Anthony Appiah, "There Is No Such Thing as Western Civilisation." The Guardian, Guardian News and Media, November 9, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/09/western-civilisation-appiah-reith-lecture; Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004).

cities of Europe or of Western music and television in Arabia provokes visceral reactions of fear and disgust that have led to violent episodes that serve only to further this history of hate.

In the example of 12th century Sicily, we appear to have a framework for an alternate perception of our cultural differences. Their society was by no means perfect and was far from equal, but their capacity for cooperation and accommodation stemming from the active policies of their ruling class were sufficiently impressive to win the begrudging admiration of Ibn Jubayr, who made it clear that he was predisposed to being against their society on principle. Their society was also often volatile, with transitions of power being plagued by opportunistic attacks on minority groups whose lives and property depended on royal protection. Sicily flourished for as long as they chose to embrace their diversity, but it was always fragile. After the expulsion of the Muslims and the relegation of the island to provincial status, it slid into poverty and cultural stagnation. Today Sicily is much more famous as a home to organized crime and superstition than it is as a place of art and education. The story of the past is not always a march towards progress.

As I stated above, I believe there is much more work to be done on this project and the true value of it could be transformative in the way we think about ourselves and our relationship to the past. For me personally, as an individual of Sicilian descent, I cannot help but wonder who my ancestors were and how they fit into this vibrant and colorful cultural tapestry from 800 years ago, and what their past identity means for the present. Going any further with this line of thought is to engage in pure speculation, which has little place in a work of scholarship. Returning to the facts that we have, what is known for certain is that for nearly five months a Muslim scholar and traveler from Iberia dwelt in safety and comfort enjoying the culture and hospitality of people whom he considered to be his sworn enemies. His story is one of finding

peace and enjoyment in a place where he least expected. Much the same as it was for me when centuries later, I joined the ancient ranks of his readers and discovered this serene island floating in a sea of conflict.

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