

**THE MINISTRY OF STEPHEN OF  
PERCHE DURING THE MINORITY  
OF WILLIAM II OF SICILY.  
VOL. III, NO.3. APRIL, 1918**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649744640

The ministry of Stephen of Perche during the minority of William II of Sicily. Vol. III, No.3.  
April, 1918 by John C. Hildt

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# Smith College Studies in History

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JOHN SPENCER BASSETT  
SIDNEY BRADSHAW FAY  
*Editors*

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NORTHAMPTON, MASS.

Published Quarterly by the  
Department of History of Smith College

Entered as second class matter December 14, 1915, at the postoffice at  
Northampton, Mass., under the act of August 24, 1912.

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## SMITH COLLEGE STUDIES IN HISTORY

JOHN SPENCER BASSETT  
SIDNEY BRADSHAW FAY

EDITORS

THE SMITH COLLEGE STUDIES IN HISTORY is published quarterly, in October, January, April and July, by the Department of History of Smith College. The subscription price is one dollar and a half for the year. Separate numbers may be had for fifty cents (or one dollar for double numbers). Subscriptions and requests for exchanges should be addressed to Professor SIDNEY B. FAY, Northampton, Mass.

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## PREFACE

Except to a few students of the Middle Ages the history of the Norman kingdom in southern Italy and Sicily has but little interest apart from its connection with the history of the empire, or of the papacy. This is probably because the Norman kingdom had so few points of contact with England, France and Germany, and also because it has ceased to exist, no national patriotism existed to act as an incentive for the exploitation of its history. Nevertheless the rise and development of this kingdom, called "the kingdom of Sicily, the duchy of Apulia and the principality of Capua," is one of the great phenomena of the Middle Ages. This power grew up through the conquests of the country by small bands of Normans who in the early years of the eleventh century wandered into southern Italy in search of plunder and adventure.

Despite the smallness of their numbers, these adventurers overthrew the Greek and Lombard rulers whom they found there, conquered Sicily from the Saracens, defied the claims and the armies of the German and the Greek emperors, carried war into the heart of the Byzantine empire, and made important conquests on the northern coast of Africa. They twice captured the pope and forced him, first, to legitimate their conquests, then to recognize their kingdom, and finally to grant ecclesiastical privileges greater than the medieval papacy ever conferred upon any other sovereigns or state. Under them Sicily embraced regions of the most widely contrasted geographical character, two antagonistic religions, the Christian and the Mohammedan, and hostile races, like the Greeks, Saracens, Lombards, Italians and Normans, who clung tenaciously to their native customs, laws, and languages. Still the kingdom was no ephemeral creation. Under various names and various ruling dynasties, it "obstinately maintained its unity with itself and its separateness from the rest of the peninsula" until 1860, when, as the kingdom of the Two Sicilies, it was incorporated into the present kingdom of Italy.

In the following study of the ministry of Stephen of Perche,

which is an episode in a larger discussion of the rise and development of the Norman kingdom of Sicily, I have attempted to give a picture of the life and procedure of the Norman court at Palermo and glimpses of the habits of the people of Sicily during the early years of the reign of William II, 1166-1189. At this time the Norman kingdom was thoroughly established and occupied an important place among the nations of Europe. Too often in the history of the Middle Ages one gets the impression that there was little but war and treaties and that the people then living were a curious, inhuman lot, very different in thought and deed from the people of today. I hope my study will show that this is not true. Besides intending to give a picture of the life of the times, it aims to show the shifting, unstable organization of the court under an absolute monarchy, its cosmopolitanism, the methods of its judicial procedure, and the necessity of force as a basis of successful government. Perhaps it will also throw light upon the significance and functions of the "familiar", a peculiar Sicilian institution.

In making this study I have drawn upon two of the most important sources of Norman-Sicilian history. One of them, the "History" of Hugh Falcandus, is considered one of the most remarkable histories, or chronicles, of the Middle Ages. Of the author we know almost nothing. Indeed, it is doubtful if Hugh Falcandus was his name. The book deals with the events of the Norman-Sicilian kingdom from 1154 to 1169, but the emphasis is laid upon the happenings at the court and in Palermo. The vividness, the vigor, the detail with which the author described men and events and the care with which he sought to explain the causes of events won for him from Gibbon and other historians the name of "the Tacitus of the Middle Ages." He was an eye-witness of most of the scenes he described. He had opportunities for knowing the inside history of the times in which he lived. But who he was, what was his position at court, or what was his nationality, we do not know. It is all a mystery yet unsolved.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Chalandon, F., *Histoire de la Domination Normande en Italie et en Sicile*, I, lii-lxi.



Arguments can be produced to show that he was not a Sicilian, nor a Frenchman, nor an Apulian. Equally good arguments might be produced, I think, to prove that he was an Englishman. Certainly the Englishmen at the Sicilian court alone escaped his bitter censures. In the first part of his history, which deals with the reign of William I, Falcandus wrote as an active partisan of the feudal nobility. He was especially hostile, nay slanderous, in regard to William I's bourgeois prime minister, the emir Maio, of Bari.<sup>2</sup> But in the latter part of his work, upon which I have drawn so exhaustively, there was no such partisanship, although the author was kindly disposed to Stephen of Perche. Here he was more dispassionate and philosophical.

The other important source used in this study is the "Annales" of Romoald II, archbishop of Salerno. Archbishop Romoald belonged to the distinguished family of Guarna in Salerno. He was a physician, as well as a prelate and historian. Occupying the second most important see in the kingdom he played an influential part in the events of his day. He was one of the Sicilian representatives in the peace negotiations between Hadrian IV and William I at Benevento in 1156. He attended William I in his last illness and presided at the coronation of William II. But the event of his life in which he took the most satisfaction was his participation, as one of the two ambassadors of William II, in the negotiation of the treaty of Venice in 1177 between Frederick I and Alexander III and his allies, the king of Sicily and the Lombard League. Romoald is very circumspect in his narration of the events in which his share might be subject to criticism or blame. He is often silent, or too brief, in regard to many important matters where Falcandus, who was most probably less intimately concerned, gives us a wealth of detail. Romoald's book is a valuable supplement and check to the narrative of Falcandus.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Siragusa, G. B., *Il Regno di Guglielmo I in Sicilia, parte prima*, 155-162.

<sup>3</sup> Chalandon, I, xlix-lij; Siragusa, *parte prima*, 9-10.

## The Ministry of Stephen of Perche During the Minority of William II of Sicily

### 1. *Intrigues Against Richard Palmer*

William II was not quite fourteen years old when his father, William I, died, 7 May, 1166,<sup>1</sup> and he succeeded to the throne of the kingdom of Sicily, the duchy of Apulia, and the principality of Capua. A few years earlier William I had experienced the deepest humiliation at the hands of his vassals. For the first time since Sicily had been conquered by the Normans the barons had revolted, seized the king in his palace at Palermo and prepared to depose him. In order that they might control the government they proposed to place his eldest son, the nine year old Roger, duke of Apulia, on the throne. Surprised at their own success the barons hesitated before putting their plan into effect. The bishops who were in Palermo foresaw the anarchy of baronial rule. Headed by Romoald, archbishop of Salerno, they led the populace of Palermo to the palace and rescued the king. During the confusion the young heir to the throne was mysteriously killed.<sup>2</sup> Grateful to the bishops for the restoration of his liberty and the re-establishment of his authority William I permitted them to exercise great influence in the government during the rest of his reign. On his death-bed William I designated his eldest surviving son, William, as the heir to the kingdom and, in accordance with the Norman custom of the realm, appointed his wife, Margaret, daughter of Garcia VI, king of Navarre, regent until the boy could assume the government. He also ordered that his wife should retain in office his intimate advisers and ministers, Richard Palmer, the

<sup>1</sup> Romoaldi II Archiepiscopi Salernitani Annales, a. 893-1178, ed. W. Arndt, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, ed. G. H. Pertz, *Scriptores*, XIX, 435.

<sup>2</sup> Hugonis Falcandi *Historia De Tyrannide Siculorum*, ed. G. Del Re, *Cronisti e Scrittori Sincroni della Dominazione Normanna nel Regno di Puglia e Sicilia*, ed. G. Del Re, I, 315-326; Romoald Salern., 431-432.

bishop-elect of Syracuse, the gait, Peter, and Matthew of Aiello, the chief of the notaries.<sup>3</sup>

The dealings of the rebellious vassals with the heir apparent, Roger, in their efforts to depose the king had prevented William I from associating his eldest surviving son with him in the kingship during his life time. It had even prevented him from conferring upon him the duchy of Apulia with which it was becoming customary to designate the heir to the throne. It was this lack of formal recognition of William II as heir as well as the dread of revolt, that caused the queen and her counsellors to withhold the news of the death of William I until after the great barons had been summoned to court and had acknowledged William II as king.<sup>4</sup> After the funeral and the period of mourning for the late king were over, William II was escorted by the clergy and the barons to the cathedral of Palermo and there crowned by Romoald, the archbishop of Salerno. The good looks, youth, and innocence of the young king called forth a great outburst of loyalty and enthusiasm; for even the enemies of the late king recognized that William II was in no way responsible for his father's unpopular acts.<sup>5</sup>

The queen, in order that the new reign might be peaceful and popular, sought to conciliate the people and the barons. She not only carried out the provisions of her husband's will, but was lavish in the distribution of her favors. She released many prisoners, both in Sicily and on the mainland. She gave orders that the oppressive "redemption"<sup>6</sup> should no longer be collected. Many counts and barons were recalled from exile and their possessions restored to them, while lands were liberally distributed to the churches, counts, barons and knights.<sup>7</sup> Although

<sup>3</sup>Falcand., 341. Gait was a title of military nobility among the Saracens and was borne by the eunuchs in the service of William I and William II. Amari, M., *Storia dei Musulmani in Sicilia*, III, 261-266.

<sup>4</sup>Falcand., 341.

<sup>5</sup>Falcand., 342; Romoald Salern., 435.

<sup>6</sup>"Redemption," a contribution levied by William I on the towns and castles of Apulia and Terra di Lavoro which had taken part in a revolt against him. Falcand., 335.

<sup>7</sup>Falcand., 342; Romoald Salern., 435.