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The Ministry of Stephen of Perche
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VOL. III, No. 3

APRIL, 1918

Smith College Studies in History

JOHN SPENCER BASSETT
SIDNEY BRADSHAW FAY

Editors

THE MINISTRY OF STEPHEN OF PERCHE
DURING THE MINORITY OF
WILLIAM II OF SICILY

By JOHN C. HILDT

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.¹

¹ 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.² 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.³

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

³ Chalandon, I, xlix-lii; 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, 1166,¹ 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.² 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

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

²Hugonis 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.³

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.⁴ 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.⁵

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"⁶ 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.⁷ Although

³ 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.

⁴ Falcand., 341.

⁵ Falcand., 342; Romoald Salern., 435.

⁶ "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.

⁷ Falcand., 342; Romoald Salern., 435.

the queen still kept her husband's advisers and ministers as his will directed, nevertheless she abandoned his policy of considering Robert of Syracuse, Matthew the notary, and the gait Peter as being equal in authority and power. The gait, Peter, a Saracen eunuch, was gentle, kindly and affable, while his extreme liberality to the soldiers obtained for him their favor and obedience. These qualities attracted the queen. Considering him the ablest minister, she placed him at the head of the administration and over the other two, who, however, continued to participate in the council meetings and to be called familiars.⁸

Now that the king was a minor, attacks were no longer made upon the sovereign, nor revolts against his authority; but the court was agitated by a series of intrigues to gain control of the administration. Most active in these intrigues were the bishops who did not reside in their bishoprics but flocked to the court. At this time there were in Palermo Romoald, archbishop of Salerno; Roger, archbishop of Reggio; Tustan, bishop of Mazara; and Gentile, bishop of Girgenti. Of these the most restless intriguer was the bishop of Girgenti. In former days he had been so afraid of William I that he sought to gain popular favor and the good will of the king by living an ascetic life.

Freed from this fear by the king's death, Gentile suddenly threw off his cloak of virtue and began to live a most dissolute life. He also sought to secure a following for himself. For this purpose he frequently gave splendid feasts to the soldiers. In his efforts to secure popular support he boasted of his family and his own achievements and lied so extravagantly that many people were surprised and amused that a bishop should act so. He declared that if he were a familiar of the court he would destroy all the evil customs and that under him the notaries and the door-keepers of the palace and other officials of the court should be made to stop their extortions and be restricted to a fixed scale of fees. He was especially hostile to Richard Palmer, the "elect" of Syracuse, and sought to stir up opposition to him and destroy his reputation with both the people and

⁸ Falcand., 342.

the barons. His enmity to Richard of Syracuse was due to the fact that both he and Richard were aspirants for the vacant archbishopric of Palermo, and that he thought that Richard, puffed up with pride at his position at court, had treated him with haughty insolence.

Bishop Gentile, accordingly, planned to drive the bishop-elect of Syracuse from court. As Richard was an Englishman, Gentile sought to get rid of him by stirring up a movement against foreigners in the service of the crown. "The foreigners," he said, "had acquired great power at court and, trusting in the friendship of the king had greatly oppressed the nation. They should be completely excluded from court and the bishop-elect the first of all. If he were driven away and not one of those people were permitted to remain at court the king, when he came of age, would have as his familiars and confer the dignities of the court upon those among whom he grew up and not upon wanderers and adventurers." For his scheme he secured the support of Romoald, archbishop of Salerno, and Roger, archbishop of Reggio. He gained over the archbishop of Reggio by entertaining him at splendid feasts, for archbishop Roger was a most miserly man who was ever ready to dine at the table of others in order to save his own resources. The notary, Matthew of Aiello, also joined in the conspiracy because of his jealousy of Richard. The two men had long been colleagues. As Matthew was uncertain about the success of the plot he prudently wished to keep secret his participation in it. The conspirators sought also to win over the gait, Peter. Every day they rode with him and paid him great court, "more than became their episcopal dignity." They warned him that the "elect" of Syracuse, jealous of his position at court, had conspired with some others to have him killed. The eunuch, believing every thing which was thus poured into his ear, at once informed his friends and by their advice he hired men to kill the bishop-elect as he entered the palace. In order that Richard might not be protected, Peter prohibited the king's soldiers and their constable

from riding with the "elect," or accompanying him when he came to court.⁹

Although Richard Palmer was informed of this plot against him, he took no precautions to defend himself, nor did he come to court each day less often than his custom. Seeing the bravery of the man the gait, Peter, was so impressed that, in spite of the urging of his ecclesiastical fellow-conspirators, he would not permit him to be assassinated. When the bishops and Matthew, the notary, saw that Peter refused to have the "elect" of Syracuse murdered, they persuaded him that he should at least have him removed from court, by sending him back to his bishopric, and have the archbishop of Salerno appointed to his place. Although the eunuch promised to do this, again he lacked the determination to carry it out. The conspirators were in despair and would have dropped their plot had it not been for the archbishop of Reggio.

Roger, archbishop of Reggio, "was now in extreme old age, tall, exceedingly thin, with a voice so feeble that it sounded like a hiss, his face and whole body were of such an ashy paleness that he seemed more like a corpse than a living person. He considered no labor too difficult if any money could be obtained from it, suffering beyond human practice thirst and hunger that he might save his own expense. He was never joyful at his own table and never a sad guest at that of another. Very often he would pass whole days fasting, expecting that some one would invite him to dine, which frequently the bishop of Girgenti was accustomed to do, as did others who knew this peculiarity of his." Because of his reputation for sanctity the archbishop succeeded in rallying the enemies of the "elect" to continue in their efforts to drive him from power. The conspirators now obtained new and more powerful allies. They secured the support of the queen who also disliked the bishop-elect. In her husband's life-time queen Margaret had on several occasions asked his aid and Richard, whose success had made him proud and overbearing, had refused her requests with insolent sar-

⁹ Falcand., 342-344.

casu. Now there was then at the court in Palermo cardinal John the Neapolitan. Seeing the two factions at the court, he attempted to fish in troubled waters and obtain from their rivalry some advantage for himself. So he readily consented to the request of the gait, Peter, to have the pope order the bishop-elect back to his diocese. The cardinal hoped, by doing this favor for the gait, that Peter would influence the queen to have him given the vacant archbishopric of Palermo.¹⁰

2. *Arrival of the Count of Gravina*

While the opposition to the bishop-elect of Syracuse was thus preparing to strike, news arrived in Palermo that the queen's cousin, Gilbert, count of Gravina, who had been loyal to William I during the revolt in Apulia, had, on hearing the news of the king's death, set out for Palermo and had crossed the Faro and would soon be at court. At once the enemies of Richard Palmer perceived that here was a new and much more dangerous rival. His rank, his loyalty, his relationship to the queen, all qualified him for a high position at court, and they foresaw that the count would be content with nothing less than the position of master catepan of the whole kingdom. If he obtained this position he would occupy the highest place after the queen in the administration of the realm. Richard of Syracuse seized his opportunity to acquire a powerful ally. He sent messengers to the count to inform him of the state of affairs at court and formed an alliance with him.

On his arrival at court the count of Gravina was disappointed at the position in which he found himself. He was accompanied by too small a band of soldiers to override the opposition he found arrayed against him. The queen had no intention of displacing the gait, Peter, for him. Her distrust of the count was aroused when she was secretly informed by Cardinal John and the friends of Peter that he was endeavoring to deprive her of the regency and all her authority in order to take it himself.

¹⁰ Falcand., 344-345.

Much irritated by his reception the count made himself the spokesman for the party of the aristocracy and of Richard Palmer. In the presence of the gait, Peter, he scolded the queen for having attempted to rule the kingdom through a eunuch instead of through the counts and barons as she ought. He furthermore upbraided her for permitting conspirators to attempt to drive away from the court the bishop-elect of Syracuse, a prudent man and necessary to the kingdom. The queen tried to conciliate him by offering him the position of familiar at the court with authority equal to that of the gait. Indignantly the count rejected the offer which he declared would make him the equal of a eunuch. He then departed, leaving the queen in tears.¹¹

Peter, realizing the intensity of the opposition of the count of Gravina towards him, judged that he would have to protect himself with force. For this reason he sought to gain the good will of the soldiers with many kindnesses and large gifts. Then, as the barons, nobles and all who possessed lands and fiefs preferred that the count of Gravina should be in control at court and be made catepan, Peter undertook to deprive the count of this support. The master constable was Richard of Mandra. He had accepted the eunuch's money and was under many obligations to him. Therefore Peter believed he could easily control him and planned to have Richard supplant Count Gilbert as the leader of the aristocracy. In order that Richard might have the necessary rank and wealth he persuaded the queen to make him count of Molise to the great indignation of many courtiers. In accordance with custom the new count, preceded by trumpets, drums and cymbals, took possession of Boiano, Venafro and all the other castles which belonged to the countship of Molise.¹² But Peter's courage was not equal to his political sagacity. He was seized with a growing fear that the count of Gravina was plotting against his life. He rode about accompanied by a large band of soldiers and archers, gave lib-

¹¹ Falcand., 346-347.

¹² Falcand., 347.

erally to all who came to him and tried to bind to his party by oath as many persons as he could. At last, overcome by his terror, Peter determined to flee by night from the country. Secretly he had a swift ship prepared and putting on board his treasures and a few of the eunuchs with whom he was intimate, he escaped to Africa.¹³

The news of the flight of the master chamberlain of the palace created great excitement among the people. It was reported that not only had he carried off an immense amount of treasure, which was true, but that he had also taken the royal insignia. A council, consisting of the bishops, the counts and the familiars of the court, was summoned to the palace. At this meeting the queen denied that Peter had taken any of the royal treasure, while the count of Gravina blamed her for having given so great power to a Saracen slave who had betrayed the Sicilian fleet.¹⁴ The newly created count of Molise took up the defense of the fugitive and declared that while Peter had once been a slave he had been freed by the will of the late king and his liberty confirmed by the queen and the new king, and that he had been driven into flight through fear for his life because he had been terrorized by the threats of the count of Gravina. The speaker further expressed his willingness to prove the loyalty of the fugitive by single combat. The dispute between the two counts then became so heated that the count of Molise called the count of Gravina a coward and unworthy to command the royal army, and had it not been for those present who put themselves between them the two men would have come to blows. It was only at the command of the queen and at the request of the great barons that they were prevailed upon to keep the peace.¹⁵

¹³ Falcand., 348; Romoald Salern., 436. Cf. Ibn Haldun, *Biblioteca Arabo-Sicula*, versione italiana, ed. M. Amari, II, 166, 238.

¹⁴ Peter had been in command of a Sicilian fleet which had been defeated by the Saracens off the coast of Africa, 8 September, 1159, while attempting to relieve Mahediah. Ibn al Atir, *BAS.*, I, 489; Ibn Haldun, *ib.*, II, 233; At Tigani, *ib.*, II, 80; Falcand., 300; Romoald Salern., 429.

¹⁵ Falcand., 348-349.

In the flight of the gait, Peter, Matthew the notary thought he had an opportunity to become the chief minister of the kingdom. He saw that the queen, the count of Molise and the party of Peter were anxious to have Count Gilbert removed from court. Accordingly Matthew planned to gain the favor of Gilbert's enemies and further his own interests by carrying through this audacious scheme. He spread the report that the German emperor was most certainly coming. He wrote false letters containing this report had them brought to the king as if from remote parts of the realm. These letters he himself in the presence of all the court opened and read; for this was a part of his official duty. The queen at once made use of the news to send for the count of Gravina and urge him to hasten immediately to Apulia, collect an army, fortify the castles and protect the country against the emperor. Although the count perceived that this was a trick to remove him from the court, yet knowing that he could accomplish nothing against the queen's will, he judged it best to retire with dignity rather than to be driven out with force. He therefore accepted the position of catepan of Apulia and Terra di Lavoro and with his son Bertrand, who had recently been made count of Andria, he returned to Apulia. Upon the departure of the count of Gravina the count of Molise became the great power at court. The queen made him a familiar and conferred on him greater power than that possessed by any other of the familiars. Because of his position at court, his courage and his command of the soldiers, for he still held the office of constable, he was greatly feared by all.¹⁶

When the count of Gravina had been driven from court the enemies of the bishop-elect of Syracuse, who had dropped their intrigues against him while a more dangerous rival was present, took up again their old animosity and resumed their attack against him. The bishops sought to rouse the queen to take active measures against him by telling her that it was Richard Palmer who had summoned the count of Gravina to court and had se-

¹⁶ Falcand., 349-350.

cretly directed his actions. They told her that it would be very easy to get rid of him if she would only consent; that by papal letters he could be summoned to Rome to receive his consecration and that, therefore, no blame could be laid upon her for his departure, nor would it even seem to be by her advice. They also said that when he had departed he could be deprived of his position at court and after his consecration he could be ordered to return to his bishopric. To this plan the queen willingly gave her consent. Cardinal John the Neapolitan, who represented the interests of the papacy at the Sicilian court, was also interested for personal reasons in procuring the removal of the bishop-elect of Syracuse from the court and therefore gave his assistance to the bishops. As he made frequent trips between Rome and Palermo he was able to procure from the Curia the necessary authorization for this purpose.

On a prearranged day the cardinal was summoned to court. After discussing some other affairs of the Roman church he at length produced papal letters ordering all the bishops-elect of Sicily, whose consecration belonged to the Roman pontiff, to go to Rome to be consecrated. After having read these letters in the presence of the king, the queen and the whole court, he added that the pope had commanded him to supplement whatever was lacking in these decrees and that therefore he fixed a date within which the bishops-elect should be consecrated. The "elect" of Syracuse, seeing that these orders were aimed at him, at once responded that he was ready to obey the papal commands as soon as he could, but that he would not accept the time limit fixed by the cardinal, nor anything which he might add to the contents of the papal decrees.¹⁷ But when the cardinal insisted that Richard should obey the time limit which he had set, Richard feared that if he persisted in opposing the demands of the cardinal without the support of the queen he would incur the displeasure of the pope. With great shrewdness and adroitness, therefore, he gained by large gifts the support of the

¹⁷ Falcand., 350-351.

queen's new favorite and chief minister, the count of Molise, and the two men became allies. When again in the presence of the whole court the cardinal demanded that the bishop-elect of Syracuse obey the commands of the Roman Curia the count of Molise, to the surprise of all, declared that the bishop-elect was too indispensable a man to the kingdom to be permitted to leave the court, either to be consecrated, or for any other matter. Then the queen, who always followed the policy of her favorite minister, likewise, declared that she did not wish the "elect" to leave and that his consecration should be put off until a more opportune time. Thus the intrigues of his enemies came to nothing and Richard Palmer retained his position at court.¹⁸

While the affairs of the kingdom were thus neglected for private intrigues, the public treasure squandered and other things done detrimental to the dignity of the court and the privileges of the realm, many people began to regret the death of William I who had formerly considered him a cruel tyrant.¹⁹ The queen, however, by her lavish gifts was able to maintain peace in the kingdom. She freed a great number of prisoners, gave slaves their liberty, granted immunities to cities, abolished customs which seemed oppressive and gave estates and castles to many nobles. But she was especially anxious to conciliate the nobility and during the first months of her rule she created nine new counts. Among these new counts were, however, three of her own relatives. They were Bertrand, the son of Gilbert, Count of Gravina, whom she made count of Andria, Hugh of Rupe Forte (Rochefort), a cousin "lately come from France," and her half-brother Roderick, or Henry.²⁰ This half-brother of the queen, a bastard son of the king of Navarre, had come into Sicily from Spain with a large following of Spanish soldiers to seek his fortune as soon as he heard of the death of William I. As the Sicilians made fun of his name, Roderick, the

¹⁸ Falcand., 351-352.

¹⁹ Falcand., 351.

²⁰ Falcand., 354.

queen had him change it to Henry. The queen married him to one of the illegitimate daughters of King Roger II and conferred upon him the countship of Montescaglioso. This Henry was an ugly, dark, little man who knew nothing but gambling with dice and checkers and who cared for nothing except to have money to squander on these games and on persons with whom he played them. As he thus threw away the large sums given him by the queen, she soon became exasperated and ordered him to depart to his estates in Apulia.²¹ In addition to these favors granted to the nobility the queen recalled from exile and restored to their estates Roger, count of Acerra, and Roger, count of Avellino. These and other concessions secured the submission of the nobility and the peace of the kingdom.²²

With the departure of the count of Gravina and the failure to remove the bishop-elect of Syracuse from his position at court the open rivalries there subsided. Richard, count of Molise, was the most powerful of all the ministers and the queen refused him no request. Richard of Syracuse and Matthew the notary managed the office of chancellor, while the gait, Richard, now master chamberlain of the palace, and the gait, Martin, who was in charge of the collection of the revenue, although they were not familiars, assisted in the management of the affairs of the kingdom. Richard of Syracuse and Matthew the Notary were busy in pursuing their own personal ambitions. Richard was anxious to obtain the archbishopric of Palermo, while Matthew aspired to become chancellor. But the Queen Margaret, realizing the weakness of her position and perceiving that she had been used as a tool by the contending factions, determined that neither of them should have the offices for which they were striving. Distrustful of the nobility and the official class alike, seeing nothing but treachery and dishonesty in them, she longed for a strong, loyal, and capable supporter. It was out of this desire that she obtained the services of Stephen of

²¹ Falcand., 353, 354; Romoald Salern., 436.

²² Falcand., 354.

Perche, destined to play a large part in the history of the time in Sicily.

3. *Stephen of Perche Becomes Chancellor*

It had been the custom of the Norman rulers in Sicily to employ whatever able foreigner they could attract into their service. Margaret had therefore written to her uncle, Rotrou, archbishop of Rouen, to send to her assistance one of her relatives, either Robert of Neubourg, or Stephen, son of the count of Perche. In the summer of 1166 it became known at Palermo that Stephen of Perche was on his way to Sicily, having stopped to visit his nephew, the count of Gravina, in Apulia. Count Gilbert informed him of the condition of affairs at the court, and then, as summer was approaching, sent him to Sicily, which was more healthy in that season than Apulia. When Stephen arrived at Palermo the familiars of the court, the bishops, the soldiers with their constable at their head, went forth to meet him at the queen's orders and escorted him to the royal palace. Here he was received with great honor and kindness by the queen, who in the presence of all declared that his father, the count of Perche, had helped her father to acquire his kingdom from the Saracens and therefore, although Stephen was only her cousin, she would consider and treat him as if he were her brother.²³

Although Stephen had come in response to the queen's request to the archbishop of Rouen, yet what he had heard from his nephew of the state of affairs at the Sicilian court had decided him not to remain long in Sicily. When the queen found out that such was his intention, she endeavored in every way, by promises, hopes of reward and even by pleading, to change his resolution. Finally she succeeded. Thereupon all the bishops and barons were summoned to court and in their presence she appointed Stephen chancellor and ordered that all the chief business of the court should be directly referred to him. Shortly afterwards, as Stephen was a clerk, the archbishop of Salerno,

²³ Falcand., 354-355; Romoald Salern., 436.

Romoald, ordained him subdeacon. Then the canons of the cathedral of Palermo were informed that the king and queen had, in response to the request which they had often made to them, granted them permission to elect an archbishop and that they, coming to the palace, in accordance with custom, should nominate at court him whom they judged suitable for the office. The canons then, "no controversy having arisen among them about this (which rarely happened), unanimously elected the chancellor" archbishop. This election received the approval of Cardinal William of Pavia, who arrived in Palermo on his way to France, and it was afterwards accepted by the pope.²⁴

In obtaining the greatest political and ecclesiastical offices of the kingdom, Stephen thus became the most important person of the court after the queen. Sudden success always arouses animosity and jealousy. The opposition which Stephen had to face was all the greater because he was a young man, a newcomer at court and a foreigner, who had deprived two old and capable ministers and politicians of the cherished objects of their ambitions. He was thoroughly conscious of his isolation and of the danger he would have to face. He made master of his household, Odo Quarrel, canon of Chartres, who had advised him to remain in Sicily and had promised to remain with him two years until he had acquired loyal friends in Sicily, or until some of his relatives and friends in whom he could trust had come from France.

Knowing that he would have to contend with the open and secret opposition of the prelates and the official class and that the support of the nobility was uncertain, Stephen with great wisdom endeavored to obtain popular support by inaugurating a policy of reform in both the court and in the local administration of the kingdom. Nevertheless he sought, if possible, to conciliate his disappointed rivals and his leading opponents. He saw that the bishop-elect of Syracuse was the ablest of the official class at court and the one whom his elevation had disappointed and hurt most. Not only had he lost the archbishopric

²⁴ Falcand., 355-356, 358; Romoald Salern., 436.

of Palermo, but by Stephen's appointment to the chancellorship his income was diminished, for the king had long permitted him to hold during the vacancy in the chancellorship many lands and revenues belonging to that office. In compensation for these profits which he was now forced to surrender, Stephen had him given two fine manors, which the Sicilians called *casalia*, one to be held as long as he remained in the service of the court, and the other to be possessed in perpetuity by the bishops of Syracuse. But the bishop-elect soon showed how little he could forget his disappointed ambitions and how little he could forgive a successful rival.²⁵

When Gentile, bishop of Girgenti, was making a bid for popularity he had declared that among the abuses he wished to reform was that of the extortionate fees demanded by the notaries, who should be restricted to a fixed scale of fees.²⁶ These notaries belonged to the office of the chancellor. They were laymen and formed an influential class at court.²⁷ They drew up not only the royal documents, but also private papers for individuals. For such services they were paid by the persons for whose benefit the documents were drawn up. They had come to charge such exorbitant fees for these services that it had become one of the notorious abuses of the day.

Shortly after Stephen had been made chancellor some men came to the court from a remote part of Apulia seeking to have certain of their affairs settled. When this had been accomplished they offered to Peter the notary, a relative of Matthew of Aiello, who had drawn up the documents recording the decision of the case, such fees as they considered just. He refused this and demanded a much larger sum. Thereupon the Apulians brought the matter to the attention of the chancellor. Stephen, who was determined to carry through a scheme of reform, commanded one of the notaries who was present to draw up the

²⁵ Falcand., 356.

²⁶ Falcand., 343.

²⁷ Kehr, K. A., Die Urkunden der Normannisch-sicilischen Könige, 99-113.

necessary documents for the men who were able to depart that very day. When Peter the notary perceived that the men who were accustomed to importune him did not return and learned that they had procured their documents through another notary, he with some of his companions fell upon the Apulians as they were traveling homeward, beat them and, taking away from them the royal documents, broke the seals and tore them up. When the chancellor heard of this action he summoned the Apulians and Peter to court. As Peter could not deny the act the chancellor had him put in prison.

The bishop-elect of Syracuse seized the opportunity to come forward as the champion of the official class and of the family of Matthew the notary. He asserted that this sentence was against justice and reason; that perhaps it was the custom in France to render such arbitrary sentences, but it was not the custom in Sicily, where the notaries were a very important class and were not so easily condemned. The chancellor was indignant that he to whom three days before had been given without compulsion two fine estates should show himself so ungrateful, should attack him so savagely, and question his judgment in the presence of the whole court; but he concealed his chagrin and made no reply. Stephen, however, had the notary released until he could be tried in a more regular manner on the charge of not only violating the peace of the realm, but of injury to the king's majesty. After a few days at the request of the familiars the chancellor decided not to push these charges, but deprived Peter of his office of notary.²⁸ Thus in his efforts at reform Stephen of Perche incurred the hostility of Matthew the notary, and of the notaries as a class, as well as the enmity of Richard of Syracuse.

A result of this affair was that the chancellor sought to reduce the extortion of the notaries by establishing a scale of fees in accordance with which they were to be paid for the various services they were called upon to render. Then he further attempted to protect the lower classes from the persecutions of the

²⁸ Falcand., 356-357.

stratigoti and those in command of the provinces and the individual towns. In order to have justice enforced more certainly he did not permit his friends, the great officials of the court, or other powerful persons to oppress their vassals with impunity, nor did he with hypocrisy tolerate any injury to the poor. By such efforts Stephen became so popular that, as we are told, all declared him an angel sent from heaven who, having reformed the court, had brought back the golden age. As a result there flocked to the court from all parts of the realm such a crowd of men and women with complaints that there were scarcely judges enough to examine the cases and notaries enough, although their number had recently been increased, to make the necessary records.²⁹

When the people of Palermo saw how incorruptible the chancellor was, how in the administration of justice he was not swayed by influence, rewards or the favor of any one, they brought before him accusations against many apostates, Saracen converts who had abandoned Christianity and had long been protected and concealed by the eunuchs of the palace. Not one of these who was proved to be guilty did the chancellor let go unpunished. Incited by these convictions the people of Palermo dared to bring accusation against Robert of Calatabiano, the cruel governor of Castellamare.³⁰ In a great crowd they went to the chancellor and demanded that Robert be given his due punishment. Some complained that their houses, others that their vineyards, had been unjustly and forcibly taken from them. Many charged that their brothers, or other relatives, had died in prison from his continued cruel torments, while there were those who declared that at his own expense Robert had restored a mosque in Castellamare. Furthermore, he was accused of having rented at a very high price to the wine-sellers a house in

²⁹ Falcand., 357.

³⁰ In the reign of William I, Robert had been in league with the palace eunuchs and had made use of his position as governor of the strong fortress that commanded the harbor of Palermo to oppress and despoil those persons who had incurred the enmity, or incited the avarice, of the eunuchs, or of himself. Falcand., 340.

which, under his protection, they conducted a resort for Saracen debauchery and crime and in the profits of which he had a share.

At first Robert paid little attention to these accusations, believing that he would not be brought to trial. But when he saw that the money was refused which he offered to have the case dismissed and that the charges were being pressed against him in the courts, he sought the protection of the eunuchs. The eunuchs threw themselves at the feet of the king and queen and with tears begged them not to permit a man who was so useful to the kingdom and had always served most faithfully the court to be condemned. They asserted that it was not at all surprising that this tumult should be raised against him since it was certain that no one would please the populace who obeyed faithfully the orders of the court. Influenced by the eunuchs the queen first requested the chancellor, and when he refused, then commanded him not to admit the accusations against Robert, saying that the robberies and murders which he had committed had been done at the command of the gait, Peter, when he had been in favor at court, whose orders Robert did not dare disobey.

The chancellor was now placed in a great dilemma. He must either refuse to obey the queen, or be guilty of a grave act of injustice and lose his popularity with the people. He tried to chose a middle road and not displease the queen or disappoint the people. He promised the queen that he would pass over the accusations which pertained to the court and which would entail capital punishment, but would try Robert on the accusations which pertained to ecclesiastical law. If then he were found guilty he would punish him with all the severity of ecclesiastical censure. Then having assembled the familiars of the court, the bishops and other clergy, Stephen, not as chancellor, but as archbishop of Palermo, tried Robert in the presence of a large assembly of the populace, not on the charges of robbery, oppression and murder, but of rape, perjury, incest and adultery. He was found guilty and sentenced to be whipped publicly, imprisoned and have his goods forfeited to the state. But since it

was not possible to lead him around the city, preceded by the public crier, because the people crowded the narrow streets in order to hurl stones at him, it was decided that the people's expectation should be disappointed by having him led around the church instead. Although Robert was surrounded on all sides by soldiers with drawn swords, yet even then it was hardly possible to protect him from the fury of the mob. Then after a few days, as he was unwilling, or as some said, unable to pay the money which he had promised to the court he was taken to Castellamare and there placed in the very prisons in which he had formerly tortured so many unfortunates and there he miserably died.³¹

By the punishment of Robert of Calatabiano the popularity of the chancellor was increased still further among the people of Sicily and especially among the Lombards settled there, who had suffered greatly at the hands of Robert. But at the same time he also aggravated the enmity of the great officials of the court and other important persons who found their power limited and their resources diverted to the chancellor and his friends. In the hope of revenge they began to slander the chancellor, declaring that it was not right that they who had faithfully served the court and grown old in its service should be set aside for a strange boy, who had got into his hands all the great offices of the court, who set himself above every one else and wished to rule so great a kingdom by himself. They further accused the queen, who was a Spaniard, of calling this Frenchman a cousin, so that under the name of relationship she might conceal her illicit love for him. But especially did the chancellor incur the deadly hatred of the gait, Richard, and the eunuchs of the palace, whose tool Robert of Calatabiano had been, and they sought to stir up the hatred of the Saracens against him.³² Stephen, well aware of this hostility and enmity, pretended not to notice it and attempted to allay it by greater familiarity and friendliness towards his enemies and by trying

³¹ Falcand., 359-360.

³² Falcand., 360.

to gain their good will by many kindly acts, nevertheless he took every possible measure to protect himself. He appointed as master constable a loyal and devoted follower of the king, Roger of Tiro, in whom he had great confidence, in order that he might secure the support of the soldiers. Through Roger and Robert of San Giovanni, both of whom had extensive acquaintances, he was able to find out everything which was plotted against him in Palermo and to take measures for his protection.³³

Learning that Matthew the notary was sending letters by courier to his brother, the bishop of Catania, more frequently than he was accustomed, the chancellor believed that these communications had something to do with a plot against himself and contained directions to the bishop for spreading it in the region of Catania. In order that he might confirm his suspicions as to what was in the letters, Stephen sent a body of men under the command of Robert of Bellême to intercept Matthew's messengers on their return from Catania and to deprive them of their papers. Robert of Bellême bungled his task. The courier who carried the letters made his escape, while his companion was wounded in attempting to defend himself and taken prisoner. This attack on his couriers greatly increased the antagonism of Matthew the Notary against the chancellor as it proved to him that he lay under the chancellor's suspicion.³⁴

Soon afterwards Robert of Bellême sickened and died. As his hair fell out and his skin peeled off it was suspected that his death was not due to natural causes, but to poison. The suspicion was confirmed by the archbishop of Salerno, who was very learned in medicine, and by the bishop of Malta and others whom the chancellor summoned to view the remains. Then a Salernian physician, a great friend of Matthew the notary, and one who by his influence had been appointed a judge in Salerno, was suspected of the crime. This physician had requested permission of the chancellor to attend Robert of Bellême and when

³³ Falcand., 361.

³⁴ Falcand., 361.

his request had been refused he had secretly visited the sick man and given him a syrup.

When these things became known the chancellor summoned the bishop-elect of Syracuse, with Matthew, Richard, the count of Molise, the archbishop of Salerno, the other bishops and many barons, and after explaining the matter, had the suspected man brought before them. Upon being questioned the physician denied the accusation, yet from the evidence of the witnesses brought against him his testimony was proved to be untrustworthy, so that in the eyes of the council the suspicion of his guilt was greatly increased and it was determined to bring him to trial. Thereupon on the following day the council was assembled and the master justiciars summoned. Then the physician was formally accused of having murdered Robert of Belême. He answered so badly the charges brought against him that the judges were convinced of his guilt and sentenced him to forfeiture of goods and to capital punishment, but also recommended him to the mercy of the court. The physician was cast into prison, but he could not be persuaded by threats or promises to reveal the person who had instigated him to his crime.³⁵

Now while Stephen of Perche had obtained the position of chancellor and archbishop of Palermo and had acquired the most important place in the Sicilian court and had to face the enmity and jealousy of the other great personages of the court, a new intrigue was brewing in Apulia. The barons of that duchy speedily saw the weakness of character of Henry, count of Montescaglioso, the queen's half-brother, who had recently arrived in their midst. Many of them considered that here was an opportunity to overthrow the count of Molise through the instrumentality of the queen's feeble brother and thus through him greatly to increase their own fortunes and power. They easily persuaded Henry that he should drive away Richard of Mandra from court and by virtue of his relationship to the king and queen acquire the control of the government of the kingdom

³⁵ Falcand., 362-363.

himself. Thereupon equipping his Spanish followers, a part of whom had followed him to Apulia and a part had fled to him there, Henry quickly started back to Sicily, followed by many of the Apulian barons, who had instigated him to this undertaking, among whom the most important was Bohemond, count of Monopoli. While on their way they learned the startling news that Stephen of Perche had become chancellor and had supplanted the count of Molise as the most powerful minister at the court. At first they wavered in their undertaking, but then adhering to their first determination they finally arrived in Sicily.³⁶

The chancellor thus saw his power threatened in another direction. Informed doubtlessly by the count of Molise, with whom he had now an understanding, of the character of Henry, he sought not only to suppress the threatened attack of the Apulians by separating the count of Montescaglioso from them, but also to strengthen his own party by gaining Henry's support. Stephen, therefore, in the king's name ordered Count Henry, who had arrived with his followers at Termini, to come in person to Palermo, while Count Bohemond and his followers were to await at Termini further royal orders. When the count arrived at court it was easy for the chancellor by flattery and persuasion to influence him to abandon his Apulian followers and also to obtain his promise to be governed by the chancellor's advice in all matters. When the count of Montescaglioso had thus been made sure of, Count Bohemond and the other Apulian barons were permitted to come to Palermo, where they were kindly received by the chancellor. But being shown the futility of their undertaking, they returned to Apulia after a few days sojourn in Palermo. The chancellor, however, made use of this occasion to gain the faithful friendship of Count Bohemond.³⁷

Count Henry was now completely under the influence of the chancellor. So great was their intimacy that he often went to

³⁶ Falcand., 363-364.

³⁷ Falcand., 364-365.

the bath with Stephen, accompanied him each day to court and on his return spent the greater part of the day in private conversation with him. The chancellor's enemies, fearing lest by this intimacy his grip upon the government of the kingdom would become still stronger, sought to break up this friendship, and to secure the support of the count for themselves, and so use him to overthrow the chancellor. At first, however, they were unable to influence Henry directly or to stir up his jealousy against the chancellor. When they told him that he ought to have the government of the realm, he responded that he was ignorant of French, which was necessary at court, and that he did not wish to have the responsibility of such a position. Then they began to work through Henry's Spanish soldiers with whom he was very intimate and who had great influence over him. Through these measures Henry was brought to desert the chancellor and to join his enemies by whose counsels he promised to be guided.

These machinations greatly terrorized the chancellor's friends. They began to fear for their lives; for the gait, Richard, master chamberlain of the palace, had by his bribes secured the support and obedience of the greater part of the soldiers of the king and all the archers of the court. Stephen prepared for his own defense. He gave up his custom of receiving any one at any time, and established audiences at certain hours when he had all his soldiers in armor on guard. Fifty armed men were always on watch within the entrance of his house, and he sought to increase the numbers of his guard. He enlisted in his service very many foreigners who had recently come from France on their way to the Holy Land, among whom was John of Lavaradin.³⁸

4. *Stephen Deals With His Enemies*

At length the chancellor came to realize that if he wished to maintain his power he must crush his enemies. He did not dare bring the leaders to trial in Palermo on the charge of conspiracy lest by their intrigues open revolt should break out, and he did

³⁸ Falcand., 366-367.

not consider that he had sufficient force to cope with such an outbreak. He therefore persuaded the king and the queen to go to Messina to spend the winter so that, in the early spring, if it were desirable, they might cross over into Apulia. He then wrote to the count of Gravina, asking his support and urged him to come to Messina as soon as possible and with an armed force, yet not one so large as to give the impression that he had an army with him. When the court had been removed to Messina, the chancellor hoped that he would be able to rid himself of his enemies.

Before the royal party could set out for Messina a period of rainy weather set in, such as had not been seen in Sicily for a long time. The familiars of the court, who did not wish to be separated from their supporters, tried to use this as an excuse to prevent their departure. But the chancellor could not be moved. Exercising the right of royal purveyance he made preparations for the journey. He sent letters to all the towns and castles on the way, commanding that the roads be widened, the steep places leveled and that all things necessary for the royal progress be prepared according to custom. When all was ready, suddenly the rain ceased, the weather became beautiful once more, and on November 15th, 1167, the king set out with the court for Messina.³⁹

As the chancellor had removed the court from Palermo because he was afraid of the populace he sought to gain the favor of the people of Messina. A few days after the arrival of the king, representative citizens came to the chancellor with great gifts and urgently requested that there be restored to them a certain grant of immunity for their city which King Roger had formerly conferred on them and then, regretting his act, had taken away again. In order to secure their good-will the chancellor refused their gifts and without reward granted their demand. Then the people of Messina brought all sorts of accusations of misgovernment and oppression against Richard, the the stratigotus of Messina, and demanded that he be brought

³⁹ Falcand., 367.

to trial. But the chancellor considered that the stratigotus would be a valuable acquisition to his party if he could gain him to his side. He therefore tried to check the wrath of the people by deferring the matter. But the people of Messina would not be put off. Suspending their accusations against the stratigotus from the tops of poles they held them up before the palace with loud cries for justice. The queen, irritated at this noise, directed the chancellor to act upon their demands without delay. There was nothing left for Stephen to do but order the master justiciars to proceed with the trial of the stratigotus, whom they condemned and sentenced to imprisonment and the forfeiture of goods. Thus by the punishment of the stratigotus and the restoration of their privileges the chancellor became very popular with the people of Messina.⁴⁰

In the meanwhile the enemies of the chancellor had not been idle. Count Henry was made the nominal head of their party. The populace is proverbially fickle and before long many of the people of Messina were won over by Stephen's enemies. So also were many Calabrians who on the arrival of the king had flocked to Messina. Gentile, bishop of Girgenti, again became active in this conspiracy, although he had sworn to support the chancellor. The unexpected arrival of the count of Gravina, however, temporarily checked the conspirators' activities, for the count brought with him from Apulia and Terra di Lavoro a hundred picked knights of tried valor and skill in arms. But the difficulties of the chancellor's position increased. In addition to the intrigues of the members of the court a new and more powerful cause stirred up the resentment of the populace and soldiers against the chancellor. Many of his followers had lately come from France and Normandy and had nothing but contempt for the native population of the Sicilian kingdom. They gratuitously angered the Greeks and Lombards by calling them all sorts of insulting names. The conspirators attempted to make use of the irritated state of mind of the populace and had Count Henry fix a date for the murder of the chancellor

⁴⁰ Falcand., 368-369.

as he returned from court. The count, in order to secure the support of one of the judges of Messina, Roger, by name, revealed to him all the details of the plot, who at once reported it to the chancellor.⁴¹

As the time fixed for the assassination was the very next day it was necessary for the chancellor to take immediate action. After having consulted with his most intimate advisers, Gilbert, count of Gravina, Bohemond, count of Monopoli, and Roger, count of Avellino, Stephen placed all the facts before the queen and the king. The queen after some hesitation determined that the court should be summoned and her brother brought to trial. Therefore by the doorkeepers (*hostiarii*) of the court the familiars, the bishops, the counts and the other leading barons, together with the master justiciars, were assembled. All others were prohibited entrance to the palace, except a few of his own soldiers whom the chancellor brought in, for he feared lest some of the leading barons whom he knew were in the conspiracy might attempt to begin the revolt in the midst of the court. The chancellor himself wore a coat of mail under his cloak and his clerks secretly brought in swords.

When the council was seated Count Henry, as he had been instructed by the conspirators, arose and began to set forth his poverty; how he was in great straits because of his debts and how the county of Montescaglioso was not sufficient for his needs and expenses. Then he demanded that the principality of Taranto be given him, or the county in Sicily which his predecessor had formerly held. This was done with the intention that if the chancellor objected it would give him an excuse for opposing him. But instead of the chancellor the count of Gravina took up the role of accuser and charged Henry with seeking to sow discord between the king and queen and plotting the death of the chancellor. The count of Montescaglioso was not prepared to hear from the count of Gravina all his machinations exposed to the light. Falteringly he denied that he had ever conspired against the chancellor. But when Roger, the judge who

⁴¹ Falcand., 369-370.

had revealed the plot, was brought in and had given his testimony, Henry completely lost his presence of mind and called Roger a traitor and perjurer for having betrayed the secret entrusted to him. Thus he was condemned by his own words and the order was given that he should be confined to the palace.

While this meeting was being held at the palace, rioting broke out in the city. Many of the people rushed to arms while the Spanish soldiers of Count Henry barricaded themselves in his house. When this turn of events was reported at the court the chancellor showed great energy in meeting the situation. He ordered his soldiers and those of the count of Gravina to arm themselves and assemble before the palace to protect the court. Then he sent the doorkeepers of the palace throughout the city to order the citizens to lay down their arms and to cease disturbing the peace. Then by the public crier the Spaniards were ordered to cross the Faro that very day and if any were found on the morrow who had not done so they would be cast into prison. Deprived of their leader the Spaniards did not dare to disobey. When they had laid down their arms and were hurriedly crossing into Calabria the Greeks, hearing what had been done in Messina, fell upon the luckless fugitives and robbed them of all their possessions, even down to their clothes. A great part of the ejected people perished from the cold.⁴²

The arrest of the count of Montescaglioso at once broke up the conspiracy against the chancellor. Some came forward to acknowledge their guilt in order to save their lands, or to lessen their punishments. The mean-spirited Henry confessed who had been its authors. Although the chancellor now knew who were his enemies, yet he did not possess sufficient determination to follow a vigorous or decided course against them. Some of his friends advised him to adopt a policy of clemency as the only way to secure peace in the future. Others, among whom was the count of Gravina, who wanted to take vengeance on Richard of Molise for having driven him from court, said that either the chancellor should follow out the example of Roger II

⁴² Falcand., 370-373; Romoald Salern., 436-437.

in drowning, killing secretly or mutilating his enemies, or he should take no further measures against them at all. But neither of these policies commended themselves to the chancellor. He had not the foresight to see the effect of his irresolution in attacking only the most obvious of his enemies.⁴³

A few days after the arrest of Count Henry, when the counts and leading barons were assembled at court in council, young Bohemond of Tarsia arose and accused Richard, count of Molise, of participation in the conspiracy against the life of the chancellor and offered to prove his accusation by combat. Count Richard denied the charge and accepted the challenge. Then Robert, count of Caserta, accused Richard of having long usurped Mandra in Apulia and certain towns in the territory of Troia and of having held them without the knowledge of the court. To this new accusation Richard replied that the gait, Peter, when he was in power, had legally given him Mandra for a time upon condition that he pay a certain sum of money yearly to the court, while as for the places in the territory of Troia they had likewise been given him by Turgis, the chamberlain of that land. Turgis, who then happened to be present, was questioned and denied that Richard held those towns with his permission.

Then all the barons, except the familiars of the court, were ordered to sit apart in order to give judicial sentence on the charges brought against the count of Molise. Those who thus passed judgment on the count were Bohemond, count of Monopoli; Robert, count of Caserta; his son, Roger, count of Tricarico; Roger, count of Avellino, Simon, count of Sangro; Roger, count of Geraci; Roger of Tiro, the master constable; Florio of Camerota, a judge of Taranto, and Abdenago, son of Hannibal, the last two being master justiciars. The sentence of these barons was delivered by Count Bohemond. It was that Richard, count of Molise, had held Mandra with the permission of the court, having received it from the gait, Peter, before his flight. But after Peter's flight he held it secretly, not having brought it to the attention of the king as he should. Therefore

⁴³ Falcand., 373-374.

he ought not to be considered as a tenant, but as a usurper, who held it by his own authority against the consent and knowledge of the court. Likewise it was agreed that he held the other towns by his own authority and against the fidelity due the king. Therefore the barons decreed that the lands of the count of Molise should be at the mercy of the king.⁴⁴ Against this decision the count protested and declared that the sentence was false and unjust. Count Bohemond at once cut short his tirade by prohibiting him from answering in court, saying that such insults did not fall on those who judged the case, but upon the king. As the count of Molise had thereby made himself guilty of sacrilege, the archbishops and bishops who were present were ordered to give sentence according to the full severity of the law. They therefore decided that according to the statutes of the kings of Sicily Richard was not only at the mercy of the king for his lands but also for his life, having dared to call false a judgment of the court.⁴⁵ Then the count was taken in custody and imprisoned in the lofty fortress at Taormina. The chancellor now considered that sufficient punishments and examples had been made. He contemptuously ignored the bishop of Girgenti who, while these things were taking place, pretended to be kept at home by a serious illness and did not dare show his face at court.⁴⁶

Having thus humbled his enemies the chancellor was willing to allow the court to return to Palermo. Before this was done, however, Gilbert, count of Gravina, was given the county of Loritello. He demanded this as his reward for the help he had given the chancellor in maintaining supremacy. It was an unfortunate bestowal, for in Apulia were many barons and townspeople who hoped that Count Robert, the former count,¹⁷

⁴⁴ For the law, Vatican Assizes, IV, XXVI, 1, in La Lumia, I, Storia della Sicilia sotto Guglielmo il buono, 372, 382. Cf. Niese, H., Die Gesetzgebung der normannischen Dynastie in Regnum Siciliae, 72.

⁴⁵ For the law, Vatican Assizes, XVII, La Lumia, 378. Cf. Niese, 58, 66.

⁴⁶ Falcand., 374-376; Romoald Salern., 437.

¹⁷ Count Robert of Loritello had fled from the kingdom because of his rebellion in 1162 against William I and his estates had been confiscated. Siragusa, G. B., Il Regno di Guglielmo I in Sicilia, parte seconda, 45-47.

would be permitted to return and receive his estates. As the gift to Count Gilbert seemed to destroy the prospect of Count Robert's return, they consequently became the implacable enemies of the new count of Loritello. The queen decided that her brother, the count of Montescaglioso, should be given eight thousand ounces of gold and sent back to her brother in Spain. She therefore ordered that seven galleys be equipped which should convey Odo Quarrel, who was returning to France, and directed Odo to take the count under his charge. In the meanwhile Henry was imprisoned in a castle in Reggio so that the galleys might the more easily and promptly take him on board as soon as the king had set out from Messina for Palermo.⁴⁸

On 12 March, 1168, the king and the court left Messina and on the twentieth arrived in Palermo. The newly made count of Loritello returned with his soldiers to Apulia. The departure of Count Gilbert was the signal for the renewal at court of the plot against the life of the chancellor. The gait, Richard, the master chamberlain of the palace, Matthew the notary and Gentile of Girgenti with others whom the chancellor had pardoned again made plans for his assassination. Palm Sunday was the date arranged and soldiers were selected who, mingling with the crowd, should fall upon the chancellor with their swords, when the king, as was his custom, left the palace.

The conspirators likewise stirred up popular opposition against the chancellor in Palermo and in other towns. They easily persuaded the people that if Stephen of Perche remained longer in power they would be completely deprived of all their liberties. The action of John of Lavardin seemed to support them strongly in this argument. John of Lavardin, who had taken service with the chancellor, had been recently rewarded by him with the land of Matthew Bonell. Desirous of enriching himself as quickly as possible he demanded of the inhabitants of the town on his lands a relief of half of their moveable goods, claiming that this was the custom of his land. But the people, asserting the liberty of the inhabitants of the cities and towns of

⁴⁸ Falcand., 376-377; Romoald Salern., 437.

Sicily, said they were not obliged to pay any tax or tribute, but sometimes, in case of urgent necessity, to give to their lords of their own accord and free will as much as they wished; that only the Greeks and Mohammedans, who were called villains, were liable to annual dues and taxes. As John of Lavardin refused to recognize their claim the people of his towns took their case to the chancellor, who, in spite of the advice of his native-born friends, Robert of San Giovanni, and Roger of Tiro, the master constable, rejected their claim. He was influenced to do this by his French followers, who declared that, if these men obtained what they demanded, a dangerous precedent would be established which would incite many others to rebel against their lords. This affair gave the enemies of the chancellor a splendid opportunity for rousing up great hostility to him among many of the citizens and townsmen, for they spread the report that Stephen intended to make every one in Sicily pay annual taxes and dues, after the custom of France, where there were no free citizens.⁴⁹

This new plot was also disclosed to the chancellor who determined to punish now those whom he had spared before. The court was summoned and the chancellor accused the leaders of plotting again against his life. Matthew, the master notary, could make no defense and so he with many soldiers was imprisoned. The queen again showed her vacillation and would not permit the gait, Richard, who had been head of the conspiracy, to be imprisoned. With great difficulty Stephen finally obtained her consent to have Richard confined in the palace. The bishop of Girgenti secretly fled to Girgenti for the purpose of stirring up that city and the neighboring towns to revolt. But the people of Girgenti did not respond to his appeals and when the court sent a justiciar to Girgenti to arrest him they permitted him to be taken without objection. Brought back to Palermo bishop Gentile was tried at court, condemned and then imprisoned in the strong castle of San Marco in Val Demone until his misdeeds could be reported to the pope.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Falcand., 377-378.

⁵⁰ Falcand., 378-379; Romoald Salern., 437.

5. *Revolt of Messina*

The chancellor had now overthrown all his enemies and his future would have been secured had not an unforeseen accident occurred. Contrary to Stephen's orders Odo Quarrel had delayed his departure from Messina, for he could not tear himself away from the happy task of collecting tolls from the ships which passed though the straits on their way to Syria. This action of his stirred up great unpopularity against him among the people of Messina. They complained that it was not right that foreign robbers should be permitted to carry away into France the treasures of the kingdom and money obtained by oppressing the citizens. While the hatred of foreigners in general and of Odo in particular was thus increasing in Messina a quarrel arose between a portion of his followers and some Greeks. These followers of Odo while drunk happened on some Greeks who were gambling and tried to break up their game. The Greeks drove away their annoyers with blows. Highly indignant at this treatment of his men Odo sent for the stratigotus and ordered that the Greeks be arrested and brought to him. The stratigotus explained that in the highly inflamed state of public opinion this would be a very unwise thing to do. But Odo insisted and declared that an example should be made of them.

Then the stratigotus sadly proceeded to carry out his orders. He found the place where the trouble had occurred crowded with a large number of Greeks. When he began to reprimand them sharply for their action, they stoned him and forced him to flee. Then the Italians, who had become very hostile to the French on account of the tolls levied on their ships, urged the Greeks to rise up against them, asserting that the French intended to drive out the Greeks and make them masters of their towns and that the chancellor was plotting to make himself king. All kinds of rumors filled the city and the population was in such a state of excitement that the stratigotus and the judges did not dare oppose it.⁵¹

⁵¹ Falcand., 379-380.

When this condition of affairs at Messina was known at court the government acting in the names of the king and queen sent a letter to the people informing them of the condemnation and imprisonment of the bishop of Girgenti, the gait, Richard, and Matthew the notary, because of their conspiracy against the chancellor. They urged them not to be excited by false reports of malicious rumors and to cease from all disturbance.⁵²

The stratigotus summoned all the people of Messina to come together in the church to hear this letter. While they were waiting for the stratigotus to appear numerous reports began to circulate among them. Some reported that Count Gilbert had murdered the king and that without a doubt the chancellor had been made king and that it was his letter, which—called the royal letter—they had been summoned to hear read. Others asserted that it was not the chancellor, but a brother of his, Geoffrey by name, who was going to be made king and, therefore, Odo Quarrel was going to France with an immense sum of money in order to escort Geoffrey to Sicily. It was also whispered that Geoffrey was going to marry Constance, the daughter of King Roger II, in order to give legitimacy to his occupation of the throne.⁵³

In the midst of the excitement of these rumors one of the crowd, having obtained silence in order that he might speak, proposed that "they first kill Odo Quarrel and then liberate Count Henry who had always greatly loved the people of Messina." This proposal had instantaneous success. All with one accord, forgetting the purpose for which they had assembled, left the church and rushed to attack Odo's house. Unable to take the house the mob rushed down to the harbor where they found Odo's seven galleys well equipped with men and arms. These galleys they compelled to convey them across the Faro. On the advice of the chamberlain of Calabria the people of Reggio opened their gates to the Messinians and fraternized with them. Then the mob attacked the castle in which Count Henry was confined. At first the garrison of the castle beat off the at-

⁵² Falcand., 380-381.

⁵³ Falcand., 381.

tack of the mob, but seeing that they themselves were few in number and had no provisions with which to stand a siege, they agreed to negotiate, provided the Messinians would produce some official, or responsible person, on whose word they could rely. Thereupon some went back to Messina and brought to Reggio much against his will James, the hostiarius, who had been commissioned by the court to superintend the arming of Odo's fleet. The result was that the garrison surrendered the count. Escorted across the Faro Count Henry was welcomed with great rejoicing by the people of Messina who promised that they would obey him in all things and be faithful to him all his life.⁵⁴

When Count Henry arrived in Messina Odo Quarrel, who had taken refuge in the royal palace with his possessions, was made a prisoner and confined by his command in the "old castle" which was near the port. Then the Messinians, fearing lest the count should treacherously desert their cause and surrender Odo to the court in order to obtain his own pardon, demanded that Odo be put to death, for they knew that if this were done, the court would never pardon the count. Very unwillingly the count saw himself compelled to consent. The unfortunate Odo was delivered over to the mob who stripped him naked and bound him on an ass with his feet towards the head and his head towards the tail. Thus he was led through the city, in the midst of a great, clamoring crowd who came to see the sight, while insults and blows were poured upon him. When he was brought to the gate of the city, one fellow plunged a knife with all his force into Odo's brain, and in the sight of all licked the blood which adhered to the blade as an expression of his inexorable hate. Others followed his example and Odo's body was pierced with innumerable wounds and torn to pieces. His head was fixed upon a lance and for some time shown throughout the city. Finally it was thrown into the public cesspool from whence it was secretly recovered and buried. In the meanwhile the Greeks

⁵⁴ Falcand., 381-382; Romoald Salern., 437.

killed all the French who fell into their hands until Count Henry made them stop by threatening them with punishment.⁵⁵

When the mob began to come to its senses it realized that Messina had risen in revolt against its sovereign. Expecting that a royal army would come to punish them, the people of Messina started in to make every possible preparation for their defense. They barricaded the roads and seized the strong castle of Rime-tula. Then they went against Taormina to liberate Richard, count of Molise, who was imprisoned there. The town soon fell into their hands, but they were unable to take the castle, owing to the loyalty of its warden. Finally through the instrumentality of the gavarret⁵⁶ Count Richard was released and the castle surrendered to the Messinians.⁵⁷

At the news of this unexpected revolt the chancellor was much disturbed. He asked permission of the king to send an army to besiege Messina and reduce it to obedience. This request was easily and willingly granted, but a certain date was fixed by the astrologers before which the army could not set out. In the meanwhile the chancellor ordered the people of Catania not to send any provisions to Messina, nor permit the vessels of Messina to load in their port. In order that this command be carried out he directed that all the vessels of Catania be beached. By taking away from Messina all means of procuring food he hoped to reduce it to obedience through famine, since no supplies could come from elsewhere as Calabria that year was suffering from such poor crops that it hardly had sufficient food for its own use. To the help of the chancellor came the Lombards of Sicily whom the chancellor had protected and favored. They urged him to attack Messina and promised that the Lombard towns would furnish him with twenty thousand men. The chancellor informed them of the date which had been fixed for the expedi-

⁵⁵ Falcand., 382-383.

⁵⁶ Gavarret, the title of an official subordinate to the warden of a royal castle to whom belonged the care and custody of the castle and the oversight of the prisoners. Falcand., 320.

⁵⁷ Falcand., 383-384; Romoald Salern., 437.

tion to start against Messina and ordered them in the meanwhile to make the necessary arrangements for taking part in it.⁵⁸

6. *Overthrow of the Chancellor*

Now when Matthew the notary, who was imprisoned in the royal palace at Palermo, learned of what was happening in Messina he began once more to renew his intrigues. Ansaldo, the warden of the palace, who was a friend of the chancellor, was confined by sickness in the upper part of the palace, and the responsibility for guarding the palace fell upon his colleague Constantine. Matthew won over Constantine to his plot and had him make all the servants of the palace, of whom there were about four hundred, swear that on the third day from then they would kill the chancellor as he came to court and with him John of Lavardin and the count of Avellino.⁵⁹

Throughout the city of Palermo the news from Messina had excited great unrest and the population lived in expectation of an outbreak. The rougher element, ever ready to loot, was waiting to fall upon which ever party might become the object of popular outcry. They hoped that it might be that of the chancellor as it was widely reported that his house was filled with wealth. The chancellor was most uneasy and did not know what to do. Ansaldo, the warden of the palace, advised him to disregard the date fixed by the astrologers and betake himself with his soldiers to some fortified place in Sicily. There he should summon the Lombards and the others whom he knew to be faithful to him and gather as large an army as possible until the king arrived, for the longer he delayed in Palermo the less likely he was to escape the plots of his enemies. But Robert, count of Meulan, and other Frenchmen advised him to remain in Palermo, as it was not proper for the chancellor to depart without the king. The advice of these men was followed by Stephen. They were ignorant of the customs of the court and did not realize that there was no place more suited for preparing

⁵⁸ Falcand., 384.

⁵⁹ Falcand., 385.

ambushes than the palace itself where no one was permitted to protect himself with arms or soldiers.

When the day set for the assassination arrived the servants of the palace, expecting that the chancellor would, according to his custom, arrive early at the place, took their position all armed before the door so that when they had admitted him with a few of his followers they could exclude the soldiers who composed his escort. But Odo, the master of the stables, seeing what was being arranged, hurried to the chancellor and informed him of his danger. Stephen at once abandoned his intention of going to court. Keeping with him only a few of his friends he dismissed the soldiers and doorkeepers of the palace who were waiting before his house to escort him to court. When Constantine learned that the chancellor was not coming to the palace he realized that his plot had been betrayed. He therefore sent some of the servants of the palace, who were well known to the citizens, through the different quarters of the city and ordered them to summon the people to arms and to besiege the house of the chancellor on the ground that he had prepared ships and was on the point of fleeing with the royal treasure.⁶⁰

The city was at once thrown into an uproar. Bands of armed men made their appearance. One Herveus Floridus "had made himself an object of suspicion to the people of the palace, not so much because of his intimacy with the chancellor, as for his much talking of himself." As he rode along by the palace with Roger, count of Avelino, he was seen by the partisans of the gait, Richard, and other armed men who had congregated there. A rush was made at him and he was dragged from his horse and killed. The count was pursued out of the gate of the city into the plain which was adjacent to the palace. He too was on the point of being killed, when the king, wanting to know what was the meaning of the tumult, came to the windows of the palace and, seeing the plight of the count, ordered the assailants with many threats to surrender the count to him safe and sound. But, as even then the fury of the mob could scarcely be restrained,

⁶⁰ Falcand., 385-386.

the king, in order to save the count, gave orders that he be confined in Castellamare.

In the meanwhile a large mob had collected about the chancellor's house. The archers of the court who were accustomed never to be the last in any sedition which gave promise of booty joined likewise in the riot. Simon of Poitou had command of the defense of the chancellor's residence. The suddenness with which the mob assembled had excluded however the greater part of his forces. When the chancellor saw the danger of the situation he betook himself with many nobles from whom he would not be separated through the cathedral which adjoined his house into the belfry.⁶¹

In the meanwhile Roger of Tiro, the master constable, had come up with his soldiers to drive away the infuriated crowd. But the mob, which was constantly increasing, seeing that it outnumbered his troops, turned on the constable and his men and put them to flight. Then began from all sides a general attack on the chancellor's residence which was valiantly defended. In the midst of the confusion Matthew the notary and the gait, Richard, were released from their confinement and resumed their offices in default of any protest. They then commanded the royal trumpeters to sound their trumpets before Stephen's house. When this well-known sound of war was heard, all the citizens, both Christians and Saracens, believed that the attack was made by order of the king and with loud outcry many more came up to join in the assault. But the besiegers finding they were unable to force an entrance into the house, sought to penetrate it by way of the cathedral. When the door of that edifice had been burned down and the assailants had got a free access there, the defenders resisted none the less bravely until at length, unable to hold out against such numbers, they were forced to abandon the house and retire also to the belfry. Streaming into the chancellor's house through the cathedral, the besiegers captured some of the defenders, whom they sent as prisoners to the warden of the palace, and made terms with the others whom they could

⁶¹ Falcand., 386-387.

not overpower. They then began to attack the belfry, but as many were seriously wounded and all were tired, the besiegers decided to put off their attack until the next day.⁶²

In the meanwhile Matthew of Aiello and the other leaders of the conspiracy began to fear that after all the uprising might not end with their success. The king, urged by his mother, wanted to leave the palace and stop the attack on the chancellor's house; but he was dissuaded by Matthew the notary and other conspirators who said that it was not safe for him to expose himself in such a storm of arrows and stones. They foresaw that if the affair was allowed to drag on for another day the populace might grow tired, or become repentant, and thus give up the attack when they found out that it had been made contrary to the king's will. They therefore entered into negotiations with the chancellor for the purpose of persuading him to leave the realm, if they gave him an opportunity to go freely to any land he wished.

The chancellor was greatly frightened by the outbreak and ill-advised as usual by his French followers. He completely exaggerated the gravity of the situation and the importance of the attack upon him. He therefore let himself be forced into accepting the terms offered him by his enemies. These were that he with a few followers, chosen by himself, should be transported on an armed galley to Syria; that the count of Meulan and the other Frenchmen should be furnished with ships to return to their own country; that the nobles of the kingdom of Sicily who had taken refuge with him in the belfry should not be deprived of their lands or their liberty; and that the soldiers who had been in his pay should be given the choice of either remaining at the court or of going wherever they pleased. Richard, the bishop-elect of Syracuse, Matthew the notary, the gait, Richard, Romoald, archbishop of Salerno, and John, bishop of Malta, swore to see that these conditions were observed.

Thereupon that night a galley was prepared and early in the morning the chancellor, with a few of his companions, left the

⁶² Falcand., 387-388.

belfry of the cathedral and went to the French port. As he was about to embark the canons of the cathedral who were present asked him to absolve them from the oath of fidelity. Stephen had not intended to give up the archbishopric of Palermo. He therefore remained silent. Then the familiars of the court began to urge and to threaten that he should renounce his election and thus permit the canons to choose a new archbishop. Seeing the armed multitude grumbling, the soldiers making a disturbance and the barons angry because he would not give up his hope of returning to Sicily, Stephen again lost his courage and renounced his election. Then going on board he set sail, accompanied by the bishop of Malta as his protector. But the galley was found to be so unseaworthy that he was forced to put ashore at Licata, near Girgenti. Here he purchased a ship from some Genoese with which he arrived safely in Syria.⁶³ He then went to Jerusalem and not long afterwards died there.⁶⁴

Thus the power of Stephen of Perche was overthrown in the summer of 1168. The movement in Messina had been a riot which of its own momentum had become a revolt. The populace of Palermo, already keyed up to a high pitch by the intrigues of the chancellor's enemies, at once seized the first opportunity to follow the example of Messina and break out into riot. The chancellor became the object of their attack only because as he was reputed the wealthiest man, he offered the greatest opportunity for booty. His enemies found themselves with hardly an effort, and probably to their great surprise, in the position which they had sought so long and so hard to obtain.

The leaders of the clergy and of the official class now gained control of the government. The queen mother, although permitted to keep the title of regent, was henceforth shorn of all power in the administration. The common bond among the victors had been their opposition to Stephen of Perche. Hence all who had suffered at his hands were to be restored to their power and position. Thus Gentile, the bishop of Girgenti, was re-

⁶³ Falcand., 387-389; Romoald Salern., 437.

⁶⁴ Romoald Salern., 437.

leased from his prison and became again a familiar of the court. Richard, count of Molise, and Henry, count of Montescaglioso, returned to Palermo followed by many people of Messina. A reorganization of the court occurred and the control of the government was entrusted to a commission of ten familiars apparently coequal in authority. They were Richard Palmer, bishop-elect of Syracuse; Gentile, bishop of Girgenti; Romoald, archbishop of Palermo; John, bishop of Malta; Roger, count of Geraci; Richard, count of Molise; Henry, count of Montescaglioso; Matthew the notary, the gait, Richard, and Walter of the Mill, dean of Girgenti and tutor of the king.⁶⁵

7. *The Ascendancy of Walter of the Mill*

In this commission of familiars which now undertook the government of the kingdom the leader was not Matthew the notary or Richard of Syracuse. A new, strong, dominating personality began to assert itself. It was that of the Englishman Walter of the Mill, dean of Girgenti, canon of Palermo and the king's tutor. The archbishopric of Palermo was the goal of the ambition of most of the ecclesiastics of Sicily, but especially of Richard Palmer. Nevertheless in spite of his relatively subordinate place in the church, Walter of the Mill succeeded in securing the support of the people of Palermo and the consent of the court and had himself elected to that archbishopric. While Walter was rapidly becoming the most important man in the government, the queen and the supporters of Stephen of Perche, for there were still some of them, attempted to fight the governing clique and to open up a way for Stephen's return. They declared that Stephen had been compelled to resign his archbishopric under compulsion and therefore his resignation was not valid. The queen sent a large sum of gold to Rome to influence the pope to accept this view and to declare the election of Walter uncanonical. Walter on the other hand made use of the same means to procure his confirmation. The pope decided in favor

⁶⁵ Falcand., 389.

of Walter and granted him permission to be consecrated by his own suffragans, while the pallium was conferred on him by cardinal John the Neapolitan.⁶⁶

Having obtained the archbishopric of Palermo, the most important ecclesiastical position in the Sicilian kingdom, it was not long before Walter of the Mill overthrew the commission of familiars and made himself the principal minister of the crown. It was but natural that this should happen. So ambitious a man could not tolerate rivalry. The commission embraced so many varied and jealous elements that it soon became impossible for it to work in harmony, while the traditions and precedents at the court were in favor of a single, powerful minister.

The new archbishop promptly brought about a reorganization of the court. Reserving the principal power in his own hands, he continued as familiars under him only Gentile of Girgenti and Matthew the notary, who in December, 1169, appears as vice-chancellor.⁶⁷ Every obstacle in the way of his success was removed by the arrival of the news of the death of Stephen of Perche in Syria, which so discouraged the queen that she abandoned her efforts to recover her power. "So the greatest power in the kingdom and the control of all affairs was in the hands of Walter, archbishop of Palermo, who was on such intimate terms with the king that he did not seem to rule the court so much as he did the king."⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Falcand., 390; Romoald Salern., 437; Pirro, R., *Italia sacra*, ed. H. Mongitore, I, 104.

⁶⁷ Garufi, *Documenti inediti dell' epoca normanna in Sicilia*, 115.

⁶⁸ Falcand., 390-391.

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