

The Chronicle of Richard of S. Germano, 1189-1207 (translation by Graham Loud, 2005)

Here begins the Chronicle of everything which happened in the Kingdom of Sicily or anywhere else in the world from the time of King William II up until the time of Frederick II, Emperor of the Romans and always Augustus, King of Jerusalem and Sicily, recorded by the notary Richard of S. Germano. ...

Since I am a native son of this kingdom, he who reads this should not hold me in contempt if I write at length about what happened in the kingdom, or about any of those things which I shall say relating to it, even if they do not appear useful; every single thing helps, and it is most valuable to God that the memory of man has everything [recorded]. Let us begin with the time when King William II of Sicily, of distinguished memory, died, in the second year of the pontificate of Pope Clement. I have included in this chronicle certain preparatory matter in praise of this king, and which deal with issues affecting the kingdom and which are worthy of record. In the name of Him who once opened the mouth of Zacharias, let Him open my mouth to speak, and break down the bond on my tongue, in the hope that every single event shall be put in its proper place.

At this time that most Christian king, to whom nobody in the world was equal, held the government of this kingdom. The prince was exalted among all other princes by his great power, his distinguished descent, his good fortune and mighty strength, notable for his intelligence and for the extent of his riches. He was the flower of kings, the life and strength of his people, who relieved the poverty of miserable pilgrims, and protected those who toiled. During his lifetime he was a paragon upholding the ideals of law and justice; everyone in his kingdom was content with their lot, and everywhere was safe, for the traveller did not fear the robber's ambush, nor the sailor injury from pirates by sea. But, although He through whom kings reign and princes rule had enriched and endowed him with so many and great things and had made him glorious among all the kings on earth, He had however treated him ingloriously in one respect, in that He had punished him through lack of offspring. He had closed the womb of his consort, so that she could not conceive or give birth to a son, and thus he could leave no issue to survive him on this earth. Thinking on the good fortune which he had received from the Lord during his lifetime, but that his fate had been made miserable because he had no children, the king, as a wise man, therefore wisely decided to placate the Lord, that He make fruitful she who had been sterile, and thus decided to use his wealth to build a house in Monreale in honour of His glorious Virgin mother, which he enriched, adorned and augmented. He gave it properties, had it decorated with gold, enriched it with mosaics and precious stones of various colours, to such an extent that by the end of his life no king or prince anywhere on earth had built the like in our time.

This king had two particular *familiars*, who were powerful and influential in his government, Archbishop Walter of Palermo and Matthew, the chancellor of his kingdom, who directed his whole court by their advice and wisdom. All the magnates of the kingdom clung obediently to these two like the firmest columns, since through them they could more easily gain whatever they sought from the royal court. It was in fact on the chancellor's advice that the king had the said church of

the Virgin built within the diocese of Palermo and secured an archbishop for it from the Roman church. The archbishop realised that this had been done on the chancellor's prompting, for the two hated each other and, while they appeared [to be] friendly in public, they freely criticised each other (through envy) in private. For some time he suffered this injury to him and the downgrading of his see patiently. Finally, after a long time had elapsed during which he was unable to change what had been done about the church, he craftily did the following. There was an aunt of the king in the palace at Palermo whom the king, on the archbishop's advice, gave in marriage to King Henry of the Germans, the son of Frederick, Emperor of the Romans. And it was also on his urging that all the counts of the kingdom took an oath on the king's orders that if this same king should happen to die without children, then they would then become the subjects of this same aunt and her husband the said King of Germany.

(The year 1189) In due course it happened that this same king, who will be remembered down the ages, so pleasing was he to the Lord, died childless in the month of December. ¹ His death was rightly lamented by all native sons of his kingdom.

After the death of this king, great dispute and violence arose and continued between the kingdom's counts, as the reader will discover from what follows in this book. For none of them was willing to be equal; they all started to fight among themselves to become the greatest and to aspire to the rule of the kingdom, and forgetting the oath they had sworn, some of them strove to set it aside.

It happened that the chancellor and his associates joined this group to prevent the archbishop's party prevailing. Count Tancred of Lecce was summoned to Palermo, and with the agreement of the Roman Curia was then crowned king by the chancellor.

(1190) This Tancred was the illegitimate son of Duke Roger. ² The latter's father, Roger, was the first to have the name of king in the Kingdom of Sicily, and because of this, and since he had a claim to be descended from the royal kin, Tancred was chosen as king from the other counts of the kingdom. After his accession he worked manfully to guard the kingdom's frontiers in peace and to subject rebels and opponents to his rule. First of all he forced five Saracen kinglets, who had fled to the mountains from fear of the Christians, to return, albeit unwillingly, from these mountains to Palermo. Then he used the royal wealth and for a long time did not hesitate to break open the public treasury, so that he might convert the other counts and barons of the kingdom to fealty and obedience to him. He sent a large sum in gold to Count Richard of Acerra, to whose sister he was married and from whom he had a numerous progeny, which the latter could spend to force all the rebels from the Principate and the Terra di Lavoro to be obedient to the king's rule...

¹ Actually 18th November 1189.

² Duke Roger of Apulia, the eldest son of King Roger, predeceased his father on 2nd May 1148.