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**Medieval Sicilian lyric poetry:
Poets at the courts of Roger II and Frederick II**

by

Karla Mallette

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of PhD
Graduate Department of Medieval Studies
University of Toronto

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Medieval Sicilian Lyric Poetry: Poets at the Courts of Roger II and Frederick II

Submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of PhD, 1998

Karla Mallette

Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Toronto

During the twelfth century, a group of poets at the Norman court in Sicily composed traditional Arabic panegyrics in praise of the kingdom's Christian monarchs. Less than a century later, at the court of Frederick II, Sicilian poets wrote the first lyric love poetry in an Italian vernacular. This study traces the literary history of Sicily during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and engages the modern scholarly formulation known as the "Arabic theory" (the notion that Arabic literature had a formative influence on early Romance vernacular lyric), in order to refine the methodology used to read and compare Arabic and Romance love lyrics written in the colonial states of southern Europe during the Middle Ages.

The introductory chapter, "Remembering Norman Sicily," sketches the fundamental issues that will inform subsequent readings of Sicilian literature: the changing relation between Sicilian culture and the mainland cultures of the Mediterranean; and the evolution of Muslim-Christian cultural communication within Sicily. "Al-Aṭrābanishī and the Court Poets of the Norman Era" uses a close reading of a poem written in praise of Roger II and his Sicily to explore the Siculo-Norman cultural project. "Vernacular Culture in Sicily, ss. XII-XIII" parallels the revolutionary vernacular poetic traditions emerging in the Arabic- and Romance-speaking worlds, and examines the innovative use of the Sicilian vernaculars on coinage produced in twelfth and thirteenth century Sicily.

"Giacomo da Lentini and Siculo-Italian Poetics" considers the realignment of Sicilian culture that occurred when Sicily began to be viewed as an extension of the European mainland, and Sicilian culture was reconceived as a variant of Latinate Christianity. The concluding chapter, "The 'Arabic Theory' and the Poetries of Sicily," uses the methodological interrogations of the foregoing chapters to comment on the traditional scholarly approach to conceptualizing and categorizing literary influence in the Muslim/Christian colonial states of southern Europe during the Middle Ages.

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FOR MICHAEL

In this burning country
words have to be shade.

Yehuda Amichai

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Poets at the courts of Roger II and Frederick II**

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All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted. However, when translations in European languages of Arabic texts exist, I have cited the page numbers where the passages I quote are translated in those editions.

Brief passages from Arabic primary works are cited in transliteration. The texts of lengthier quotations are given in appendices following each chapter.

I have used the following system to transliterate from the Arabic:

ء	'	ط	t
ب	b	ظ	z
ت	t	ع	'
ث	th	غ	gh
ج	j	ف	f
ح	<u>h</u>	ق	q
خ	kh	ك	k
د	d	ل	l
ذ	dh	م	m
ر	r	ن	n
ز	z	ه	h
س	s	و	w
ش	sh	ي	y
ص	<u>s</u>	آ	-a (If followed by a vowel, transliterated -at.)
ض	<u>d</u>		

Where necessary for comprehension, the declensional ending of nouns and adjectives has been given in superscript, thus: *al-fâ'il^u* (definite); *fâ'il^{un}* (indefinite).

Remembering Norman Sicily

Ho detto che mi pare di conoscere il paese anche nei suoi silenzi.

Leonardo Sciascia

Occhio di capra, p. 13

Ibn Jubayr Visits Sicily

In the year 1184, Ibn Jubayr, an Andalusian returning from a pilgrimage to Mecca, was shipwrecked in Sicily. At the time he arrived, the Normans, who had seized control of the island from the Muslims, had been in power for little more than 100 years. The great Norman king Roger II had ruled and died; his son William I had ruled and died. The current Sicilian monarch, William II, welcomed the travellers to Sicily in person, and paid the landing fee for the Muslims on Ibn Jubayr's ship. In his account of his visit to Sicily, which forms one chapter of the magnificent description of his travels through the Mediterranean, Ibn Jubayr will describe William and his court in some detail: he considers William's admiration of Muslim learning and tolerance of Islamic religious practice at his court to be among the wonders of Sicily. He will also take pains to illustrate through interviews and anecdotes the daily lives of Muslim Sicilians, attempting to produce a coherent portrait of a Christian land where Muslim visitors are honored and Arabic learning and culture are embraced in the royal court, but Muslim citizens endure economic and religious injustices, and many of them dream of escape to a better land.

In the introductory section of his chapter on Sicily, Ibn Jubayr lays out most programmatically the paradox of Muslim-Christian cohabitation on the island. Following this introductory section, he will describe his travels through Sicily by relating events in the order in which they occur. But in the introductory section his organization is thematic, rather than chronological. His goal is to convey to his readers the central difficulties presented by Sicily: the Muslim colonizers have been colonized; and the culture that is emerging here – inchoate and unsettled though it is – resists categorization. Ibn Jubayr is a sensitive observer and a skillful narrator, and he finds an evocative way to represent the ambiguity of Sicilian culture.

Sicily's approach is announced to the travelers on board Ibn Jubayr's ship by a glimpse of one of the island's best-known landmarks: Etna, *jabal al-nâr* – the "Mountain of Fire" – in Arabic (*Rihla Ibn Jubayr*, 293; *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, 335). Soon after they catch sight of the volcano, a storm arises and blows the travellers into the strait between the Italian mainland and the island, where they are forced to abandon ship. Ibn Jubayr heightens the drama of the passage by telling us that the seas in the strait of Messina seethe around the ship like boiling water, and he compares the force of the waters to the "bursting of the dam," *al-'arim al-sayl* (Ar. 293, Eng. 336). He refers to the dam of Ma'rib, which collapsed under the pressure of flood waters with such destructive effect that it constituted an epoch-making event for the Arab tribes, and is remembered in the Qur'an (34:16). After this stirring episode, he describes his landing on Sicily; we see William II pay the landing fees of the Muslim travelers on board Ibn Jubayr's ship, we visit his court, we meet Muslim businessmen and merchants. Concluding this introductory section, Ibn Jubayr lists some of the natural wonders of Sicily, and he returns to Mt. Etna. In describing Etna, he repeats a metaphor he had used while describing the shipwreck. Here are the culminating sentences of his description:

As for the lofty mountain on the island, known as the Mountain of Fire, it also possesses a remarkable characteristic in that fire comes forth from it in some years

like the bursting of the dam. It does not pass by anything which it does not burn until it ends up at the sea, and rides upon its surface, until it is submerged . . .
[emphasis added]

Arabic text, 301 (see Appendix p. 18, Ibn Jubayr #1); English tr., 343-344.

The image of the dam of Ma'rib recurs: the eruption of the Mountain of Fire is like the waters bursting through the dam. The words used in the shipwreck scene and in this passage are identical, and are the same words used in the Qur'an to refer to this event. The repetition of the reference brackets the introductory section, and sets it off from the chronological description of Ibn Jubayr's travels that will follow. They leave in the reader's mind a sense of awesome and antagonistic natural forces, encouraging us to see Sicily as a theater of remarkable phenomena.

Ibn Jubayr's intent, in this introductory section, is clearly to describe what is most strange and disturbing in the Sicilian situation. His ship, on arriving at the port of Messina after the harrowing shipwreck, had been greeted by William II, who had himself paid the landing fee for all the Muslims on board the ship. This detail constitutes – after the first glimpse of Etna, and the seething storm – the first of the marvels of Sicily not connected with natural phenomena, and in telling of it, Ibn Jubayr emphasizes his wonder: we were informed of a marvelous thing, he states (*wa-min al-'ajabi 'alâ mâ ukhbiranâ bihi*; Ar. 295, Eng. 337), as he prepares to relate this first vignette regarding the Norman king. He will go on to talk with some wonder about the court of William II, the "Orientalist" Christian monarch, whom Ibn Jubayr commends for his learning and in particular for his admiration of Muslim culture and his promotion of Muslim men of learning at his court. William speaks Arabic: he has an *'alâma* (an Arabic royal title used on coinage, in architectural inscriptions, in the heading of official documents); he retains Muslim physicians and astrologers (Ar. 298, Eng. 341). His description of William's court culminates with the famous anecdote of the earthquake, when the palace rang with the sound of William's servants – many of them secret Muslims – calling on Allah, in the moment of crisis, for preservation. William, unperturbed, said only:

"Let each of you call upon the God to whom you are subject; let that give him peace."

Arabic text, 299 (see the Appendix p. 18, Ibn Jubayr #2); English tr., 341

The opposition of fire and water in the descriptions of Etna and of the shipwreck provides the reader with a neat characterization of the two populations who are forced into an unnatural promiscuity by the conditions of cohabitation in Sicily. Ibn Jubayr consistently describes Christian tolerance of Muslim Sicilians in general, and individual Christians' kindness to him and his fellow-travelers, in tones of wonder – just as he describes the marvel of the Mountain of Fire. On the other hand, he will dwell on the suffering of Muslim Sicilians, talking in particular about their anxiety regarding their future. Alongside the marvels of Sicily, alongside Etna and the splendors of William's court, he will rehearse the details of Muslim-Christian cohabitation, attempting to understand what Sicily is and what it will become, what will be the fate of Muslim Sicilians. The images of the fires of Etna and of the sea that bracket this introductory section may be read as a metaphor for the two populations, as different as fire and water. But if we parallel the sea boiling and seething "like the bursting of the dam," and the fire rushing forth from Etna, in turn, "like the bursting of the dam," we can also feel the intensity of Ibn Jubayr's anxiety: his fear of the shifting balance of power, and his anxiety that the proper distance between the two populations is not maintained, on this difficult and remarkable island where fire and water morph into each other.

Ibn Jubayr's characterization, however, reveals another level of complexity on deeper examination. We have seen that Muslim culture is respected and patronized by the most powerful citizen of Sicily. Yet the two instances of open toleration of individual Muslims by William II that Ibn Jubayr sketches come only in response to calamity: a tempest provokes the king's payment of the landing fees for the shipwrecked Muslims, and an earthquake inspires his statement on religious tolerance. On the one hand, William admires Muslim culture, and promotes it at his court; on the other, it takes a natural

disaster to draw from him simple acts of charity and tolerance toward individual Muslims. This interpretive knot – the balancing of tolerance and repression, the opposition of Muslim culture and Muslim citizens – forms the center of Ibn Jubayr's assessment of Sicily. The celebration of Muslim culture witnessed by Ibn Jubayr constituted, essentially, the flaunting of a trophy culture. By promoting Muslim culture at his court, the Sicilian monarch expressed a gratifying recognition of the accomplishments of the Muslim world, but he also advertised the fact that, in Sicily, those accomplishments had come under the control of Christians. The Muslims who had colonized Sicily had treasured its beauty and its riches: with the Norman conquest, they had lost a prized possession. The Muslim Sicilians' struggle for cultural and economic survival which Ibn Jubayr describes is as intricate and brutal as the battle of the elements he evokes in his descriptions of storms and volcanoes. And Christian possession of Muslim culture may have looked to the visitor as unnatural and disturbing as fire bursting forth like water.

When the Normans occupied Sicily, along with the natural riches of the island, they had taken possession of its cultural riches, its bureaucratic and cultural institutions. A hybrid culture emerged after the first century of Norman occupation, one that used Arabic literary and architectural conventions to celebrate a kingdom ruled by a Christian monarch; under the Normans, Sicilian court poets wrote in Arabic. A century later – during the reign of Frederick II, grandson of Roger II and King of Sicily from 1197 until 1250 – Sicilians wrote the first substantial body of lyric love poetry in an Italian vernacular. It will be my purpose in this study to sketch the background and develop the necessary vocabulary in order to characterize and evaluate the literary culture of Sicily during this period. Like fire morphing into water, the language of culture in Sicily underwent a rapid and radical transformation between the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries; in the readings that follow, I will trace the history of that strange and marvellous literary phenomenon.

Sicilian literary history, ss. XII-XIII

In order to approach the literary history of Sicily during the Norman period and its aftermath, it is necessary first to sketch an outline of the historical events that shaped cultural developments during this period. When the first Norman invaders stormed Sicily in 1038, the Muslims had ruled the island for roughly 200 years. The earliest Muslim military activity on the island which was more than an act of piracy, which was executed with the intent to colonize, had occurred in 827. At that time, Sicily was a Greek colony. The Greco-Sicilian government was not strong enough to resist the Muslim invasion: three years after the first Muslim attack, in 830, Palermo fell to the invaders, and in 878 the Muslims took Syracuse, the last significant Christian stronghold on the island.

The years of Muslim domination on the island were turbulent, as the colony reacted, first, to the upheavals that rocked the greater Muslim world during this period, and later to internal struggles. In 947 the Kalbite dynasty took control of Sicily, increasing its cultural and political independence from the North African centers of power. Despite continuing domestic unrest, the next century was the most peaceful and prosperous in Muslim Sicily's brief history, and constituted the colony's cultural "golden age."

The Norman invasion of Sicily, unlike the Muslim invasion that had taken place two centuries earlier, was a lengthy affair. The first assault, undertaken in 1038 by a contingent of Normans, Lombards, and Greeks, had little appreciable effect on the Muslim state. Robert Guiscard arrived in Sicily in 1046, to try again. In 1060 his brother, Roger, joined him for another attempt. Finally in 1072 the Norman army, led by Robert and Roger, took Palermo.

Roger ruled as Count of Sicily until his death in 1101. His son, Roger II, became Count of Sicily in 1105, at the age of 9; he would be King of Sicily from 1130 until 1154.

and would be remembered as the greatest of the Norman monarchs of Sicily. His son William I, known as "William the Bad," ruled from 1154 until 1166; and his grandson William II, or "William the Good," was king from 1166 until 1189. On the second William's death the triumphant years of Norman rule in Sicily came to an end, as squabbles over succession brought unrest and civil war to the kingdom.

Cultural development in Sicily during the period of Norman domination built on and transformed the culture of Muslim Sicily. When the Muslim colonizers occupied Sicily, they found a Greek colony in cultural decadence. Umberto Rizzitano notes that the relative barbarity of cultural life on the island during the first century of Muslim rule can be attributed, in part, to this fact: Siculo-Arabic culture would have developed more rapidly if it had encountered and interacted with a more vibrant culture on the island (Rizzitano, 258-259). When the Normans arrived, however, they found a colony just entering its cultural prime. Rather than – as contemporary Norman conquerors did in Britain – attempt to supplant indigenous cultural practices and idioms with their own, the Normans adopted and adapted the cultural practices they found in Sicily. They took over many of the bureaucratic institutions established by Muslim Sicilians. They used Arabic, alongside Greek and Latin, as an "official" bureaucratic and cultural language. They hired Arabic artists and artisans to decorate their monumental architectural projects. And they supported the panegyrists who wrote Arabic poetry in their praise.

The culture of Norman Sicily was at once triumphant and ephemeral: the death of William II in 1189 would in effect bring an end to the Norman Sicilian experiment, the unique cultural hybrid that developed during the years of Norman rule. With the ascent of Frederick II to the Sicilian throne, Sicilian culture underwent a substantial transformation. Frederick articulated much stronger political, economic, and cultural ties between Sicily and the European continent. He also maintained connections with the Arabic-speaking world; however, he did not support Arabic cultural production within Sicily, and during his reign, the last Muslim communities in Sicily were uprooted and

transplanted to a "ghetto city" on the Italian mainland. Most importantly, it was under Frederick's rule, and probably with his active support, that a group of poets wrote the first lyric love poetry in an Italian vernacular. The Kingdom of Sicily was re-invented as a Latinate Christian territory.

Literary historians writing about the Italian vernacular poetry produced in Sicily during the thirteenth century typically see that body of work in a continuum with the Occitan lyrics written by the troubadours of eleventh- and twelfth-century Provence. Indeed, the Siculo-Italian poets were intimately acquainted with the troubadours' poetry, and interrogation and explication of their relation to the Romance vernacular traditions of the European mainland was a crucial part of their poetic project. However, that poetic project cannot be described through reference to the Occitan poets alone. The Siculo-Italian poets wrote *toward* the Romance vernacular traditions of the European mainland; but they wrote *from* a land where cultural identity was more problematic. In the readings of Sicilian poetry that follow, I will place the Siculo-Italian poets' work in a continuum with the works of the Siculo-Arabic poets who wrote at the court of Frederick's grandfather. I will not argue that this is a *more* accurate way to read the Siculo-Italians' poetry. Rather, these readings will provide vital information which is necessary to supplement the traditional versions of Sicilian literary history: they will demonstrate that approaching the Siculo-Italians' works without understanding the immediate cultural history to which they respond may produce less accurate, and even impoverished, readings of their works.

The Two Sicilies

During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and indeed throughout the Middle Ages and into the modern period, Sicily's cultural identity has been marked by a radical

sense of fluidity. Placed in a desirable location – at the very center of the Mediterranean – and possessed of tantalizing resources, the island naturally attracted colonizers over the centuries. The passing of so many different nations through the territory enriched it culturally, but also clouded its cultural identity. The Sicilian ruling regime during the tenth and eleventh centuries spoke Arabic, and its cultural, religious, political, and economic affiliations lay with the capitals of the greater Muslim world. During the thirteenth century, Sicilian rulers began to view Sicily as a cultural, political, and economic extension of the European mainland. The aspect of this transformation most relevant to the present study is the linguistic shift that accompanied it: the languages of Sicilian culture during the thirteenth century were Latin and Italian; official court documents were no longer regularly produced in Arabic or Greek.

The fluidity of Sicilian cultural identity during this period was conditioned and magnified by a simple physical fact: Sicily is an island. It could be perceived to function as an extension of any of the mainland states that colonized it, and did not indisputably and immutably belong to any one of those states. In a study on the language and history of Sicily, the scholar Alberto Varvaro discusses the difficulty of defining Sicilian cultural identity, and ties the ephemerality of its cultural affiliations to the relentless succession of colonizers that arrived on the island, reimagining its place on the map in light of their own nations' colonizing efforts:

Insularity has indeed entirely different consequences in a Mediterranean perceived as *mare nostrum* and in a Mediterranean made treacherous by pirates, when the primary ties with the mainland unite Messina to the Italian peninsula or when on the other hand they link Trapani and Mazara with Tunisia.

Varvaro, 18

Sicily's position in relation to the diverse homelands of the peoples who conquered it, in relation to the Muslim and Christian colonizing states of the Mediterranean, responded to the political exigencies and realities of the moment. Cultural identification could be transformed into cultural rivalry; repudiation could become emulation. Again, *Iḥsān*

ʿAbbās, writing a history of Muslim Sicily, stresses its insularity, its distance from the mainland states that colonized it, and the desirability of its geographical position, in determining the discontinuity of its cultural identity:

The most important element in the formation of the Sicilian cultural identity is the fact that Sicily is an island in the ocean, and that, by virtue of its mediate position, it became a crossroads in which travelers gathered, and where armies bivouacked.

ʿAbbās, 305

ʿAbbās points to the discontinuity in leadership produced by waves of colonization as a cause for the absence of a firm cultural identity. While Muslims controlled Sicily, the Sicilians began to make headway toward establishing such an identity, he states; and had the Muslim state endured, there might have emerged a people "who would have perceived themselves to be a Sicilian nation" (ʿAbbās, 305).

The ambiguity of Sicily's cultural ties must be acknowledged when reading its poetry, which can seem at times so unambiguously aligned with cultural production on the European mainland, or in the Muslim capitals of North Africa and the Middle East. The readings undertaken in this study will focus on the articulation of cultural affiliations in Sicilian poetry written during the Norman and Norman/Hohenstaufen eras. The goal of these readings will be two-fold: first, to sketch the mechanism of the cultural shift that occurred during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; and second, to track elements of both continuity and discontinuity in the Sicilian poetry written during this period.

The cultural experiment undertaken in Sicily during the twelfth century was based on a simple, but radical, proposition. The Normans, unlike the other peoples who colonized the island during the Middle Ages (and, indeed, during Antiquity and during the modern period) did not perceive it as an extension of a mainland state. Rather than dismantle the culture they found and replace it with a colonial version of their own culture, the Normans adapted indigenous cultural elements to create a unique cultural hybrid. Arabic, Greek, and Latin cultural conventions were used in the construction of monumental works conceived to advertise the splendor of the Normans' Mediterranean

state. This experiment proved successful, but short-lived. When the Siculo-Norman dynasty fell, and Frederick II took the throne, Sicily would again be perceived and promoted as an extension of a mainland civilization: for the first time in its history, Sicilian culture would function as an expression of the Latinate Christianity of the European mainland. The readings of Sicilian poetry that follow will focus on exemplary poetic works from the Norman and Norman/Hohenstaufen eras. Al-Atrābanishī wrote a delicate and delightful description of a royal park in the possession of Roger II. Giacomo da Lentini was the best-known of the poets associated with Frederick II; he produced a love poem which has been described as a "manifesto" of Siculo-Italian poetics, in which he interrogates his relation to the new Romance vernacular love lyric tradition. Focusing on these two poems, and making reference to other works produced by contemporary poets, I will outline and evaluate the Sicilian poets' articulation of their affiliation with the poetic conventions of the Arabic and Latinate traditions. My goal will be to illuminate the stages by which the shift in Sicilian cultural allegiance, from the cultural independence of the Norman state to the intimate, but dynamic, connection to Latinate Christianity during the era of Frederick II, was effected.

It should be noted, however, that the cultural discontinuity between these two eras was balanced by a parallel thread of continuity. Thus, while Sicilian poetry underwent a radical linguistic transformation, at the same time certain tendencies and attitudes endured. In reading al-Atrābanishī's and Giacomo's works I will underscore their distance from each other; but I will also highlight the similarities between their respective position in relation to the greater poetic traditions to which they respond. Al-Atrābanishī and Giacomo wrote from a state whose relationship to established poetic traditions was ambiguous: they wrote from an island that had no indisputable and immutable affiliation with any single mainland cultural tradition. Thus, both poets wrote works that were largely conventionalizing, but embodied a fundamental difference from literary convention. The most important difference between these two poets and the Arabic and

Italian cultural traditions to which they respond coincides with the most important continuity between the two poets' works: their focus on the *duality* of the Sicilian population. Like Ibn Jubayr, with his vivid and violent depictions of the fire and water that circle the island of Sicily, al-Atrâbanishî and Giacomo acknowledge the Muslim/Christian duality of the Sicilian population, and thus of Sicilian culture. Their residence in a state where Muslims and Christians cohabit under the rule of a Christian monarch – though the nature of that cohabitation changed radically between the two poets' lifetimes – remains for both of them the most important Sicilian difference, the most important cultural factor distinguishing them from poets writing in other parts of the Arabic and Latinate worlds.

The scholar Erich Auerbach wrote one of the most compelling and persuasive narratives of western literary development between the fall of the Roman Empire and the rise of the vernacular literatures during the High Middle Ages. He describes the competition between a single, pan-European, Latin literary tradition and a multitude of national literatures based on local spoken languages, and the subsequent disintegration of that unifying Latin tradition. I will use a re-evaluation of Auerbach's narrative of western literary history to place the Sicilian literary tradition in the context of trends emerging on the European mainland: a close reading of certain texts, produced both in Sicily and elsewhere, suggests that their authors may have conceived those works in relation not to a single, monolithic, Latin literary heritage, identified with the literary monuments of the past, but rather in competition with a multitude of contemporary literary tongues. Thus while the basic outline of Auerbach's account of the transformation of the literatures of Europe during the High Middle Ages remains intact, these readings trace a development that differs from Auerbach's narrative in one crucial way: they witness the emergence of new literary traditions not solely through agonistic struggle with a single "Other," but also in a complex competition with a multiplicity of "others."

For some time, western literary historians have struggled with the question of Arabic influence on the earliest lyric love poetry written in the Romance vernaculars.¹ The literary history of Sicily can help to revitalize thinking about the "Arabic theory" by offering a fresh perspective on its fundamental propositions and on the methodologies used to research, think about, and discuss those propositions. Scholars attempting to shed light on the thorny question of Arabic literary influence on Romance vernacular poetry have added significantly to our understanding of the conditions in which the Romance poetic tradition emerged. However, their work has not led to greater consensus regarding the central question it seeks to answer: *whether* such influence occurred. The question may never be answered; indeed, it may serve literary historians better if it stands unanswered, an enigma designed not to be solved but to provoke cyclical periods of speculation. Nevertheless, our ability to engage such an enigma benefits from a periodic re-evaluation and adjustment, in light of new evidence, or relevant changes in larger cultural attitudes. Thus, for instance, scholars struggling with the evidence, and with other scholars' resistance to their conclusions regarding the evidence, have called at times for a new attitude toward research in this area, one less concerned with a scientific notion of proof. In this passage, Henri Pèrès attempts to shift the focus of his inquiry toward an analysis that might be termed *genealogical* rather than empirical:

What does one ask of the Andalusian thesis? tangible proofs, concrete facts, demonstrations by formulas: $a = b$; to be more precise, phrases, verses or strophes from troubadour works translated indisputably from the Arabic, word for word. Are material traces, then, the only resource to consult in examining a question of influence? Ought one not to admit that ideas radiate, that literary trends – which are paralleled here by elements of artistic and more properly *lyric* culture – are capable of circulating and spreading? Is it impossible to believe that there are matters which escape the control of reason and printed documentation?

Pèrès, 122

¹For a concise, informative, and lively synopsis of the history of scholarship on the "Arabic theory," see Maria Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*, pp. 79-84.

This statement, taken from an article published in 1947, documents an exasperation with the consuming focus on philological and manuscript evidence that defined research and speculation on the "Arabic theory" during the first half of this century. In more recent years, Maria Rosa Menocal has published a substantial body of scholarship evaluating the way that "Arabic theorists" and their critics approach the poetry they study and conceive their discipline. She calls for "a more realistic definition of influence (one that does not trivialize it by making it mean copying or rob it of other possible complexities)" (*The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*, 85). Using more sophisticated methodologies of reading, she argues, scholars will be able to perceive and respond to the evidence of some level of cultural contact and communication between Muslim and Christian populations in southern Europe in more sophisticated ways:

it would be more reasonable to assume something other than parallel development when one observes the appearance of quite similar and distinctive features in two schools of lyric poetry, one arising in the wake of the other, in two regions near each other and with no lack of communication, indeed with all sorts of traffic, between them. Significant, too, is the cultural prestige one of the two regions possessed in the eyes of the other. In fact, most of the refutations of the influence of Hispano-Arabic poetry on that of the Provençal troubadours derive their validity from the basic assumption of the unreasonableness of such a proposition, an assumption that is itself strongly governed and shaped by ideology. Once such a proposition is discarded and the hypothesis adopted that such influence is plausible, the force of the refutation is deflected. What is at stake is hardly whether William sat down and copied out some Arabic poetry, any more than it would be when we talk about an Ovidian influence on William [*i.e.*, William IX of Aquitaine, the "first troubadour"]. Rather, the question is whether an Andalusian factor was a significant part of his cultural background.

The Arabic Role, 85-86

By focusing attention on the contemporary cultural attitudes that impact scholarship on the "Arabic theory," Menocal has made a certain kind of disingenuousness much less tenable for scholars working in this area, and has challenged them to a more dynamic engagement with both the greater issues and the finer details of their discipline.

Scholars working with the "Arabic theory" have typically concentrated their research on the poetry written in al-Andalus and in Provence: it was in al-Andalus that a new poetic form, which integrated refrains in the local Romance vernacular, was invented; and it was in Provence that the first Romance vernacular lyric love poetry was created. Sicily, the other Muslim/Christian borderland of southern Europe, has been of less interest to scholars concerned with establishing poetic primacy – with determining who invented what, and under the influence of whom. If the focus of the inquiry is shifted, however, the significance of the Sicilian poetic experiments will stand in greater relief. Scholarship on the relations between Arabic and Romance vernacular poetry in medieval Europe can benefit from an approach geared to evaluate not primacy, but rather the nuances of genetic relations. By focusing on the phenomenon of cultures "reading" and reacting to each other, we will be able to reach a better understanding of those cultures' understanding of each other. The Sicilian poets of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries reacted explicitly to the poetic traditions of the Arabic and Latinate world. Thus, the poets at Roger's court wrote panegyrics that followed the conventions established for Arabic panegyric poetry, and the poets at Frederick's court produced poems imitating the love lyrics of the Occitan troubadours. At the same time, however, they asserted their difference from the mainland poets whose relation to literary convention was less problematic. Awareness of and response to the other Sicilian population constituted a crucial element of this "Sicilian difference," as each population perceived in their ready access to the other population both dangers and advantages. The readings of Sicilian poetry that follow will trace the tension between danger and desirability in perceptions of the other Sicilian population, and will identify in the evolution of this tension one of the central problems with which Sicilian men of culture grappled during this period.

During the Norman period, Latin writers began to refer to the Kingdom of Sicily as "The Two Sicilies," because its territory encompassed both the island and the southern tip of the Italian mainland. I have adopted this term to refer to the duality of the Sicilian

population during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries – or, more precisely, to cultural perceptions and representations of the duality of the Sicilian population.

Conceptualizations of the "two Sicilies" within Sicily did not remain stable during this period. Perceptions of Sicilian duality, of the other Sicilian population, of the relations and the balance of power between the two populations changed radically between, for instance, the era of Count Roger and of Roger II, between Roger II's rule and William II's, between the end of the Norman era and the death of Frederick II; and representations of Sicilian duality produced by contemporary Muslim and Christian observers may be strikingly different in certain ways. By the time the Siculo-Italian poets began to write, probably during the 1230s, the duality of the Sicilian population had become less a reality than a memory. A fresh and a useful perspective on the Sicilian poetry of Frederick's era may be gained by asking not how Sicilian poets viewed their relation to the Occitan poetry of Provence – how they remembered the troubadours – but rather how they remembered the more immediate cultural history of the state from which they wrote, how they remembered Norman Sicily. Both Sicilians and non-Sicilians recognized the remarkable character of Sicilian culture during the twelfth century, its essential and radical duality. What did thirteenth-century Sicilians remember of Norman Sicily; and how did they use their memories in constructing a new, Latinate Sicilian culture?

The modern Sicilian writer Leonardo Sciascia, discussing the remarkable cultural history of his homeland, writes: "I feel like I know the land even in its silences" (quoted above, page 1). The "memories" of Norman Sicily that can be traced in Siculo-Italian poetry do not necessarily look like snapshots or citations. They are not records of a detailed knowledge of another state or another time. Rather, they are responses to a history and a tradition, motivated by a desire to use the past in a way that will serve the present. Addressing, again, the question of literary influence, Maria Rosa Menocal writes: "It is thus important to shun the notion that influence by one culture on another is in any way dependent on accurate, or even particularly well detailed, information" (*The Arabic*

Role in Medieval Literary History, 44). One culture may make fruitful use of misreadings of another culture; or it may use an incomplete or skewed version of its own past as a touchstone for a new vision of its own present and future. Sciascia points out that the period of Muslim occupation in Sicily is vital to his knowledge of his land, although he knows very little about it. In much the same way, the state's recent history, with all its ambiguities and all its lacunae, was a crucial point of departure for some of the early Siculo-Italian poets, although the cultural traditions of that state were very distant from the European, Romance-vernacular literary tradition toward which they wrote.

ابن جبير

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ليذكر كلّ أحد منكم معبوده ومن يدين به؛ تسكيناً لهم

٢

وأما الجبل الشمخ الذي بالجزيرة، المعروف بجبل النار، فشأنه أيضاً عجيب، وذلك أن
ناراً يخرج منه في بعض السنين كالسيل العرم، فلا تمرّ بشيء إلاّ أحرقته حتى تنتهي إلى
البحر فتركب تَبَجّه على صفحه حتى تغوص فيه

The Norman Idea of Sicily

Scholarly debate regarding the nature of cultural life in Norman Sicily has been vexed by two factors in particular which make it difficult even to frame appropriate questions, let alone hazard answers to those questions. First, there is no abundance of extant evidence in any one field to compel a specialist – a literary historian or an art historian – to focus sustained attention on the period. The Normans were remarkably productive in certain respects; for instance, they created a substantial amount of monumental architecture, much of which has survived until the modern era. But their Sicilian dynasty was also remarkably short-lived, and its dissipation brought an abrupt end to the cultural project they initiated. Because there is no critical mass of evidence in any one field to attract a specialist, those who have studied and written about the cultural history of the Norman kingdom have largely been dynastic historians rather than cultural historians, and their interest in cultural matters has been tangential. And secondly, the cultural affiliations of the works that were produced in Norman Sicily were of notoriously ambiguous origin. Arabic, Byzantine, and Latin traditions co-existed in Sicily during the

brief period of Norman domination. The hybrid that resulted is difficult to read, and fits only very awkwardly into known categories. Literary historians in particular who take on the project of reading the works of Norman Sicily face additional challenges: they may be disturbed by the subject matter of much of the poetry, and by the absence of masterpieces among the works that have been preserved. Although scholars of Arabic literary history are accustomed to reading panegyric, which is an important poetic genre in the Arabic-speaking world, those trained in and accustomed to the lyric practices of Western Europe do not generally react with enthusiasm to the panegyrics of medieval Arabic poets; and the court poetry of Norman Sicily that has been preserved consists largely of works written in praise of the Norman monarchs. The presence of a poetic genius might soften literary historians' view of Norman Sicily. But after Ibn Hamdīs – who left Sicily in 1078/79 – there are no great masters among the Sicilian poets.

The cultural or literary historian approaching Norman Sicily must take into account all these difficulties, because they can impact our reading of the works that were produced at the Norman court. What did it mean to produce a creative work in an environment like Sicily during the twelfth century, when the artist was called upon to celebrate the cultural identity of a state which had recently undergone a violent political upheaval? What was the nature of the relation between political power and artistic creation in Norman Sicily: what expectations did the ruling regime have in regard to Sicilian artists, and how did artists respond to those expectations? And in order to address these issues, the scholar must pose fundamental questions regarding the nature of the state that the Normans formed in Sicily: how did the Norman rulers perceive the cultural realities of their state, and how did they imagine its potential; and what was the relation between that Norman idea of Sicily and Sicilian cultural reality?

Simply stated, the Normans – like the Arabs, the Greeks, and the Romans before them – did not make a state *ex vuoto* in Sicily. Their courtly culture was pieced together in response to indigenous resources and to the cultural ideals of their era. It was not

meant to be representational of indigenous Sicilian culture; or rather, it was not a realistic representation of indigenous culture. Like all political art, Norman court culture was to some extent utopian and prescriptive. It reflected Sicily's past and present, drawing on the culture of the nations that had been in power on the island and remained demographically significant components of the Sicilian population. And it embodied a hubristic conception of Sicily's future, which, because the future would in fact be very different from the Norman imagining of it, may easily be overlooked by modern observers. The Norman court was engaged in producing and elaborating an idea of Sicily under the rule of Norman kingship, and Sicilian culture was both the subject and the end product of their work.

The reading that follows focuses on a panegyric written by a poet known as al-Aṭṛābanishī describing one of Roger II's famous pleasure gardens, and draws on supplementary examinations and considerations of contemporary works, both poetic and non-literary, produced in Sicily and in other parts of the Mediterranean. My goal in these readings is nothing so ambitious as a definition of the cultural life of Norman Sicily. Instead, I hope to begin a project that is a bit like the Normans' own, drawing on a number of intellectual traditions in order to piece together a methodology for reading and characterizing Norman cultural life. In his tribute to Roger's garden, al-Aṭṛābanishī constructs a portrait of the Norman Kingdom of Sicily that draws on Arabic and Islamic poetic conventions; and in his consistent use of dual nouns when describing the garden, he pays tribute to one of the most unique characteristics of that kingdom: the cohabitation of Muslims and Christians within it, and the use of Arabic cultural institutions and idioms to celebrate and advertise the Christian monarch of a Christian kingdom. The reading that follows looks at al-Aṭṛābanishī's poem from a multiplicity of perspectives, to forge a vocabulary capable of addressing the complexity and the multiplicity of the poem itself.

Favara

During the Norman era, Palermo was surrounded by a circuit of pleasure gardens and hunting and fishing preserves. The splendor of these gardens was described by a number of visitors to the island, who were struck by the opulence and beauty of the gardens and the palaces in them, and by the luxuries of the life enjoyed there by the king and his court. These gardens were probably expansions and improvements of the grounds established by Siculo-Muslim rulers who had made Palermo their capital. Amari speculates that Favara, which during the Norman era was a fishing preserve, was on the site of a garden made by Ibn Ja'far, a Kalbite emir who ruled Sicily 998-1019 (*Musulmani di Sicilia*, vol. 3, 872-873). One characteristic in particular is noteworthy in the descriptions that I will cite of the gardens of Palermo and of Favara: they all focus on the management of water as a central feature in the conceptualization and the maintenance of the gardens.

In addition to Favara, two of the most important surviving architectural monuments of the Norman era use water as a primary design element. La Zisa, built by William I (and probably finished during the reign of William II), is fronted by a square mirror of water; in the midst of this pool is a pavilion from which the viewer can look out over the soothing surface of the water, and at the façade of the palace. The Cuba, which dates to the reign of William II, is constructed on an island surrounded by a large pool of water. Both of these buildings use water as an interior design element as well.¹ In Palermo – the capital city of an island-kingdom, itself an ocean port – water served as a natural medium for adorning architectural works built to celebrate the ruling regime and the kingdom itself. And in the management of a garden, and particularly one which

¹In a recent study, Hans-Rudolf Meier points out that the use of water as an interior design element – common in the Muslim world, but not found in Europe after the Roman Empire – is illustrative of the Norman tendency to conceive the palace in a close relation with the surrounding garden, and to use the imperial palace/garden complex as a metaphorical expression of a "paradisiacal" ideal: the seat of the Sicilian King is conceived as an earthly paradise (*Die normannischen Königspaläste in Palermo*, 176).

includes a fishing preserve, of course, it is the most important resource to be considered; the name Favara – which comes from the Arabic *fawwâra*, meaning natural fresh-water spring – presumably indicates the existence of a spring that made it possible to construct such a facility there. In order to read the use of water in the monuments of the Norman era, however, and in order to read the references to water in literary accounts of Favara in particular, it is necessary to understand the range of significance water could carry, particularly for a Muslim audience: the use of water not merely as a technical necessity, but as a primary design element cultivated for its soothing beauty and its symbolic potency, is a trait more typical of Muslim architecture and gardens than of the gardens and architecture of northern Europe.

In this passage Jonas Lehrman characterizes the part that water played in the medieval Muslim garden (and continues to do, in many parts of the Muslim world):

Water was rich in symbolism. It was a source of life, and in a harsh landscape refreshed both body and spirit. To the Muslim, the water that maintained his city represented both its material economy and spiritual force; at the personal level, its fluidity and purity made it an image of the soul. . . . Throughout most of the Islamic world, water remains scarce; but in every garden and courtyard it is unmistakably the focus of attention, a profound satisfaction, and a supreme delight. (Lehrman, 36, 39)

In the Bedouin culture of the desert, water was both vital and scarce. Perhaps as a result, it came to be associated with generosity: by lingering on the theme of abundant water in his description of Favara, al-Aṭrābanishī probably meant to celebrate Roger's generosity (a motif repeated by other contemporary panegyrists). Water, too, is associated with ritual purity, in recognition of its use in the ablutions required of Muslims before prayer. Finally, it plays a crucial role in the Qur'anic descriptions of the gardens of paradise, an association that I will return to later in discussing al-Aṭrābanishī's poem. An understanding of the vital importance of water in the medieval Muslim garden, and the voluptuous pleasure that observers took in it, is of fundamental importance in reading the descriptions of gardens quoted below: by drawing a close connection between the

magnificence of the garden and the power of the reigning monarch, these writers associate the king with the good qualities symbolized by the abundant water that nourishes his gardens.

Ibn Jubayr and al-Idrîsî do not describe Favara in particular, but they enumerate the gardens of Palermo among the city's riches. In the geography which he produced at the court of Roger II – one of the most important geographic works of the Middle Ages – al-Idrîsî describes the gardens of Palermo:

Within [the city] are many gardens and wondrous parks and canals of coursing fresh water brought to the city from the mountains that encircle it.

Arabic text, 23 (see Appendix, p. 72, al-Idrîsî #1); Italian tr., 27

It is unclear whether his description of the gardens and parks "within the city" includes the royal pleasure gardens, which were located just outside the city proper. This passing reference is of interest, however, for two reasons: al-Idrîsî connects the gardens of Palermo with the presence of fresh water; and he cites the gardens as evidence of the city's richness. His reference to Palermo's gardens in this passage is much more ideologically charged:

How many are the towers [*lit.* "look-outs, high points"] of which he may boast that he strengthened their walls: and how many are the superb points which he has made loftier and even more exalted;² he has made their enclosures into flowering and fertile gardens . . .

Arabic text, 4 (see Appendix, p. 72, al-Idrîsî #2); Italian tr., 3

The difference in tone between the first and second passages cited above can be attributed to a simple cause: the first phrase is taken from al-Idrîsî's description of Palermo. The second comes from the dedicatory introduction, in which his primary purpose is to praise Roger, under whose commission he is working. Roger, in his telling, has effected a kind of renaissance in Palermo, and he asserts that the monarch is personally responsible for the flourishing of the city's gardens during the post-Roger period.

² In the interest of coherence, I have taken considerable liberty with this phrase. Its literal meaning is approximately: "how many are the excellences which he has endeavored to make rise their moons and has illuminated their (celestial or terrestrial) regions."

Ibn Jubayr's description of the gardens around Palermo is often quoted by historians describing the splendor of Norman Sicily. During Ibn Jubayr's visit, William II was in power, and he is the monarch alluded to in this passage:

His palaces are arranged [around Palermo] like necklaces around the throats of shapely women, and he moves among [Palermo's] gardens and squares, [passing] from sport to amusement . . .

Arabic text, 305 (see Appendix, p. 72); English tr., 348

Here, again, the gardens are celebrated both for their own beauty, and as an illustration of the character of the monarch who takes his pleasure in them. The delicate and memorable image that Ibn Jubayr uses to describe them suggests a profound admiration for them: they are a sign of the good life that rich Sicily can provide. Benjamin of Tudela, a Jewish traveler, visited Sicily late in the twelfth century,³ and he too identifies the gardens of the city with its monarch:

[William's palace] contains all sorts of fruit trees as also a great spring surrounded by a wall and a reservoir called al-Behira, in which abundance of fish are preserved. The king's vessels are ornamented with silver and gold and ever ready for the amusement of himself and his women.

Benjamin of Tudela, 160-161

Amari identifies "al-Behira" with Favara and assumes that it is at Favara that the king entertains his women with his ornamented vessels (*Musulmani di Sicilia*, vol. 3, 872).

Again, for Benjamin the gardens are a sign of almost magical opulence; again, he identifies them so closely with William that they stand as illustrations of the monarch's character.

The identification of Palermo's gardens with Palermo's ruler is made most clear in this description of Favara, from Romualdo Salernitano's *Chronicon*, in which he describes the parks and sings the praises of Roger II:

Et ne tanto viro aquarum et terre delicie tempore ullo deessent, in loco, qui Fabara dicitur, terra multa fossa pariter et effossa, pulcrum fecit bivarium, in quo pisces diversorum generum de variis regionibus adductos iussit inmitti. Fecit etiam iuxta

³ It is thought that Benjamin of Tudela travelled ca. 1165-1173, though he may have started out as early as 1159. Since he visited Sicily and Italy during the later stages of his journey, the "William" he names would be William II. As far as I am aware, however, no one has established with any degree of certainty the date of his visit to Sicily.

ipsum bivarium, pulcrum satis et speciosum edificari palatium. Quosdam autem montes et nemora, que sunt circa Panormum, muro fecit lapideo circumcludi et parcum deliciosum satis et amenum diversis arboribus insitum et plantatum construi iussit, et in eo damas capreeolos porcos silvestres iussit includi. Fecit et in hoc parco palatium ad quo aquam de fonte lucidissimo per conductus subterraneos iussit adduci.

Sic vir sapiens et discretus predictis deliciis, prout temporis expetebat qualitas, utebatur; nam in hyeme et quadragesimali tempore pro copia piscium in Fabare palatio morabatur; in estate vero apud parcum estivi caloris temperabat incendium, et animum diversis curis et sollicitudinis fatagatum, venationis usu mediocri quodammodo relevabat.

Romualdo Salernitano, 232-233

Lest so great a man lack in the delights of water and of land in any season, in the place that is called Favara, having dug and excavated the land, he made a lovely pond for game-fish, and he ordered fish of all kinds, brought from different regions, to be placed in it. He also had a palace, very delightful and beautiful, built near this pond. He had the mountains and the woods which are around Palermo enclosed with a wall of stone, and he ordered the construction of a lovely and pleasing park, planted with different trees; and he ordered there to be put in it deer, and roebucks, and wild boars. He made a palace in this park; and he commanded that water be brought to it, by subterranean passages, from a very clear spring.

It was the custom of this man – wise and discerning in the aforementioned pleasures – to use this park as the quality of the season demanded: for in the winter and during Lent he stayed in the palace at Favara, for the sake of the abundance of fish; but in the summer he weathered the oppression of summer heat at the park, and relieved his spirit of the fatigue of many cares and worries by hunting, in moderation.

Here the themes that I have been highlighting in the descriptions of the parks of Norman Palermo are brought together. The delight in the waters of Roger's parks is illustrated by Romualdo's enthusiasm for the *pulchrum bivarium* ("lovely pond for game-fish"), and more vividly by his characterization of the water brought to Roger's parks, *de fonte lucidissimo* ("from a very clear spring"). Most striking however is his characterization of Roger as designer and creator of the parks. Each of the descriptions cited here link the system of parks to the figure of the king, and (except in the case of al-Idrîsî) make specific reference to the king's use of them. Description of Sicily's natural riches was a *topos* common to many accounts of the island. The characterizations of Palermo's parks cited

above could have been used by their authors to illustrate that *topos*, and inserted into passages praising Sicily's natural resources; but they are used instead to give us information regarding the king's character and his manipulation of the island's natural resources.

It is true, of course, that the garden is not produced by nature, but created through the intelligent cultivation of nature. The passages cited above represent the gardens of Palermo as products of volition, and of the monarch's volition in particular: that is, they describe the gardens as if they were texts, and cast the monarchs as the authors of those texts. The gardens of Palermo, as royal possessions and sometime home to the king (and it makes little difference, in these accounts, whether that king was Roger or William), were essentially an extension of the royal court. Because of their connection with the monarch it is only natural that they be used (as the court was) for polemical ends, for the purpose of articulating and propagating a desired image. In their depictions of the royal gardens as artifacts produced under the supervision of the king, the authors cited above sketch in outline an idea of Sicily: Sicily is rich in natural resources and in beauty. It is ruled by a monarch as refined as he is powerful, whose intelligent manipulation of the land magnifies its natural richness. When we admire the gardens of Palermo, we admire the character of the king and the effectiveness of the Norman administration as well as the beauty and richness of Sicily.

The characterization of Palermo's parks as text and the Norman monarchs as their author is striking for the same reason that al-Idrīsī's suggestion that Roger effected a renaissance in Palermo is striking: both assertions presuppose the existence of a Siculo-Norman cultural ideal. A leader cannot inaugurate a new era in the cultural life of a city unless he is able to formulate and express some idea of what that new era entails (though his idea may be unrealistic, and may never be realized); nor could Roger's garden be construed as a work of art that could provide information regarding his character, unless both his character and his cultivation of the Sicilian terrain were coherent articulations of

an idea. Al-Atrābanishī's poem, like the descriptions of Favara quoted above, is a text based on a text: a poem made to celebrate and advertise the idea of Sicily that the royal garden embodied.

"Favara "

Oh Favara of the two seas! you have gathered together desires
[in you] life is pleasant, [your] view is majestic

Your waters are divided into nine streams
how lovely their division into two courses!

At the convergence of your two seas, a battlefield of love
and upon your two bays, desire encamps

By God, the sea of the two palm-trees, and what the sea
surrounding it contains
is the greatest of all places

It is as if the water [of the streams], where they flow together,
in its clarity
were melted pearls, and the land were dusky skin

5

And as if the branches of the gardens stretched out
to gaze on the billowing waters, and smile

The fish swim in the clarity of her water
and the birds of her gardens sing

The oranges of the island when they blossom
are like fire blazing in branches of chrysolite

The lemons are like the yellow [complexion] of a lover
who, having spent the night in the torment of distance, laments

And the two palm trees like two lovers who choose
as protection from the enemy, a castle well-fortified
against them

10

Or alarm clings to them, and they draw themselves up
to frighten suspicion out of the one who suspects them

Oh two palms of the two seas of Palermo, may you always drink
of the sustaining rain, and may it not be cut off

May you take pleasure in the passage of time, and may it bestow
upon you
all desires, and may events [be so gentle as to] lull you to sleep

By God, may [your] shade protect the people of love
for by the safety of your shade, love is shielded

This account of an eyewitness is not to be doubted: rather
hearsay accounts are deluded embellishments

15

Arabic text: *A Biographical Dictionary of Sicilian Learned Men and Poets*,
54-55 (see Appendix, p. 72)

A reading of the vocabulary of al-Aṭrābanishī's poem

The foregoing is a translation of al-Aṭrābanishī's poem in its entirety, as it was preserved in the anthology of 'Imād al-Dīn.⁴ Because the two hemistiches of the first line, as we have them, do not rhyme – as is customary in the opening line of a traditional Arabic poem – it is almost certain that this passage represents a section from a longer poem. The poem celebrates Favara, Roger II's garden and fishing preserve. It does not name Roger II, but as we will see, 'Imād al-Dīn's introduction to the poem makes the association with Roger clear. Although the description of Favara draws on the language and imagery of love poetry and addresses its object in the second person, the poet does not position himself as a lover and Sicily as his beloved as a westerner might expect. And although he

⁴ For other translations of the poem, see Amari, *Storia dei musulmani di Sicilia*, vol. 3, 778-780; Gabrieli, "Ibn Hamdis," 26-27; Corrao, 164-167.

describes a garden, he does not strictly adhere to the conventions of Arabic garden-poetry. Al-Atrâbanishî's poem is a celebratory description, an articulation and amplification, of a monument associated with the court of Roger II. In the reading of the poem that follows I will examine its vocabulary and point out how it differs from traditional Arabic garden poetry, and from another body of medieval Arabic panegyric poetry, in order to explore al-Atrâbanishî's interpretation of Roger's kingdom, and his response to his position as a court poet. Al-Atrâbanishî's poem is a "manifesto" of Norman Sicily, and does not express the passion of an individual poet, but rather celebrates ideas about Sicily's cultural situation and cultural potential that were current at the royal court.

There are a handful of words which the poet repeats in the course of this brief passage, and an examination of this vocabulary will help us to approach al-Atrâbanishî's description of Favara. The words used most often have to do with water; following is a list of the water vocabulary used in the poem:

v. 1	<i>al-bahrayni</i>	the two seas
v. 2	<i>miyâhuki</i>	your waters
	<i>jadâwila</i>	streams
v. 3	<i>bahrayki</i>	your two seas
	<i>khalîjayki</i>	your two bays
v. 4	<i>bahr</i>	sea (occurs two times in this verse)
v. 5	<i>mâ'a</i>	water
v. 6	<i>al-miyâhi</i>	waters
v. 7	<i>miyâhihâ</i>	her waters
v. 12	<i>bahray</i>	(of the) two seas

I discussed above the importance of water in medieval Muslim gardens. An understanding of the association of water not only with sustenance, but also with sensual pleasure, helps the reader to appreciate the voluptuousness of al-Atrâbanishî's description of Favara. The insistence on water – words that name bodies of water occur nine times in the first seven verses of the description, according to my inevitably imprecise tally⁵ – gives the poem a

⁵ For instance, it is difficult to determine whether a category as vague as "water-words" ought to include an item like the word *jarayânu* in v. 2, which signifies *flowing* in general. However I consider the point that

seductive and lulling rhythm. The heavy sensualism of the water-imagery prepares the reader for the poet's subsequent evocation of the island's luxurious shade, and his wish that the two palm trees may be lulled to sleep. Furthermore, the identification of water with generosity suggests to the reader that the park should be read as a symbol of the generosity of the monarch under whose protection it flourishes.

It is the duality of al-Atrābanishī's water-images, however, that is finally most striking, a duality that is echoed in the poet's descriptions of the two palm trees. In the opening line of the selection we possess, the poet invokes the park with the words "Oh Favara of the two seas!" He will refer to the two seas again in v. 3 and v. 12, and will name the "two bays" of Favara in v. 3. The two palms appear in vv. 4, 10, and 11, and are linked specifically to the two seas in vv. 4 and 11. The image of the doubled garden, and the doubled *sea* in particular, may have recalled to the mind of a Muslim reader *sūra* 55 of the Qur'an (*al-Rahmān*), in which the garden of paradise is described in similar, doubled terms. The passage promises believers two gardens containing all possible delights, including fruits two by two, and two springs (55:46-52); it mentions besides these two gardens an additional two gardens (55:62), which in turn contain two springs (55:66). Earlier in this *sūra*, a reference is made to *two seas* created by the Lord, using the same word that appears in the opening verse of al-Atrābanishī's description of Favara and is repeated in vv. 3 and 12, *bahrayni* (55:19). Like the Qur'an, al-Atrābanishī describes a garden that stands as a symbol of the magnificence and the magnanimousness of its lord and creator. And the poet imitates the Qur'an's use of dual nouns, in order to double the splendor of the garden, and magnify its lord's power.

Scholars puzzled by al-Atrābanishī's reference to the "two seas" of Palermo have speculated that there may have been, originally, two game-fish ponds within the park, or that the poet intended with this dual noun to make reference to another park as well as

there is a preponderance of nouns related to water to have been adequately established, without dwelling overmuch on such technicalities.

Favara.⁶ It seems more appropriate, however, given the resonance of water-imagery in the Islamic world, and given the parallels between al-Aṭrābanishī's poem and the Qur'anic passage, to seek a less tangible referent for the poet's two seas. The Qur'anic passage may have suggested itself to the poet as a model for his description of the sea created by the Norman king because it allowed him to acknowledge the most remarkable aspect of the Sicily of his age: its Muslim/Christian duality. And 'Imād al-Dīn may have been attracted to this section of the poem, and may have chosen to preserve it, because he recognized the message implicit in it. In the Qur'an, the reference to the "two seas" created by the Lord makes an initial reference to their "flowing together," and speaks immediately afterward of their irrevocable separation:

maraja al-bahrayni yaltaqiyâni
baynahumâ barzakh^{um} lâ yabghiyâni
 Qur'an 55:19-20

He has loosed the two seas: they flow together
 between them is a barrier; they do not transgress it

In the tension between the "flowing together" of the waters in the first verse and the barrier which they "do not transgress" in the second, an Arabic poet in Norman Sicily could easily have identified a parallel to the situation he faced in Sicily. I discussed above Ibn Jubayr's use of water imagery (as well as fire imagery) to dramatize the division between the kingdom's Muslim and Christian populations – or, more precisely, to dramatize the writer's anxiety that the line between the two populations is, in certain ways, blurred (see above, pages 4-5). Al-Aṭrābanishī could have modelled certain details of his description of the pleasure garden at Favara on this Qur'anic passage because it presented a simple and effective way to evoke the duality of the Sicilian population, and to call to the reader's mind as well the tension between flowing together and remaining separate that was so relevant in that context.

⁶ See, e.g., Amari, *Storia dei musulmani di Sicilia*, vol. 3, 778-779; Gabrieli, "Ibn Ḥamdis," 26; Bresc, "I giardini palermitani," 370.

Other words are repeated in al-Aṭrābanishī's poem, though none as insistently or as evocatively as the words signifying water. A word meaning "love," *al-hawâ*, is used three times in the poem: in verse 3, and twice in verse 14. Al-Aṭrābanishī seems to deliberately underscore his repetition of this word. The first time it appears, in the first hemistich of verse 3, it is balanced by a word in the second hemistich meaning "love" or "desire" – *al-gharâm*. And it is phonetically echoed by the appearance in the first hemistich of verse 4 of the word *hawâ*, which means "to surround", and is close in sound to the word for love. Finally, the second and third uses of the word for love occur in the same line (verse 14). The repetition of the word "love" – particularly in combination with the insistent use of duals, which reinforces his depiction of the park as an ideal setting for the trysts of a pair of lovers – illustrates al-Aṭrābanishī's intent focus on presenting a peaceful and sensual portrait of Favara.⁷

This stylistic choice can be highlighted by contrast with another word which is repeated in a prominent position in the poem. The first verse that we possess ends with a verb – *yasta'ẓamu*, meaning "it is proud, arrogant, mighty" – which comes from the same root as the final word of verse 4, *al-a'ẓam*, "the mightiest." This repetition is not as deliberate as the others I have discussed above, and is noteworthy mainly because of the position of prominence that Imād al-Dīn's editing has given it by beginning his citation of the poem where he did. However it helps to illuminate the difference between al-Aṭrābanishī's conception of Favara and those voiced by the other authors cited above. Insistence on the mightiness of Favara strikes the same note as al-Idrīsī's assertion that Roger rebuilt the towers of Palermo, for instance, or as Romualdo's somewhat macho characterization of him. Al-Aṭrābanishī's use of these words in a rhyming position suggests that he is aware of the conventional focus on strength and might in representations of

⁷ I have not included in this discussion the final word in the first hemistich of the first line – *al-munâ*, which I have translated "desire" – because its semantic range is slightly different: it means *desire, wish, hope*, rather than *desire, passion, love*.

Roger II, and that he does not wish to break with it. But, after a nod in the direction of convention, his focus shifts, and his subsequent characterization of the park as the setting for a tryst between a pair of lovers is quite different from al-Idrīsī's or Romualdo's descriptions (although it meshes well with Benjamin of Tudela's idea of the park as a playground for the king and his women).

Based on the foregoing discussion of the vocabulary of al-Atrābanishī's poem, we can make the following preliminary observations. The preponderance of "water-words" occurs in the first half of the section of the poem that we possess. In the opening verses of his description of Favara, al-Atrābanishī chooses imagery which establishes a lulling rhythm – the repeated descriptions of water; the reference to the "battlefield of love," and the "encampment of desire"; the voluptuous comparison of the streams to pearls and the land to darkened wood (v. 5), so suggestive of pearls against dusky skin. His description then gives way to the garden-imagery of the second section: he refers to the oranges, the lemons, the two date-palm trees, using typical love-imagery to characterize them. The selection closes with a prayer for the safety of Palermo. The careful structure of the work as it stands suggests that, although we may not possess the entire poem, the surviving section may be a constituent component of a longer *qasīda* conceived as a series of discrete descriptions of the royal court, of Palermo, or of Roger's kingdom in general.

Favara is represented as the ideal home for a pair of lovers, whom the poet sees reflected in the delightful fruit-trees of the gardens. The lovers are threatened by a sinister force, and in turn protected by a powerful presence, clearly meant to suggest the Sicilian king (vv. 10, 11). The use of water imagery – resonant both of the richness and fertility of the land, and of the generosity of the king who rules it – reinforces this characterization of the kingdom as a place where a powerful and benevolent ruler protects and sustains his people. On another level, the use of dual nouns and the description of the garden, recalling *sūra* 55 of the Qur'an, serves to evoke the kingdom's divided populace, and both the pleasures and tensions of Muslim/Christian cohabitation. Al-Atrābanishī's

characterization of the park provides a miniaturist, stylized, but dynamic portrait of Sicily itself. The poet's delicate and sure touch has helped the poem to become for its modern readers – in Gabrieli's words – "almost the symbol of Muslim Sicily" ("Ibn Hamdis," 27).

Al-Atrābanishī as a court poet

An examination of the vocabulary of al-Atrābanishī's poem helps to illuminate the internal structure of the poem; in order to contextualize that close reading, however, it is necessary to step back and consider the poem in relation to contemporary cultural and poetic trends. Gardening was a sophisticated and elaborately structured art form in the medieval Muslim world; this should be apparent from the prose descriptions cited above, which represent the garden as aesthetic "text" (and the monarch as "author"). And poetry describing gardens – *rawdīyya* – was an established Arabic literary form. Therefore al-Atrābanishī's poem should be considered not only in relation to the real garden he described, but also to the many other textual "gardens" of the Arabic literary tradition. Al-Atrābanishī's poem depicted Roger's royal garden for a specific purpose: in order to present an image of the Norman king to the world beyond the garden walls; and so it is necessary to compare his poem to the works of contemporary panegyric poets as well. By considering parallels and differences between al-Atrābanishī's poem and other garden poetry, and between al-Atrābanishī's poem and other court poetry, we can begin to understand his relation to the greater cultural trends of his world, as they were represented by these poetic traditions.

In medieval Muslim cities, the garden served as a central element of urban design. The physical comforts that gardens could offer to city-dwellers are apparent; in addition, the Muslim garden was richly symbolic. Richard Ettinghausen calls the garden "a ubiquitous art form in the Muslim world, being both socially and geographically extensive"

(*The Islamic Garden*, Introduction, 6). I excerpt from his speculations regarding the reason for the potency of the garden as symbol in Islamic culture:

There is first the idea of Paradise as a reward for the Muslim faithful, a basic concept developed by Muhammad from the beginning of his apostolic mission in Mecca. This was more than an abstract vision of the garden's topography, its nature and its inhabitants. Since then these descriptions have played an important part in the Muslim cosmography and religious beliefs. . . . The second point to be made is that the institution of the royal pleasure garden already existed in pre-Islamic times in the Near East. . . . Thus, in Islam there exists both a sacred, visionary, and a secular, hedonistic tradition, each centered around a special garden of the highest beauty. . . . (*The Islamic Garden*, 6)⁸

The prose descriptions of Favara quoted above demonstrate the importance of Palermo's gardens as symbols of royal authority and power, their "secular, hedonistic" significance. The religious and even eschatological significance that gardens often take on in the Muslim world, however, does not enter either prose or poetic representations of Favara (although al-Atrâbanishî's adoption of Qur'anic language in describing Favara is a nod in that direction). The poetic garden in Arabic poetry often serves as a representation of Paradise, and of mystical union with God. I quote an example by the famous mystical poet Rûmî, drawn from an essay by Annemarie Schimmel which focuses on poetic representations of the "Celestial Garden," in illustration:

See the upright position from the Syrian rose,
and from the violet the genuflection,
the leaf has attained prostration: refresh the call to prayer!
Schimmel, 25

Rûmî makes reference to the physical details of the garden, but jumps instantly from the physical world to the spiritual realm. Even this briefest of citations should suffice to demonstrate the distance between Rûmî's mystical approach to representing the garden, and al-Atrâbanishî's comparatively worldly approach. There existed in medieval Arabic

⁸ Ettinghausen goes on to point out that gardens in the medieval Muslim world – unlike French, English, or Italian gardens – often constituted a "response to the ecological condition" (7) of the lands in which Muslims lived, oases of relief from an arid and hostile environment. This observation is not relevant to my present concerns, though it echoes intriguingly the significance and importance that *water* held for the Muslim nations.

poetry another, more secular tradition of describing nature, a genre which may be seen as a subset of *wasf*, "description," in the sense that it is informed by the Arabic passion for artful poetic description. I quote here a passage from Ibn Khafâja, who is generally considered to be the most remarkable of the Andalusian nature-poets (and Andalusian poets are generally considered to excel in descriptions of nature), in which the poet describes a snowy landscape:

The land stretched to the horizon – you would think it
a silver-haired woman with head uncovered, whom old age had stricken

From highlands and lowlands there emerge
gardens which flower but do not yet bear fruit

Each camomile-flower possesses mouths, and upon the mouths a smile
and on the smile the snow makes a droplet of cool saliva

As if in the sky there were trees in bloom
a wind wafts through them, and [their blossoms] are scattered

Arabic text: Ibn Khafâja, 372 (see Appendix, p. 73, Ibn Khafâja #1)

This elegant description demonstrates some of the remarkable sophistication of which Arabic nature-poetry (and poetic description in general) is capable. Al-Aṭrābanishī's poem is certainly closer in spirit to Ibn Khafâja's than to Rūmī's. The best nature poetry scintillates because it clothes familiar beauty in less-familiar images, and because it personifies and psychologizes nature, and thus uses it to represent human emotions. This is true of Ibn Khafâja's poem, and to some extent of al-Aṭrābanishī's, although he was not the poet Ibn Khafâja was.

However the poem that al-Aṭrābanishī wrote about Favara could not be termed strictly *rawdīyya*. Nor was it the primary intention of the historians or travel writers who wrote accounts of Favara to produce artful descriptions of Palermo's gardens. Al-Aṭrābanishī was certainly drawing on the *rawdīyya*-tradition, and the authors of the other descriptions quoted above attempted to write beautiful images of a beautiful place in order to embellish their prose. But their texts have a specifically ideological and even

propagandistic focus which would be alien to traditional *rawḍiyya* poetry: their descriptions are meant to illustrate the power and authority of the monarch to whom the gardens belong. In this sense they resemble what María Jesús Rubiera Mata, in her history of Hispano-Arabic literature, calls the *poetas-funcionarios* of Nasrid Granada. These court poets were charged with the responsibility of writing *qasâ'id* in honor of the kings of Granada. I will examine Rubiera Mata's account of these "poets for hire" more closely at a later point: here I am interested in the similarities between their panegyrics and the descriptions of Favara. I translate a section from Rubiera Mata's translation of a poem by Ibn al-Jayyâl (1261-1346), written in honor of a palace built for the sultan Muḥammad III:

Oh Najd Palace, you are the most noble of chateaux,
because you have combined the good with the best!

.....
You possess such beauty that even the palaces
of Baghdad and Gumban cannot compare with you:
marvels that surpass every idea and thought
are united in you;
your cupola is like a bride who flaunts
her seductive beauty in the bridal party . . .

Rubiera Mata, 130

Ibn al-Jayyâl's poem – like al-Aṭrâbanishî's description of Favara – has two functions: it strives both to describe and adorn a work of monumental architectural, and to celebrate and advertise it for the readers' benefit. A magnificent palace demonstrates the magnificence of the monarch who has built it. A poem describing the palace can articulate and amplify the palace's message, making its magnificence present even when the palace itself is physically distant.

Al-Aṭrâbanishî, like the *poetas-funcionarios* of Granada, is charged with the task of immortalizing the grandeur of Roger's kingdom. The gardens of Palermo were commonly represented as signs of royal power and authority, and were seen in a text-author relationship to the royal monarch. Al-Aṭrâbanishî's poem does not name the monarch, as the prose descriptions do. But the presence of a powerful and protecting authority is

unmistakable. The poet strives to depict Favara not as an other-worldly *locus amoenus*, but as a temporary haven, a vantage point from which the fortunate can observe adversity at a safe distance. The perception of the garden as a refuge separate from the torments of the real world informs the poem; the words denoting strength at the beginning of the description of Favara, and the seductive image of the sheltering shade near the end of the excerpt, convey to the reader the sense of a powerful protector under whose aegis the garden flourishes. The identification of Roger as that protector may have been made in another section of the poem. At any rate, the reader who did not make the connection for himself would be filled in by ʿImād al-Dīn, who, introducing the poem in his anthology, states:

I excerpt from [al-Atrābanishī's] description of the [royal] park [of Roger II], known as Favara . . .

Arabic text: *A Biographical Dictionary of Sicilian Learned Men and Poets*, 55 (see Appendix, p. 73. ʿImād al-Dīn #1)

ʿImād al-Dīn uses the word *al-muʿtazziyya* – an adjective derived from a word meaning “mighty” or “powerful” – to describe the park. This word is used in reference to Roger II's *ʿalāma*, his Arabic royal title: *al-muʿtazz bi-llāh*, “the one who exults in the glory of God.”⁹ His meaning would be clear to contemporary readers: the park is *al-muʿtazziyya* because it is the possession of the ruler whose royal title is *al-muʿtazz bi-llāh*. And I have conveyed that meaning in my translation by calling it “the royal park of Roger II.”

Al-Atrābanishī represents Favara as a shelter and a haven in part to exalt its monarch and protector, to celebrate his tolerance for his Muslim subjects and enthusiasm for Arabic culture. His representation of the park as a refuge, however, also admits a more mundane interpretation: as a park, a place where nature is tamed and cultivated, the real Favara was a sort of shelter. It allowed those who visited it to experience the sensual pleasures of the outdoor life while reducing to a minimum their exposure to its discomforts. Thus – the reader understands – the monarch's sheltering presence made his

⁹ Amari makes this point in his *Biblioteca Arabo-Sicula, versione italiana*. 257.

island realm into a haven for those who dwelt in it. And if this is true of Sicily as a whole, it is even more true of the royal court in particular. The poem depicts Favara, one of the seats of the king's court. If the king's protection is felt throughout his kingdom it is felt especially at his royal court; if his kingdom is a refuge from the troubles that afflict the realms of less powerful monarchs, his court is even more a refuge and a haven. Modern critics tend to respond to al-Aṭrābanishī's poem – as Gabrieli states in the passage quoted above – as "almost the symbol of Muslim Sicily." It would seem more accurate to see the poem as a symbol of Norman Sicily, and more precisely of the royal court of Norman Sicily: a sheltered corner of the kingdom where lovers disport and the trees obligingly mimic their passion, where the two populations of Sicily are able to coexist with a minimum of cultural or economic tension.

Al-Aṭrābanishī was doubly a court poet: not only did he write *from* the court, he also wrote *about* the court. He strove to articulate and amplify the magnificence of Sicily in general and of the Sicilian court in particular. He represented that magnificence in a form that was accessible even to those who were physically distant from the court itself: his poem recalls Roger's Sicily to the minds of all those who read it in 'Imād al-Dīn's anthology. I characterized the works of *poetas-funcionarios* above as adornment and advertisement (and I will have more to say below about the role of poetry as articulation and adornment of physical monuments). It does indeed seem appropriate to call Al-Aṭrābanishī's work propaganda, produced to define and defend an idea of Sicily, and to term his poem a manifesto, because it works to create the state that it describes. Some poets who are considered by modern scholars to be court poets do not write specifically about the court, as al-Aṭrābanishī did: the Italian poets who wrote during the reign of Frederick II, for instance, were associated with a royal protector, but did not take his monarchy as their subject matter. But most of the court poets of the Norman era whose works have been preserved wrote explicitly about, and in praise of, the Norman monarch;

and because most of them wrote during the era of Roger II, the majority of the Norman court poetry we possess consists of panegyrics addressed to him.

One court poet of the Norman era, al-Buthayrī, describes the pleasures of life at Roger II's court in terms that make its dual cultural affiliations clear:

Drink of the lute-chords
and the songs of Ma'bad¹⁰

no living is serene, save
in the sweet shelter of Sicily

in a dynasty that rivals
the empires of the Caesars

Arabic text: *A Biographical Dictionary of Sicilian Learned Men and Poets*, 58-59 (see Appendix, p. 73, al-Buthayrī #1)

The exhortation to the listener to "drink of the lute-chords" demonstrates that the court that al-Buthayrī celebrates conceives of itself as a cultural center. And the mention of al-Ma'bad, a poet from Damascus, introduces a linguistic and cultural specificity. At Roger's court one listens to Arabic music, imported from the capital cities of the Muslim world. The reference is useful for the simple fact that it demonstrates that Roger's court perceived itself to be culturally connected to Arabic courts elsewhere in the Mediterranean. In the final verse al-Buthayrī draws a parallel between Roger's Sicily and the splendors of the Roman empire, indicating another cultural connection which the poet believed relevant. Thus, in these three lines of verse, al-Buthayrī navigates a path between Muslim and Christian empires, and places Sicily, with her serenity and sweet shelter, between them.

Al-Buthayrī mentions Roger by name in this excerpt:

Here exalted Roger thrives, King of the Caesars
among the delights of a lengthy life and her [Sicily's] pleasing beauties

Arabic text: *A Biographical Dictionary of Sicilian Learned Men and Poets*, 58-59 (see Appendix, p. 73, al-Buthayrī #2)

¹⁰ Ma'bad was a poet from Damascus.

This reference to the Christian monarch of Sicily was clearly too much for the anthologist 'Imâd al-Dîn. He cuts the poem short at this point, with the curt comment:

I limit myself to the two *qasîdas* which I have cited, because they are in praise of the infidels, as has been demonstrated.

Arabic text: *A Biographical Dictionary of Sicilian Learned Men and Poets*, 60 (see Appendix, p. 73, 'Imâd al-Dîn #2)

'Imâd al-Dîn, a contemporary of Ibn Jubayr's (he died in 1201), preserved the majority of the surviving fragments of poetry from the court of Roger II in his anthology, *Kharîdat al-Qasr wa Jarîdat al-'Asr* (*The Virgin Pearl of the Palace and the Register of the Age*): it was his introductory comments which were cited in the discussion of al-Atrâbanishî's poem above. His acknowledgement of the Sicilian monarch – *al-mu'tazz bi-llâh* – in his introduction to al-Atrâbanishî's work seems the more remarkable in light of this peremptory dismissal of al-Buthayrî's celebration of the same ruler. In these two dialogues – between 'Imâd al-Dîn and al-Buthayrî, between 'Imâd al-Dîn and al-Atrâbanishî – the outlines of the struggle for cultural self-definition in Sicily, and the reactions to those efforts from an audience outside Sicily, become visible. 'Imâd al-Dîn (like Ibn Jubayr) both admired the Sicilian ruler, and distrusted him: he appreciated the works of the Siculo-Arabic poets that reached him, perceiving those works as part of the continuum of Arabic poetry, and yet tried to contain and limit the place that he granted them within that continuum. Al-Buthayrî and al-Atrâbanishî, in much the same way, identified themselves as Arabic poets, writing conventional panegyrics, in conventional meters, drawing on conventional Arabic or Islamic techniques for praising a man of power. But they distanced themselves from Arabic conventions by writing in praise of a Christian monarch, the ruler of a colony that had been a Muslim possession but had passed into the hands of a Christian dynasty. What probably disturbed 'Imâd al-Dîn the most in al-Buthayrî's poem was precisely the cultural continuities that the poet set up: between a Muslim poet and a Christian monarch, between a former Muslim colony and the empires of the Caesars.

The court that al-Aṭrābanishī and the other court poets of the Norman era celebrated, that they made present to those who read their poetry, placed itself in a mediate position between the Christian and Muslim worlds, and it partook of the cultural traditions of both of those worlds. The court poets retained by Roger II, who sang his praises in lines of verse that were heard throughout the Arabic-speaking world, were given the task of celebrating Sicily's connections to the two worlds, of finding a way to articulate its dual cultural tradition and advertise its splendor. In order to place these poets' work in perspective, it will be helpful to consider what it meant to write as a *poeta-funcionario* in Norman Sicily, and to question how the modern reader approaches these poets' works.

Reading the court poetry of Norman Sicily

Ibn Khafāja wrote remarkable *rawdīyyāt* in celebration of the beauty and the splendor of al-Andalus. I quote here a fragment preserved from such a poem:

Oh people of al-Andalus, how blessed you are
[with your] water, and shade, and rivers, and trees

There is no garden of Paradise, save in your realms
and if I could choose, it is this [Paradise] I would pick

Do not worry that, after this, you might enter Hell
for you do not enter the flames after being in Paradise

Arabic text: Ibn Khafāja, 364 (see Appendix, p. 73, Ibn Khafāja #2)

We see only a glimpse of Ibn Khafāja the gardener in the second hemistich of the first line of this fragment. The poem is written to praise al-Andalus, and to do so in the passionate and excessive manner dear to medieval Arabic poets. In the discussion that follows I will consider the attitude that might move a modern reader to draw a line between a poem like this and a poem like al-Aṭrābanishī's, to celebrate Ibn Khafāja's description as a variety of love poem, and to criticize al-Aṭrābanishī's panegyric as a form of pandering.

The poets of al-Andalus whom Rubiera Mata terms *poetas-funcionarios* were associated with the court of Granada during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Granada was one of the last outposts of Hispano-Arabic civilization, representing, for much of the Nasrid period, the sole remaining Muslim stronghold in Spain. As such, it attracted Muslims from throughout the Iberian peninsula, who created in Granada the final monuments of Andalusian culture. It is worth looking briefly at Rubiera Mata's account of the culture produced there because the civilization she describes provides intriguing parallels and differences with Norman Sicily.

It is al-Andalus, but a condensed al-Andalus, "the final and succulent drop of the Andalusian lemon," as Emilio Garcia Gomez called the reign of Granada. . . .

This intensity, arising from a process of distillation of condensed essences, was accompanied by a profound cultural conservatism. Because one of the characteristics of the reign of Granada, in all matters – art, literature, politics, institutions – is its conservatism. This is to be expected, since it functioned in the manner of a cultural minority – small and ancient, in the midst of other large and young populations – and minorities are conservative, in order to maintain the signs of their identity.

Given the impossibility of renovation, because a renovation would have caused their culture to resemble the culture of their neighbors, [the culture of Granada] plays with its own forms, until those forms are converted into mutations, like the final descendents of an endogamous family. It is the decadence – albeit an exquisite decadence – corresponding to the civilization of which it is the distorting mirror.

Rubiera Mata, 28-29

Like the Granada of this late period, Norman Sicily represented at once the peak and the decline of a Muslim colonial civilization. And like Granada, Norman Sicily existed in a cultural limbo, on a frontier between the Muslim/Arabic and Christian/Latin worlds. Both the Iberian peninsula and Sicily were going through a form of "Reconquista," a seizure by Christians of Muslim-occupied lands which had at some point in their prior history been occupied by Christians. As a result, political and economic exigencies required an intense level of negotiation and communication between Muslim and Christian communities and leaders in both Granada and Sicily. Muḥammad Ibn al-Aḥmar, who seized Granada and founded the Nasrid dynasty in 1248, became a vassal of Ferdinand I of Castile, and

Muslim sovereigns of Granada who followed him would, like him, be obliged to acknowledge and work with Christian occupying forces on the Iberian peninsula. Finally, both Palermo and Granada preserved cultural forms that were swiftly being eradicated outside the city walls. And both cities managed to produce cultural monuments despite a certain amount of cultural disparity even within the city walls. Rubiera Mata points out that the refugees who formed the population of Granada during this period "came from all parts of al-Andalus, with their different sorts of dialects, their different ways of living, their very different culture" (Rubiera Mata, 28).

The differences between Granada and Palermo, however, are striking. The culture that existed outside the city walls in twelfth-century Sicily was not nearly as monolithic as that of the Iberian peninsula during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The religious, linguistic, and cultural practices of the Sicilian population outside the royal court combined Greek, Arabic and Latinate traditions. The Normans had brought with them an infusion of Latin culture, but even the Latinity of Norman Sicily was a mongrelized combination of Norman French and Lombard Italian influences. And in Palermo, unlike in Granada, a Muslim population was ruled by the leaders of the Christian occupying forces, leaders who maintained their Christian identity and their contacts with the Christian world, but integrated existing Muslim bureaucratic structures and cultural forms into their own statecraft. Finally, the history that preceded developments in twelfth-century Palermo was quite different from that which led to fourteenth-century Granada. Granada represented the decadence of a long and dynamic period of occupation. Norman Palermo in contrast strove to perpetuate and to renovate certain aspects of a Siculo-Arab culture that had existed for only two centuries, and that had scarcely managed to overcome its growing pains and attain a preliminary maturity, before the Norman conquest.

If Granada constituted a final refuge for Arabic culture on the Iberian peninsula, and witnessed the decadence of a tradition that had endured some 700 years, in Palermo, on the other hand, Arabic culture was exploited and perpetuated by an occupying force

that made no evident attempt to replace the Arabic tradition already in place when it arrived. This is not to suggest that the Normans possessed no culture – indeed, the impact of the Normans' contemporary conquest of Britain on the culture of the British Isles demonstrates that Norman colonizing forces of this era did have resources to draw on in order to establish cultural hegemony in a parallel situation. Rather, the Norman occupying force seemed to find it easier, more efficacious, or more appropriate to work with the cultural elements it found in Sicily than to attempt to supplant them. In Norman Sicily a Christian occupying force co-opted Arabic cultural forms, and used those forms to express an ideal of a state that was in some ways similar to and in some ways radically different from the state that had existed in Sicily previously.

The comparison with Granada, for all the differences between the two situations, reveals a surprising similarity. In Granada and in Palermo a culture whose hegemony was being challenged by incursion was called upon to produce monuments, sublime architectural works which functioned as both culminations of the cultural history which preceded their making, and aggressive statements of the power and potential of the current regime: in Granada the Alhambra; in Palermo the Cappella Palatina, the Cuba, La Zisa, the system of pleasure-gardens. And simultaneously the royal courts in Granada and Palermo supported schools of poets who wrote civic poetry in celebration of the ruling regime.¹¹ In both Granada and Palermo, elements of a previously existing culture were patched together to produce a hybrid, monolithic culture, formed by uniting diverse voices, and used to celebrate a politically charged idea of the state's past, present, and future.

Rubiera Mata contrasts the poetry of the *poetas-funcionarios* of Granada with "courtly" poetry. At one point she states that the Granadan court poet of this era, "charged

¹¹This, of course, was nothing new in the Arabic-speaking world. Some of the greatest works of Arabic poetic history were produced by poets called on to celebrate a tribe or a tribal leader, or to vilify the tribe's enemy; and this tribal practice was perpetuated by city-dwelling poets who wrote in praise of their cities or of urban men of power.

with singing the glories of power, transformed himself into a functionary for the whole monarchy" (129). Again, she specifies that the literature produced in Granada was "no longer so much courtly, as the work of functionaries" (30). Rubiera Mata judges the civic poetry of Granada – as others have judged the poetry of Roger's Sicily, and of Frederick's Sicily – to be lacking in intellectual or aesthetic substance:

The intellectual poverty of the reign of Granada is reflected especially in its poetry, which is similar to the stamped ceramics of [the poets'] contemporaries, the *mudejar* artisans; having found a model, they use a mold to repeat it to infinity.

Rubiera Mata, 129

The court poets of Granada, like those of Sicily, sang the praises of a patron-ruler. The situation of the court with which they were associated seems to suggest that their assigned task, at least in part, was to encourage cultural cohesion, or at least to prevent further cultural decay, in a land where a confrontational diversity threatened cultural authority.

But before taking up this issue, I would like to address another, equally important for historians of medieval literature: the aesthetic judgement of panegyric poetry. Rubiera Mata's approach to the poetry of the Granadan *poetas-funcionarios* is typical of Western literary historians' estimation of the professional panegyrist in medieval society. The poet-for-hire typically receives the damning brand of "decadent" at best, and "mercenary" at worst; the existence of a circle of such poets at a court is often taken – as we saw in Rubiera Mata's discussion above – as a sign of the decadence or the "intellectual poverty" of that court.

This formula, however, becomes awkward if one considers it at length. Rubiera Mata contrasts the *poeta-funcionario* with the "courtly" poet; apparently, the *poeta-funcionario*, despite his involvement with the court, is not "courtly" enough, and on the other hand the "courtly" poet manages to transcend his implication in the life of the court through his "courtliness." At the same time, Rubiera Mata is willing to accept the Alhambra as an admirable statement of the genius of Hispano-Arabic architecture (although she does not judge it among the finest achievements of that culture). Yet the

Alhambra, like the work of the Granadan court poets, is a work of panegyric, designed to trumpet the rulers under whose patronage it was built. It seems likely that in experiencing architecture we are less prone to reject extravagant self-celebration, and more likely to read it as an admirable expression of the aesthetic sublime (and, if Ayn Rand's portrait of an architect in *The Fountainhead* is any indication, this tendency is not limited to our readings of medieval culture).

In putting forth these comments, my intention is not to contradict Rubiera Mata and the many other literary critics who have seconded her opinion, but rather to point out the inconsistencies inherent in their judgement, and thus to lay the subject open for further consideration. Is the difference between the way that we read poetry and the way that we "read" architecture substantial enough to justify the distance between the reception of the Alhambra or the Cappella Palatina on the one hand, and the work of contemporary court poets on the other, by modern observers? Or is our distaste for the *poeta-funcionario* inspired by the fact that our age no longer has any feeling for a poetry of ethics? Panegyric poetry is essentially an ethical poetry: it delineates and celebrates standards of behavior that in turn are articulations of a moral code. It is central, in particular, to Arabic literary history; it is upheld in the Arabic tradition because it teaches its readers to distinguish between worthy and unworthy behavior, and it celebrates the worthy. The medieval court panegyrist, in praising the monarch who in turn functioned as a symbol of his community, participated in the ethical life of that community. We have little difficulty in believing that love poetry can create love, or in imagining a situation in which love poetry creates love, though it may never have happened to us. If we believe that panegyric poetry can create ethical behavior – or are at least able to suspend our disbelief on this point – we may be able to produce more sophisticated and productive readings of medieval court poetry, including the court poetry of *poetas-funcionarios*.

Al-Atrâbanishî's poem expresses an urge to articulate and to advertise a Siculo-Norman ethic. By celebrating Favara and the monarch who possessed and maintained

Favara, he celebrated a set of values, some of which have been defined in the foregoing discussion. The poet's Favara (which stands for Sicily, or more precisely for the Sicilian royal court) is a place where the good things in life flourish; a place where love – the symbol *par excellence* of courtly sophistication – can grow, because it is shielded from harm by the strength of its ruler; and a place where the realm of Islam, and of Arabic culture, extends well beyond its traditional political borders. I make the following observations in order to suggest some of the sorts of information regarding Norman court culture that might be drawn from al-Aṭrābanishī's poem:

The poem implies a continuity between Sicily's past and its present.

Although the medieval reader would probably have known from the poet's *nisba* – the final part of his name: *al-Aṭrābanishī*, which means "from Trapani" – that al-Aṭrābanishī's Arabic poem was written in Sicily, 'Imād al-Dīn's encoded reference to Roger II (see above, page 39) would have cleared up any remaining ambiguity regarding the poet's nationality. His use of the adjective *al-mu'tazziyya* made explicit the fact that the poem was written in the land ruled by Roger II. It also served as a subtle reminder that the poem was written in the land which had a Christian ruler who used an Arabic *'alāma*. By falling under Christian rule Sicily had broken administratively with the Muslim world; but the perpetuation of Arabic cultural forms at the Sicilian court – illustrated by the simple fact that the poem was written in Arabic – constituted an attempt to establish a cultural continuity both with Sicily's Muslim past, and with contemporary Arabic culture. We tend to read the Norman use of Siculo-Arabic cultural forms as a symptom of cultural ambiguity. But for the Normans, the urge to co-opt Arabic forms rather than to supplant them may in fact have represented a way to fight cultural uncertainty. As in Nasrid Granada a population of refugees from all parts of al-Andalus, reacting to the uncertainties generated by diversity within their own kingdom and by attacks from without, produced a hybrid culture by patching together elements of diverse traditions, so in Sicily the Normans built a courtly culture that used diverse indigenous cultural traditions to assert an

aggressive sense of unity. The culture of Norman Sicily was grounded in a perpetuation of the cultural traditions of the island's past, and strove to express a vision of a utopian future for the island.

The poem embodies an idea of Sicily's future. Sicily was a previously Muslim colony now under the rule of a Christian monarch, and the culture of the Norman court never mis-stated that fact. However, it did at times adopt a somewhat utopian tone regarding Sicilian life: it was calibrated to generate cohesion in a land where divisions were all too apparent, recognizing that a rupture had occurred, and stressing a paradoxical continuity. Al-Atrâbanishî's representation of Favara as a garden of love could not be mistaken for realistic representation. By writing toward cultural cohesion in a state which was often wracked by civil skirmishes and upheavals, poems like al-Atrâbanishî's or al-Buthayrî's embodied a sense of the potential for peaceful cohabitation in the milieu in which they were written, and hence they implied an idea of Sicily's future. I stated above that Al-Atrâbanishî's poem was a "manifesto" of Norman Sicily, and that it worked to create the state that it described. Manifestic textuality rewrites the present in the image of an idealized future. Al-Atrâbanishî's poem represented a Sicily that could exist, and should exist: it did not deny the rupture that had occurred in Sicilian life nor was it nostalgic about the "old Sicily," but wrote toward a Sicily that was new, different and strong.

The poem was conceived for an Arabic audience. The language used by the poets of Roger II's court was Arabic. Arabic was not the only official Sicilian language; the Cappella Palatina, for instance, with its inscriptions in Latin, Greek, and Arabic, illustrates the multilingualism of high culture in Sicily, and other documents suggest the importance of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, in addition to Arabic, in the political, mercantile, and daily

social life of the island.¹² The use of Arabic by court poets could have represented either a conscious decision on the part of the Norman ruler, or a fortuitous use of existing resources, and further research may suggest possible answers to that question. But one of the results of the use of Arabic by court poets is immediately apparent. By writing panegyric in Arabic, his court poets created an image of Roger as a leader who was great in an Arabic tradition – though, of course, with a difference. That is, they used traditional Arabic poetic genres and images to represent Roger's greatness, and therefore made him into a great *Arabic* ruler. But (as the foregoing discussion makes clear) they made no attempt to misrepresent him, depicting him as a Christian leader who was great in an Arabic sense of the word.

The foregoing observations are not meant to stand as conclusions, but as notes toward further research and further readings of the culture of Roger's court. My primary goal in this study, as I have specified, is not to produce a new definition of Norman culture, but to work toward defining a methodology which will allow a more productive evaluation of Norman court culture. In this reading of al-Atrābanishī's poem, I have discussed the internal structure of the fragment of it which survives, and have placed it in a larger cultural perspective, in order to demonstrate the usefulness of both close readings and broader cultural criticism in approaching the works of the Norman court. Finally, I have considered the textuality of the work, and the impact that that textuality has on a modern reader. Medieval panegyric poetry, because it is essentially an ethical poetry, is perversely difficult for a modern reader to appreciate. But panegyric poetry illustrates the values of the society in which it is written; and civic panegyric in particular – panegyric written for the ruler of a state, as opposed to poems of friendship, or works written for a wealthy patron who is not a political leader – can serve to illuminate the ideals of a state.

¹² For an interesting reading of the linguistic cultures of Norman Sicily, see Barbara Zeitler's recent article, "'Urbs felix dotata populo trilingui,'" in which she considers epigraphy of the Norman era in order to make observations regarding the extent and the ramifications of Sicilian multilingualism.

The observations drawn from al-Aṭrābanishī's poem listed briefly above represent some of the basic elements of the Norman idea of Sicily, the perception of Sicily's past, present condition, and future potential upheld by the rulers of Sicily, as it was articulated in the official "state" culture of Norman Sicily. Though it is by no means complete, certain details emerge from the *pointilliste* portrait sketched above: in particular, the odd balance between rupture and continuity in the cultural life of the Norman court, as expressed both by the Normans' co-opting of Arabic cultural forms and by the Arabic court artists' attempt to perpetuate the Arabic culture of the island in service to the new Norman lords.

Before closing this reading of al-Aṭrābanishī's poem, I will reconsider it in relation to other poetry written in and about Norman Sicily. In order to understand what it meant to be an "insider" poet – a poet of the court, with access to the monarch – it is necessary to consider what it meant to write as an "outsider." The poets whose work I will discuss in the next section all wrote from outside the royal court, and in one way or another they wrote *toward* the court: the Norman rulers are present in each of these works, either as a figure toward whom the poem is addressed, or as a character described within the poem. Their position outside the court requires these writers to take a different stance toward the Norman rulers. But for all their differences, it is the similarity between "insider" and "outsider" that is finally most striking.

Sicilian poets outside the court

Al-Aṭrābanishī and al-Buthayrī are termed "court poets" because it is presumed that their poetry was written or performed at the court of Roger II. This characterization is convenient, but it begs answers to a number of questions regarding the conditions in which the poems quoted above were written. What did it mean to be "*at* the royal court"? How

did the poet's affiliation with the monarch affect what he wrote? Most relevant to our purposes, how did the poet's proximity to the court determine how he saw contemporary political and cultural developments in Sicily? Do the non-court poets' writings bear witness to an "idea of Sicily" similar to that voiced by al-Atrābanishî, al-Buthayrî, and other poets who *were* "at the court"? The extant corpus of "non-court" poetry written in or about Norman Sicily is almost as scanty as the corpus of court poetry. However it is uniquely suited to help us address these questions, because it often deals explicitly with the political situation of contemporary Sicily: much surviving Siculo-Norman poetry is addressed to the reigning Norman monarch, or takes as its subject the vicissitudes of recent Sicilian history.

ʿImād al-Dīn preserves verses from a grammarian by the name of Abū Ḥafṣ, who was imprisoned by Roger II and wrote for his freedom. The work is a felicitous hybrid of love poem and panegyric. I quote here most of the excerpt given by ʿImād al-Dīn:

- 1 He sought solace, though it were from someone other than his Suʿād [*i.e.*, his
 beloved],
 who might ease the core of his heart and soul

And he hoped for a visit from her phantom, while she shunned him,
 while his desire denied the sweetness of sleep

By God! If only Roger were present, who
 bestows upon his friends the magnificence of his love

.....

Eager in giving – with the eagerness of the one who holds a sword
 which he brandishes in his hands on the day of destruction

In the darkness his face is gleaming dawn:
 you would think that he – shining among the envious ones –
 were the splendor of the sun

Where Orion rises he makes the ground for his tents
 and the stars, the sun, the moon are his tent-poles

When matters are uncertain, then his sceptre
writes, making white their blackness with his ink

.....

Oh king! who stands firm
hardy and rooted, on the rock of his roughness

The spirits of his enemies provoked him, and he scattered them
laughing, as they received the blade-edge from his sheath

Arabic text: *A Biographical Dictionary of Sicilian Learned Men and Poets*,
149-150 (see Appendix, p. 74)

The poem is a powerful bid for its writer's freedom, and I have quoted it at length in order to demonstrate the steps by which it is constructed. The abrupt transition, between the second and third verses, from the theme of romantic longing to panegyric and praise illustrates the passionate vehemence of the poet's desire for freedom. In the subsequent verses in praise of Roger, the poet focuses on images of strength. This is scarcely unusual in medieval Arabic panegyric, and here it is particularly advantageous to the poet's mission: by representing Roger as a daunting warrior hewn from rock and stars, he – like al-Atrābanishī – constructs a representation of the monarch as a ruler of semi-divine power, capable equally of protecting or punishing. In his introduction to his selection of Abū Ḥafṣ' verses, 'Imād al-Dīn fills in some of the details of his tale, telling us of his imprisonment. And he cuts off Abū Ḥafṣ' poem at the end, grumbling that he does not like to repeat poetry in praise of the infidels, but does not tell us whether Abū Ḥafṣ' bid for freedom was successful.

The fourteenth-century scholar Ibn Faḍl Allāh produced an important geography which included an essay on Sicily. He records a poem by a traveler who was captured while passing by Sicily and, like Abū Ḥafṣ, imprisoned; brought before the king, he recited a poem pleading for his freedom. Ibn Faḍl Allāh does not tell us the name of this poet, whom he identifies only as belonging to the Banū Rawāḥa. Nor does he tell us who the monarch was to whom the poem was addressed. I quote selections from it because they

provide a useful contrast to the artful petitions of Abû Hafs. The poem opens with an invocation of the monarch:

- 1 May you live, and be safe from destruction, and protected from it [by God]
 may you be successful in this world, and may you find reconcile in the next

Oh king, whose troops sweep through the land
 and increase the slaughter, and multiply the prisoners

Arabic text: *Biblioteca arabo-sicula, Versione araba*, 152 (see Appendix, p. 74, Banû Rawâḥa #1)

The poet continues with a description of the battle at sea in which he and his companions were attacked, defeated, and captured by the monarch's fleet. He concludes his poem with a pathetic evocation of the aged mother and young daughter who await him at home:

I left them – by God – he knows that they
 are in straightened and narrow conditions

They are bankrupt. in hardship, dispersed
 worse than prisoners – and would that they were prisoners!

- 10 If they were prisoners. they would be in rapture:
 I would be with you – we would not be hungry. nor naked
 Arabic text: *Biblioteca arabo-sicula, Versione araba*, 152-153 (see
 Appendix, p. 74, Banû Rawâḥa #2)

The ingenuous simplicity of the poem apparently proved efficacious. Ibn Faḍl Allāh informs us that the king not only released the poet. but rewarded him with money. and sent him home. The tale is related by Ibn Faḍl Allāh in illustration of his point that the kings of Sicily – both Muslim and infidel – were men of discernment and generosity.

If these two poems demonstrate that there was at the royal court an audience for such works. other poems have been preserved which show that outside the court there existed an audience which was ready to hear very different things regarding the Norman rulers of Sicily. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm – a poet who lived either, according to 'Imād al-Dīn, during the second half of the twelfth century (*A Biographical Dictionary of Sicilian Learned Men and Poets*, 51), or possibly. according to Amari, a century earlier, during the era of the

Norman conquest (*Storia dei musulmani di Sicilia*, v. 3, 786) – expresses succinctly a more critical estimation of the Normans in these verses:

Ardently did I love Sicily as a young man,
and it was like a corner [*lit.*: portion] of the garden of eternity

but it was not ordained that I should arrive at middle age
before it became a burning hell

Arabic text: *A Biographical Dictionary of Sicilian Learned Men and Poets*,
51 (see Appendix, p. 74)

ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm gives voice to a hatred for the conquerors of Sicily that extends to Norman-occupied Sicily itself. ʿImād al-Dīn also preserves fragments from some seven poems and three prose works by the Sicilian Abū Mūsā, whose attitude toward the Normans is somewhat more ambiguous. Among the poetry cited by ʿImād al-Dīn is a selection from a powerful anti-Norman invective:

Oh blonde tribe, my blood is on your hands
my killer is among you, and the one who robbed from me

Is it beautiful to forsake one who has affection for you?
and is it lawful, in the Messiah's faith?

Oh eye! ill, though not from grief:
if it could see the heart, it would be healed

Everything, after I saw you,
every beautiful thing is ugly in my eyes

Arabic text: *A Biographical Dictionary of Sicilian Learned Men and Poets*,
159 (see Appendix, p. 75, Abū Mūsā #1)

The force of the fragment comes from its evocation of a bitterness born of thwarted affection. The poet has loved Sicily and has been betrayed by it – like ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm, and like, as we will see shortly, Ibn Ḥamdīs.

Much of Abū Mūsā's poetry preserved by ʿImād al-Dīn, however, is love poetry. In another fragment, the poet describes his beloved and the confusion she inspires in her lover. I quote these verses because they provide an intriguing counterpoint to his poem quoted just above:

My tears expose my love: they lose patience
with the maiden who gazes with the eyes of a young wild cow

A blonde who loves to dress in white,
and her veil is tinted red

As if she, in her chemise and veil,
were whitening and reddening the one who watches

The hyacinth, sheathed in silver
and crowned with carnelian

Arabic text: *A Biographical Dictionary of Sicilian Learned Men and Poets*,
160 (see Appendix, p. 75, Abû Mûsâ #2)

The passage is an extended play on contrasts of color, a precious description of the blonde who dresses in white and red, who makes her lover turn white and red, who is compared to hyacinth and carnelian. It was probably the panache with which the poet pulled off this color-play that attracted 'Imâd al-Dîn to the passage, as he suggests in his reference to the complexion of the beloved in his introductory comment: "And he said concerning a girl blonde in coloring, a marvel of beauty" (*wa-qâla fî jâriyyatⁱⁿ musfarratⁱⁿ al-lawna^a badî'atⁱⁿ al-husn^a*, *Biographical Dictionary*, 160). Both Abû Mûsâ and 'Imâd al-Dîn use words derived from the same etymological root to describe the poet's blonde beloved, and a third word derived from this root is used to describe the "blonde tribe" whom the poet castigated in the verses quoted above:

yâ banî <i>al-asfar</i>	Oh blonde tribe (v. 1, from the first poem cited)
<i>safrâ'</i>	A blonde girl (v. 2, from the second poem cited)
jâriyyat ⁱⁿ <i>musfarratⁱⁿ</i>	A girl blonde in coloring ('Imâd al-Dîn's
al-lawna ^a	introduction)

We know nothing about the poet's life beyond what we can glean from his poetry, and it would certainly be rash to deduce based on the verses quoted above that Abû Mûsâ loved a blonde Sicilian and was thwarted in his love, and this disappointment made him hate all fair-complected Sicilians. However, while the coincidence of vocabulary may not be cause enough to draw conclusions regarding Abû Mûsâ's life, it allows us an insight into one of the psychological themes of his poetry. His passion for a blonde girl and contempt for a

blonde tribe suggest a certain ambivalence – perhaps dramatizing a radical change of heart, perhaps an ongoing personal struggle – toward the Norman Sicilians. The poet's plaintive question, "Is it beautiful to forsake one who has affection for you?" (see the first poem cited, v. 2), encourages us to believe that the poet had had – or at least had represented in his poetry – a passion for Sicily, or for the Sicilians whom he addresses, or perhaps for one Sicilian in particular. The few verses which 'Imâd al-Dîn has preserved in praise of the blonde girl may provide a gloss on that prior affection, a fragment from a song celebrating a passion that soured and became fuel for Abû Mûsâ's subsequent poetry of bitterness.

Ibn Hamdis – the best-known poet of Muslim Sicily, whose work is valued in particular for its beautifully-wrought descriptions – explores, in his poetry on Sicily, the theme of nostalgia (a topic beloved by Arabic poets¹³), and the beauty and tragic difficulty of remembering good times during bad. Ibn Hamdis was born in 1056, 18 years after the first assault on Sicily spearheaded by Normans, Greeks, and Lombards; he was 16 years old when the Normans took Palermo. Thus he never knew a Sicily free of the presence of invaders. He fled the island in 1078 or 1079, either because of a failed romance or because the presence of the Normans made life there untenable for him. In this poem his tone is bitter, displaying his rancor not only toward the Norman colonizers but also toward the land itself, for accepting defeat at the Normans' hands:

My land did not wish to return to her people
she caused me to doubt, and I began to renounce her

I consoled my soul concerning her-[the land], because I saw her
afflicted with a disease, a mortal poison afflicting [her]

¹³ See, e.g., Salma Khadra Jayyusi on the centrality of the theme of nostalgia to Arabic poetry: "indeed, the Arab soul has always been annihilated by nostalgia and revived by memory" (325). She makes the point, however, that Andalusian poetry does *not* have the thematic focus on nostalgia that is typical of traditional poetry of the Arab East.

what else, when she has been humiliated basely,
 and her mosques have become churches at the Christians' hands
 vv. 6-8; Arabic text: Ibn Hamdīs, *Dīwān*, 274 (see Appendix, p. 75, Ibn
Hamdīs #1)

Ibn Hamdīs, like `Abd al-Halīm, turns his anger and hatred for the Norman conquerors against Sicily, describing the island as if it were a woman who has perhaps not defended herself with enough ardor and whose honor has been compromised. In a later verse from the same poem, though, we find Ibn Hamdīs remembering her more tenderly, absolving her of the guilt he had lain on her shoulders in his frustration and wrath:

Oh Sicily! destiny has betrayed her:
 and she was protected among the peoples of destiny!
 Arabic text.: *Dīwān*, v. 11 (see Appendix, p. 75, Ibn Hamdīs #2)

In another poem, perhaps the most beautiful of Ibn Hamdīs' dirges for Sicily and for his lost youth, he sheds light on the complicated project that remembering Sicily became for some ex-Sicilian, anti-Norman poets.¹⁴ Ibn Hamdīs begins the poem by remembering the frivolous days of his youth in Sicily, and describes at length a bacchanalian party at a convent, where he and his mates acquired wine from the nuns and entertained each other with music throughout the night. As the poem draws to a close, the poet becomes more philosophical, touching on topics like memory and the writing of memories, sorrow and the remembering of joy. "I remember Sicily," he writes, "and sorrow/is aroused in my soul by the memory" (v. 32): this statement shocks the reader, who has just been charmed by the poet's beguiling evocation of a Sicilian idyll. Ibn Hamdīs explains that Sicily, with all its comforts and pleasures, is now distant from him, and that the memories of lost delights cause pain when they contrast too sharply with present displeasure. He makes reference to his compulsion to remember, and to talk about his memories, although it causes him pain: "But if I was chased out of Paradise/let me still speak about it" (v. 34). The verse sums up the plaintive and pathetic tone of the

¹⁴ There is a lovely translation of this poem by Toti Scialoja in Francesca Maria Corrao's anthology, *I poeti arabi di Sicilia* (126-133).

poem with simplicity and a certain majesty: it evokes a distant happiness and a present distress; it connects the garden of Paradise and the discomforts of life after the fall through the figure of the poet, who remembers and writes. In the final line of the poem, Ibn Hamdīs speaks to himself: "But do not worsen the sins yourself/since your Lord never ceases to forgive them" (v. 37).¹⁵ A more precise (though less idiomatic) translation of this final verse would be: "your Lord never ceases to be a forgiver of them"; the final word of the poem, *ghaffār*, meaning "much-forgiving, readily inclined to forgive," is one of the 99 names of God. Thus the poet strives, with exquisite poignance, to turn himself away from his tormenting boyhood memories of Sicily, and toward a more mature acceptance of the will of a merciful God. The poem is a magnificent meditation on memory, and in particular on the pain and the joys that memories of good times can bring to one who is unhappy. The rhyme scheme serves particularly well to dramatize Sicily's constant return to the poet's mind: it rhymes in the consonant *r*, with an attached feminine possessive pronoun. This pronoun can be used in reference to any feminine noun (and also to plural masculine nouns), but in Ibn Hamdīs' poem it most often refers to Sicily, which in Arabic is feminine. This knell at the close of each line recalls Sicily to the reader's mind, contributing considerably to the sense of obsessive memory, and dramatizing the poet's plight as the victim of those memories.¹⁶

Abū Mūsā, the Banū Rawāḥa poet, 'Abd al-Halīm, Abū Hafṣ, Ibn Hamdīs were not, like al-Atrābanishī or al-Buthayrī, "court" poets. They did not have access to the Sicilian monarch, and were not paid by him to produce works celebrating the splendors of his kingdom. From their different perspective, they are able to add details to the portrait of

¹⁵ This verse echoes, in a subtle and affecting way, Abū Mūsā's words: "Is it beautiful to forsake one who has affection for you?/and is it lawful, in the Messiah's faith?" (quoted above, p. 56. Arabic edition of the verses quoted in this paragraph: Ibn Hamdīs, *Dīwān*, 180-83 [see Appendix, p. 75. Ibn Hamdīs, #3]).

¹⁶ It is interesting to contrast Ibn Hamdīs' rhyme scheme with Abū Hafṣ', whose petition to Roger rhymes in the consonant *d* with an attached *masculine* possession pronoun. Thus, while Abū Hafṣ makes the monarch the focus of his poem, Ibn Hamdīs centers his on the romanticized, nostalgic figure of Sicily herself.

Norman Sicily provided by al-Atrābanishī's and al-Buthayrī's poems: they are able to tell us how Arabic poets who did not speak from a position of privilege – *i.e.*, from "within the court," with all the connotations and all the ambiguities inherent in that phrase – viewed the new administrative situation and the new rulers of Sicily. And they bear witness to one of the more interesting trends in Sicilian poetry of this era.

What marks the difference between poets like al-Atrābanishī, `Abd al-Ḥalīm, Ibn Ḥamdīs, and earlier Siculo-Arabic poets, some scholars argue, is their specifically Sicilian content. Previous Sicilian poets adhered closely to classical Arabic standards; when they needed an evocative landscape to serve as a backdrop, they used images of the desert, because that was what traditional Arabic poets did. Francesco Gabrieli, in a brief study of Ibn Ḥamdīs, states Siculo-Arabic poetry demonstrates "a specifically local element . . . only in its final manifestations . . ." ("Ibn Hamdis," 27); by "final manifestations," Gabrieli means the poetry of the Norman period, from the age of Ibn Ḥamdīs until the close of the twelfth century. Here Umberto Rizzitano expresses the same idea:

the poetic production of the pre-Norman era was distinguished by the almost complete absence of any specific reference to the Sicilian environment, as well as by fidelity to the conventional motifs of the Arabic poetry of the pagan era and of the first centuries of Islam.

Rizzitano, 275

The poetry of Sicily became specifically Sicilian with the Norman conquest – that is, as Sicilian culture became more complex, and its allegiance to mainland cultures more problematic. This explicit attention to Sicilian culture or to the Sicilian political situation may be read, as in the case of Ibn Jubayr's discussion of Sicily, as an attempt to grapple with the problems presented by cultural ambiguities. The poetry of Ibn Ḥamdīs and Abū Mūsā witnesses a similar, but more emotional, response to the difficulties of being Sicilian during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. These writers approached an unconventional problem using conventional means: they wrote traditional Arabic poetry, they wrote as Arabs, in reply to a situation in which Muslim cultural hegemony had come under attack.

The poets who wrote to petition the Norman ruler for favor, who therefore celebrated him and his kingdom, also followed Arabic poetic conventions, differing from those conventions only by writing their works in praise of a Christian ruler rather than a Muslim.

The duality of Sicily's population is noted explicitly by certain of these writers: Ibn Hamdīs speaks of Sicily's mosques becoming churches (quoted above, page 59); Abū Mūsā speaks with contempt of "the Messiah's faith" (quoted above, page 56). Al-Buthayrī, too, had made an implicit reference to the faith of the island's rulers, when he called Roger "King of the Caesars" (quoted above, page 41). No other explicit reference to the Christian faith occurs in the pro-Norman poems by al-Aṭrābanishī, Abū Ḥafṣ, or the Banū Rawāḥa poet. But this could well be because ʿImād al-Dīn identified those verses as too problematic, and did not preserve them; it is the naming of "the Caesars" that inspires him to cut short al-Buthayrī. Arabic literary convention – at least as it was conceived by ʿImād al-Dīn – allowed poets to note the difference of Norman Sicily, and allowed them to praise its Christian rulers (so long as they praised them in terms that echoed conventional panegyrics written for Muslim rulers), but preferred that they did not give concrete details about the most problematic aspect of the state's new rulers.

During the twelfth century (and to some extent as early as the Norman seizure of Sicily during the second half of the eleventh century) the culture of Sicily underwent a transformation. The poetry written in and about Sicily bore witness to these changes by explicitly addressing the nature of Sicilian culture: by lamenting the changes that had occurred and exploring the impact of those changes on the writer's own psyche; by making reference to the new rulers of Sicily and to the dual nature of Sicilian cultural life. At its simplest, this new Sicilian poetry looked like conventional Arabic panegyrics, differing only in the religious and cultural affiliations of its addressee. The response of ʿImād al-Dīn to the poems of al-Aṭrābanishī, al-Buthayrī, Abū Ḥafṣ demonstrates the problem posed by such work; and, if there was a substantial amount of Sicilian poetry from this period that was not preserved, it seems likely that much of it was written in praise of the Normans and

of the new Sicily, like these works which were cited but edited by the anthologist. The more complex and more sophisticated work of an Abû Mûsâ or, especially, an Ibn Hamdîs could more easily be subsumed into Arabic literary history. In Abû Mûsâ's extant works (and in the fragment preserved from 'Abd al-Halîm's invective), a drama of passion and disillusionment is played out, in which Sicily first beguiles and then betrays the poet. Ibn Hamdîs explores a subtler theme: the difficulty and necessity of memory. But the notion of betrayal is central to his Sicilian poetry, as it is to Abû Mûsâ's.

Thus, each of these poets – whether they write in praise or in vituperation of the Normans, whether they write "at the court" or outside it – bear witness to a Sicily made different from what it was, and attempt to reconcile it with its past. If al-Atrâbanishî's poem differs from those works written outside the court it is in its acknowledgement of Sicily's *future*. Ibn Hamdîs' nostalgic poetry is written in a constant dialogue with the past. Only in al-Atrâbanishî's bold depiction of Favara, with its soothing waters, its fruits, its sheltering shade, do we get a sense of what its rulers imagined the new, Norman Sicily might become.

A literary history of Norman Sicily

The surviving literary record demonstrates that there was a literary circle at Roger's court, or at least that there was enough interest in poetry to support the production of the occasional poem; that record, however, is too scanty to allow the literary historian to talk about a Siculo-Norman "school" of poetry in Arabic. I have already discussed the works of al-Atrâbanishî and al-Buthayrî. It is difficult to give a full account of the other poets who were active at Roger's court because of the paucity of published materials. And it becomes almost impossible to determine which of the poets who were active in Sicily during this

period should be termed "court poets" without digging more deeply into archives, and without engaging in more extensive discussion of the meaning of that problematic term. Abû al-Daw' al-Kâtib wrote an elegy for Roger's son (*Biographical Dictionary*, 42-44; Amari, *Musulmani di Sicilia*, v. 3, 775); 'Uthmân ibn 'Abd al-Rahîm al-Siqilî wrote a poem in praise of Roger (Amari, *Musulmani di Sicilia*, v. 3, 781-83).¹⁷ Two poets – Abû al-Qâsim ibn Ramadân and 'Abd Allâh ibn al-Samanî wrote verses on a spectacular water-clock at the court in Palermo (Amari, *Musulmani*, 702-703). A man by the name of 'Abd al-Rahmân ibn Ramadân wrote beseeching Roger to allow him to return to his home in Malta; only a few lines of this poem survive (Amari, *Musulmani*, 784-785). Amari lists another seven poets who lived in Sicily during the Norman era but apparently did not mention the Norman rulers in their verses, either to praise or to vituperate, along with a couple of poets from other parts of the Arabic-speaking world who are known to have visited Sicily during the Norman years. Among these last, the most well-known was Ibn Qalâqis, who visited during the era of William II, and wrote in praise of him and in praise of some of the cities of Sicily (Amari, *Musulmani*, 790-791). It is, of course, true that much of the Arabic poetry of Sicily was not preserved, and the challenge that the poetry of the Norman era posed to Arabic literary tradition would not have promoted its preservation. But the fact remains that the scholar who wishes to produce a literary history of Norman Sicily is left with little to build on.

The foregoing reading of al-Atrâbanishî's poem, however, should demonstrate that there is work for literary scholars to do in Norman Sicily, despite the sketchy literary record that remains. In concluding this study, I would like to point out two areas which seem to me to offer a great deal of potential for new directions in reading Siculo-Norman literature (and which should also be relevant, for instance, to the literature of Nasrid

¹⁷ I am following Michele Amari's account of the poets of the Norman era (*Musulmani di Sicilia*, vol. 3, 765-791) because it seems to me to be the most complete. I have cited the pages of the poems, where I have been able to find modern published editions of them, as well as the page numbers of Amari's discussions of the poets.

Granada, and to the Siculo-Italian poetry of the era of Frederick II). The first requires a slight adjustment of the methodology involved in doing medieval literary history; the second involves the aesthetic issues that arise when literature is linked with political power.

I argued, in beginning this chapter, that because the Siculo-Norman literary record is so scanty, literary historians should turn to broader cultural history to provide supplementary information, and to allow them more room to work. In reading al-Atrābanishī's poem, I used chronicles and travel writings describing the gardens of Norman Palermo in order to understand the conception of the garden in Norman Sicily, the cultural sources of the Norman idea of the garden, and the sorts of responses that outside observers had to the gardens of Palermo. The years of Norman rule in Sicily saw the initiation of a number of remarkable building projects and a broad urban development program. The development projects of the Norman years embody a certain "idea of Sicily," based on a conceptualization of Norman kingship that differs from the attitudes and approaches of Normans who remained in the north, and on a specific reading of Sicily's past, its contemporary situation, and its future potential. In the foregoing analysis I have presented material from a variety of sources in order to explore some of the characteristics and the ramifications of that idea. Historians writing on Norman Sicily have, traditionally, been interested in understanding the Norman idea of Sicily. But, as I argued above, certain aspects of the Norman project in Sicily are best read by *cultural* or *literary* historians, who are trained in methodologies of reading that will allow them to define and to pose questions like, for instance, the ones concerning the writing of poetry at the Norman court that I have addressed in this chapter. Such studies would truly complement and build on the fundamental historical work that has been done by the scholars who have researched and described the political, social, and economic history of Norman Sicily.

I have also, in reading al-Atrābanishī's poem, looked briefly at the poets of Nasrid Granada for perspective on the conception of the court poet in Muslim Europe. And in a future chapter of this study I will read the Siculo-Italian poetry of the thirteenth century in order to compare conceptions of the court poet in Norman Sicily and in Hohenstaufen Sicily. In addition to supplementing the literary record by drawing on broader cultural history, the literary historian can also look to parallel poetries in order to broaden the scope of studies of Norman Sicily, comparing the Norman court to courts with a temporal or geographical affinity, or seeking thematic affinities in other poetic schools. Modern critical theories have given literary scholars tools that can be applied to non-literary texts, as well as to poems and narratives. And the contemporary intellectual climate in North America encourages comparative readings of the literatures of different nations and different cultures. The methodological adjustments which I suggest here – which are quite slight: medieval literary scholars have always, of necessity, been comparatists, and have often drawn on non-literary texts for evidence of medieval cultural formulations – simply apply ideas that have become quite commonplace in the modern academy to the study of Norman Sicily.

Finally, I have discussed the textuality of court poetry, in order to highlight some of the aesthetic issues that have made it difficult for modern literary historians to approach this work. It would be a mistake to claim that al-Atrābanishī is as good a poet as Ibn Hamdīs. But he can teach the careful reader things about the uses (and abuses) of literature that Ibn Hamdīs cannot: he can help us to understand the dynamic relations between political power and literary talent, between political power and literary creativity, in Norman Sicily. Like the works of Céline, for instance, or the Italian Futurists, like certain monumental architectural projects (the Alhambra or the Cappella Palatina are outstanding examples), much medieval court poetry bears witness to a place and an era where political power and the aesthetic sublime comment on and support each other. By considering the court poetry of Norman Sicily in relation not only to other cultural

practices, but also to Norman social and political history, it may be possible to expand our knowledge both of literary history and of social and political history, without being put in the awkward position of having to make unrealistic claims for the aesthetic value of that poetry.

Al-Atrābanishī's poem about Favara poses questions about the relation between political power and literary talent, between the Norman urban development project and the court poets of the Norman era, between Norman Sicily and the Sicilies that came before and after it. The poem was in a sense a text based on a text, because it described a garden that was a deliberately conceived "representation" of Sicily. Favara (the garden and fishing preserve) was a lens fixed on the best and most beautiful of Sicily's natural riches: "Favara" (the poem) described that garden in the best and most beautiful of poetic language. A medieval Arabic court rich enough to produce monuments like Favara often possessed poets to celebrate those monuments as well, and at times the poetry in celebration of a monument was incorporated into the monument itself. The example of the architectural use of poetry most familiar to western audiences is probably the Alhambra in Granada, where poetic inscriptions celebrate the building, its gardens, its views, and the rulers who built it. Buildings with poetic inscriptions also existed in Norman Sicily, and in closing I would like to look briefly at one of those inscriptions.

Work on the palace known as La Zisa, in Palermo, began during the reign of William I, Roger II's son. Amari has argued convincingly that the name is an Italian corruption of the Arabic *al-'Azîz*, "the mighty" (Amari, *Le epigrafi arabiche di Sicilia*, 67-72). This theory is indeed supported by an inscription in Arabic verse, in a large room on the ground floor of the palace, most of which I translate here:

Whenever you wish, you may regard the best kingdom
the most exalted realm of the world . . .

You may see the king of the age in an excellent habitation
which merits haughtiness and delight

This is the earthly garden [or paradise] which comes into sight
that is the *Musta'izz*, and this is the *'Azîz*

Arabic text: Amari, *Le epigrafi arabiche*, 81

Amari argues that the final line plays on the *'alâma*, the Arabic royal title, of William II (son of William I): *al-Musta'izz bi-llâh*, "the one who has become powerful in God"; and it is on this basis that Amari speculates that the second William had a hand in finishing work on the palace (*Le epigrafi arabiche*, 82). William's royal title is drawn from the same root as Roger II's – *al-Mu'tazz bi-llâh*, "the one who exults in the glory of God." Finally, the name of the building itself – *al-'Azîz*, also given in the closing verse of the inscription – is also drawn from the same etymological root.

This final verse seems to make reference to a view from a window, although it is not impossible that it refer, in a highly idealizing way, to the building itself. The use of verse describing a building as architectural ornament in that building itself is, of course, not an extraordinary development in a culture which loves adornment, but forbids the use of human (or divine) representational adornment. One of the results of this practice, however, is a somewhat extraordinary level of architectural self-consciousness: one would hardly find, in other architectural traditions, a building that speaks in the first person, commenting on itself and addressing those who visit it in the second person, as occurs at the Alhambra. Although the inscription at La Zisa does not speak in the first person, its function is still to draw attention to the building which it adorns, and to the monarch under whose rule it was completed. The continuity of the building with the ruler, and of that ruler with his grandfather, would be underscored for those visitors who knew the royal titles of the Norman monarchs of Sicily, and could connect *al-Mu'tazz* with *al-Musta'izz*, and those two figures with *al-'Azîz*.

The historical consciousness demonstrated by this poetic inscription illustrates one of the more remarkable aspects of Norman court culture, which I would like to touch on in closing my discussion of Norman Sicily: that is, its occasional flashes of self-consciousness, and more precisely its *Sicilian* self-consciousness. I quoted above (page 9) a passage by

Alberto Varvaro arguing that Sicily, because it is an island, and was occupied and ruled from so many different mainlands between antiquity and the modern age, could be understood to be an extension of any one of those mainlands in response to the political realities of the moment. During the Norman period, connections with the Italian and the North African mainlands, and with the Greek archipelago and mainland, were maintained. But the Normans, unlike the Arabs who ruled Sicily before them or the French or Spanish who ruled after them, did not attempt to supplant existing cultural forms and replace them with their own cultural practices. Rather than negotiate and strengthen a tie between Sicily and a single mainland, the Normans sought to make of Sicily a culturally, politically, and economically discrete state. They exploited the cultural traditions and institutions they found on the island, and synthesized them in order to produce a hybrid vocabulary which might be used to celebrate their idea of Sicily's past, present, and future. The inscription at La Zisa – a lucid summation of the success and the strength of the Siculo-Norman dynasty – and al-Atrâbanishî's elegant and focused description of the royal park at Favara represent two of the most triumphant and articulate moments of Sicilian self-celebration.

In constructing a peculiarly Sicilian cultural project, as is apparent in the poetic and architectural works discussed in this chapter, the Normans drew aggressively on Arabic cultural institutions and cultural idioms. The scholar Jeremy Johns, discussing the administrative and cultural history of the Norman era, points out that appropriation of Arabic institutions changed significantly between the early and late periods of Norman rule. Thus, for instance, Johns identifies three stages in the development of the *'alâmât*, the Arabic royal titles, of the Norman monarchs. During the earliest stage, the period of Robert Guiscard and Count Roger, rulers' Arabic "titles," as they appear on coinage and in documents, consist of simple transliterations of their Latinate names. In a second stage, during the later years of the life of Count Roger and the earlier years of Roger II's rule, the monarch identifies himself with a simple Arabic title: thus Roger II is termed *Rujjâr*

al-thânî . . . sultân, "King Roger II." During the third and final stage, which begins with Roger's coronation as King of Sicily in 1130, the monarch uses royal titles like those quoted above, complex and sophisticated evocations of the king's power, making specific reference to the Muslim faith, and based on usage in other parts of the Arabic-speaking world (Johns, "I re normanni e i califfi fâtîmîti," 13-14). Again, Johns sees in the gardens and palaces of the Norman era evidence of a similar trend: during the reign of Roger II, new developments in cultural institutions suggest that the Normans began to look to the greater Arabic-speaking world for appropriate ways to express their power and celebrate their realm (Johns, "I re normanni," 21-26).

The hybrid nature of Sicilian culture, and the difficulty it poses to modern Western historians attempting to read it, result from the Normans' reluctance to see their kingdom as an extension of any one mainland kingdom; from their idea (if my readings in this study are accurate) that in the future the island would emerge as a "mainland" unto itself. the seat of a rich kingdom with ties throughout the Mediterranean; from their appropriation of Islamic cultural idioms and institutions in the construction of a Norman civic culture. With the Norman invasions, a Muslim colony broke its administrative ties with the greater Muslim world, and became a Christian territory. However, the Normans did not bring an end to Sicily's Muslim cultural institutions, but continued to exploit them, updating and adapting them to serve their own purposes. The island became a Mediterranean kingdom where, as in al-Andalus, Muslims and Christians cohabited.¹⁸ In Sicily, however, Christian rulers celebrated themselves and their kingdom using the language and the cultural conventions of the Muslim world. The dual nature of Sicilian cultural expression is reflected in al-Buthayrî's Arabic panegyric for the King of the Caesars, in al-Atrâbanishî's

¹⁸Abraham Udovitch makes the point, relevant to this discussion, that Norman rule did not bring an end to travel between Sicily and various parts of the Muslim world: he uses the Geniza documents to demonstrate that Muslim and Jewish merchants and men of culture continued to travel from North Africa to Sicily, throughout the years of Norman domination ("New Materials for the History of Islamic Sicily": see esp. 194, 196).

love song to the doubled garden, and in the anxious tones of Ibn Jubayr's and 'Imâd al-Dîn's response to Sicilian cultural developments. If the Siculo-Norman experiment had endured, if the Siculo-Norman vision of Sicily's place in the world had had a chance to mature, it might have produced a monument as magnificent as the Alhambra, and even stranger to the modern eye than La Zisa, the Cuba, or the fragments of Arabic panegyric dating to the Norman period. But the "Golden Age" of the Norman era, measuring it from the first year of Roger II's reign (1130) to the end of William II's (1189), lasted no longer than an individual's lifespan. And when the Norman rule ended, when Frederick II ascended to the Sicilian throne, the desire to see Sicily as a discrete land ended as well, and the ties that linked Sicily to Christian Europe were to become primary.

الإدريسي ١

وله في داخله بساتين كثيرة ومنتزهات عجيبة وسقايات ماء عذبة جارية مجلوبة إليها من الجبل المحدقة

الإدريسي ٢

فكم مراتب فخر شيد أركانها وكم مزايا همم أطلع أقمارها ونور أقطارها وصير حدائقها روضا زهيا وغرسا زكيا

ابن جبير

تنظم بلبتها قصوره انتظام العقود في غور الكواعب، ويتقلب من بساتينها وميادينها بين نزهة وملاعب

الأطرابنشي

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| ١ | فواره البحرين جمعت النى | عيش يطيب ومنظر يستعظم |
| ٢ | قسمت مياهك في جداول تسعة | يا حبذا جريانها المتقسم |
| ٣ | في ملتقى بحريك مغترك الهوى | وعلى خليجيك الغرام مخيم |
| ٤ | لله بحر النخلتين وما حوى ال | بحر المشيد به المقام الأعظم |
| ٥ | وكان ماء الفرعين وصفوة | در مذاب والبيضة عندم |
| ٦ | وكان أغصان الرياض تطاولت | ترنو إلى سمك المياه وتبسم |
| ٧ | والخوت يسبح في صفاء مياهها | والطير بين رياضها يترنم |
| ٨ | وكان نارنج الجزيرة إذ زها | نار على قضب الزبرجد تضرم |
| ٩ | وكانما الليمون صفرة عاشق | قد بات من ألم النوى يتألم |
| ١٠ | والنخلتان كعاشقين استخلصا | حذر العدى حصنا منيعا منهم |
| ١١ | أو رية علقتهما فتطاولا | يتهيان ظنون من يتوهم |
| ١٢ | يا نخلتي بخري بلرم سقيتما | صوب الحيا بتواصل لا يصرم |
| ١٣ | هنيئما مر الزمان ونلتما | كل الأمانى والحوادث نؤم |
| ١٤ | بالله فينا واسترا أهل الهوى | فبأمن ظلكما الهوى يتحرم |
| ١٥ | هذا العيان بلا امتراء إنما | سمع الكيان زخارف تنوهم |

ابن خفاجة ١

- | | | |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| ٢ | والأرض فضية الآفاق تحسبها | شمطاء حاسرة قد مسها الكبير |
| ٣ | فكل نجد ووهدي قد أطل به | روض تخلي بتور ما له ثمر |
| ٤ | وللأقاحي ثغور فيه باسمه | لها من الثلج ريق بارد خصر |
| ٥ | كأن في الجوّ أشجاراً منورة | هب النسيم عليها فهي تنثر |

عماد الدين ١

أورد له في وصف متنزه المعتزية المعروف بالقوارة

البشري ١

- | | | |
|---|----------------------|---------------------|
| ٢ | واشرب على وقع المثلث | ني والأغاني المعبدة |
| ٣ | ما عيشة تصفو سوى | بذرى صقلية هنيه |
| ٤ | في دولة أربت على | دول الملوك القيصريه |

البشري ٢

- | | | |
|----|---------------------|---------------------|
| ٩ | وبها رجار نعى العلى | ملك الملوك القيصريه |
| ١٠ | في طيب عيش دائم | ومشاهد فيها شهيه |

عماد الدين ٢

واقصرت من القصيدين على ما أوردته لأنهما في مدح الكفار فما أثبتته

ابن خفاجة ٢

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| ١ | يا أهل أندلس لله دركم | ماء وظل وأنهار وأشجار |
| ٢ | ما جنة الخلد إلا في دياركم | وهذه كنت لو خيرت أختار |
| ٣ | لا تتقوا بعدها أن تدخلوا سقرا | فليس تدخل تعد الجنة النار |

أبو حفص

- ١ طلب السلو لو ان غير سعادته
٢ ورجا زيارة طيفها في صدها
٣ والله لولا الملك رجار الذي
...
٥ يهتر للجدوى اهتزاز مهند
٦ ويضيء في الديجور صبح جينه
٧ ومطالع الجوزاء أرض خيامه
٨ وإذا الأمور تشابهت فلقضيه
...
٩ يا أيها الملك الذي ثبت به
١٠ ودعته أرواح العدى فرمى بها
- حلت سويدا قلبه وفؤاده
وغرامه يأبى لذيذ رقاده
أهدى لحيه عظيم وداده
...
يهتر في كفيه يوم جلاده
فتخال ضوء الشمس من حساده
والنجم والقمران من أوتاده
خط يبيض سودها بمداده
...
قدما الفظاظ في صفا أصلاده
لعبا تلقتها ظنى أعماده

بنو رواحة ١

- ١ بقيت ووقيت الرداء وكفيته
٢ ايا ملكا جالت اساطيل جيشه
ووقفت للدنيا ووقفت الاخرى
فاعظمت القتلى واكثر الاسرى

بنو رواحة ٢

- ٨ تركتهم والله يعلم أنهم
٩ مغاليس في ضرر وشم ملست
١٠ ولو أنهم اسرى لكانوا بعبطة
باضيق حال لا يزيد به العمرا
اشد من الاسرى فيا ليتهم اسرا
فانا لديكم لا نجوع ولا نعرا

عبد الحليم

- ١ عشقت صقلية يافعا
٢ فما قدر الوصل الكتهلت
وكانت كبعض جنان الخلود
وصارت جهنم ذات الوقود

أبو موسى ١

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| ١ | يا بني الأصفر أنتم بدمي | منكم القاتل لي والمستريح |
| ٢ | أملح هجر من يهواكم | وحلال ذاك في دين المسيح |
| ٣ | يا عليل الطرف من غير ضئ | وإذا لاحظ قلباً فصحيح |
| ٤ | كل شيء بعدما أبصرتكم | من صنوف الحسن في عيني قبيح |

أبو موسى ٢

وقال في جارية مصفرة اللون بديعة الحسن:

- | | | |
|---|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| ١ | فضح الهوى دمعي وعيل تصبري | بخريدة ترنو بعيني جؤذر |
| ٢ | صفراء تولع بالبياض لباسها | وخمارها بمعصفرات الآخر |
| ٣ | فكانها في درعها وخمارها ال | مبيض والمحمر عند المنظر |
| ٤ | ياقوتة كسيت صفيحة فضة | وتوجت صفح العقيق الأحمر |

ابن حمديس ١

- | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| ٦ | لقدرت أرضي أن تعود لقومها | فساءت ظنوني ثم أصبحت يائسا |
| ٧ | وعزيت فيها النفس لما رأيتها | تكابد داء قاتل السم ناحسا |
| ٨ | وكيف وقد سيمت هوأنا وصيرت | مساجدها أيدي النصارى كنائسا |

ابن حمديس ٢

- | | | |
|----|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| ١١ | صقلية كاذ الزمان بلادها | وكانت على أهل الزمان محاربا |
|----|-------------------------|-----------------------------|

ابن حمديس ٣

- | | | |
|-----|-----------------------|----------------------|
| ٣٢ | ذكرت صقلية والأسى | يُهيج للنفس تذكاريها |
| ... | | |
| ٣٤ | فإن كنت أخرجت من جنّة | فإني أحدث أخبارها |
| ... | | |
| ٣٧ | فلا تعظم لديك الذنوب | فما زال ربك غفّارها |

Auerbach and the Idea of Vernacular Culture

In his essay "The Western Public and Its Language,"¹ Erich Auerbach recounts the history of the literary language in Western Europe between late Antiquity and the late Middle Ages, tracing the decline of Latin as the single medium for literary composition, and the rise of the Romance vernaculars. He describes the enervation of the Latin literary tradition as the result of the disjuncture between Latin and the spoken languages of the literary public. The Carolingian reform elevated the Latin of antiquity as the model for literary composition. "The consequence," he writes, "was an irrevocable cleavage between written Latin and the popular tongues. Latin lived on as an international organ of cultural life, as a language without any corresponding popular idiom from which to draw new life" (254). With the vernacular revolutions of the later Middle Ages, new literary languages were created out of the raw materials of the various spoken languages. Auerbach's essay traces the development of these languages as vehicles for literary composition, as "little by little they rose to maturity and in the end fashioned a literary public of their own" (277).

¹ In *Literary Language and Its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*. 237-336.

Having sketched this narrative – the separation of the literary language from the languages of daily life, the isolation and decline of the Latin tradition, the creation of the new literary languages that would replace Latin – Auerbach surveys the Latin and vernacular literatures of the Middle Ages through a series of readings remarkable in both their breadth and their nuance. In this chapter, I will not be interested in the details of Auerbach's discussion of medieval literatures. Rather, I will use the narrative that serves as the foundation of his literary history as a point of departure for my own readings, in order to explore the relation between the literary history of Sicily and contemporary trends emerging elsewhere in Europe.

Auerbach's formulation in "The Western Public and Its Language" is designed to account for a binary opposition between a formal, written language and the spoken language of daily life. Auerbach discusses or touches on a number of vernacular traditions, but his readings focus on the discrete competitions between these languages and literary Latin. The broad outline of the drama he recounts remains appropriate in a discussion of the Sicilian situation. In Sicily, as in other parts of Europe, literary culture struggled to define its relation to the complex linguistic realities of daily life. But a literary history of Sicily during the Norman and Hohenstaufen periods must add a third dimension to Auerbach's formulation, in order to account for interactions between a number of literary and linguistic cultures. Arabic, Latin, and Greek traditions converged in Sicily; the interaction between spoken and literary languages was augmented by an interaction between diverse literary/linguistic paradigms.

Such linguistic complexity was not unique to Sicily. The Iberian peninsula witnessed similar struggles between Arabic and Romance traditions. And students of other literatures may recognize parallels between developments in southern Europe and the competition in other regions between Germanic, Celtic, Anglo-Saxon, and Romance traditions. But when scholars of European literary history acknowledge these dramas, they often consider them to be marginal to the greater narrative of literary development in the

Christian West, which is characterized by the disintegration of the Latin literary tradition and the subsequent emergence of the vernacular literatures. Auerbach discusses literary development on the Iberian peninsula in this passage:

From the very start the Iberian peninsula was in a special situation, for there the Romance popular idioms had to contend not with the unchallenged domination of Latin but with several languages which served both for spoken and written expression and had developed in a variety of ways. In Andalusia, with its elegant and colorful popular culture, Mozarabic Spanish came into contact with other languages: the Arabs and Jews adopted it, employing it, for purposes of entertainment, in the poetic forms of their own languages, and it seems likely that Romance poetry was nowhere committed to writing so soon as here, within the frame of the Arabic and Hebrew *muwaššas*. In the Spanish Middle Ages Latin was not the uncontested written language . . . (320)

Auerbach's goal is to follow a thread of literary development from Latin Antiquity to the emergence of the Indo-European vernacular literatures in late medieval Europe. In this context, the literary culture of al-Andalus functions as an occlusion, or an interruption, of another literary history. Auerbach will not discuss literary development in al-Andalus further, except to mention the evidence the Romance-language *kharjas* provide regarding the development of a Romance vernacular lyric tradition in the Iberian peninsula (340).

In this chapter, I will build on Auerbach's basic narrative by discussing ideas about vernacular culture in late medieval Europe, in order to provide a framework for evaluating developments in Sicily. During the reign of Roger II, Sicilian court poets wrote in Arabic; during the reign of Frederick II, less than a century later, Sicilian court poets wrote in Italian. By looking at the use of "official" languages in Sicily, and at works written in other parts of Europe regarding the language of poetry, I will work to construct a critical methodology able to address the relation between those two bodies of poetry. Some of the innovative ideas that emerge in these readings would be fundamental to subsequent literary development. But others would disappear without having a lasting impact on literary or cultural history. Taken together, these readings will compose not a connected narrative history of the birth of vernacular culture in Europe, but a kaleidoscopic portrait

of the strategies, both successful and flawed, used to respond to similar literary problems in different parts of Europe during the late Middle Ages.

In al-Andalus, in Provence, and in Sicily, between the tenth and the thirteenth centuries, poets drew on spoken vernaculars to invent new literary languages. After an initial period of literary innovation, others wrote accounts of the poets' works, in the form of literary histories, poetic manuals, or grammars. These treatises document the stages by which later generations sifted through the innovations introduced by the earlier poets, and strove to preserve and develop further those which seemed to have a lasting relevance and efficacy. I will read two such literary-historical studies – Ibn Khaldūn's description of Andalusian poetry and Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia* – in order to gauge the broader cultural response to the poets' linguistic experiments. There is not room, in this study, to survey the vast cultural and linguistic questions which are raised by these works. My readings of them will be focused on the information they provide concerning two main issues, the first literary-historical, and the second methodological.

Both Ibn Khaldūn and Dante analyze linguistically innovative poetry not by opposing it to a single, formal literary language, but by describing the regional uniqueness of each form, and contrasting the various forms to each other. That is, their discussions do not focus on a binary opposition between the written language and the vernacular, but attempt to characterize the particular by opposing it to a plurality of variants. Auerbach's narrative – the alienation of a literary language from the language spoken by its public; the invention of a new literary language, incorporating elements of the spoken tongue, to replace it – remains relevant to these accounts. But they add an important new dimension to Auerbach's formulation, demonstrating the importance of interaction between diverse literary/linguistic paradigms in the development of new literary languages during the late Middle Ages.

The methodological issue raised by these readings of Ibn Khaldūn and Dante is peripheral to the history of Sicilian poetry, but should be of interest to scholars studying

the history of the Arabic poetry written in Europe during the Middle Ages, and in particular to those who are interested in the question of literary contact between Hispano-Arabic and Occitan poets. I undertake a comparative reading of the treatises on the *muwashshah* and lyric poetry in the Romance vernaculars as an experiment. These works are not typically read together. I will parallel them here in part to demonstrate that they do share certain common concerns, that they respond to similar fundamental problems and that the solutions they offer to those problems are similar.

I will conclude with a discussion of the linguistic resources of medieval Sicily, and the use that was made of those resources during the Norman period and the early years of Frederick II's reign. We have no literary-historical evidence describing attitudes toward literary language in Sicily during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. However, information can be gleaned regarding Sicilian thinking about vernacular culture by looking at non-literary sources. In this chapter, I will consider the coins produced in Sicily between the era of Robert Guiscard, who mounted the first Norman invasions of Sicily, and the era of Frederick II. The inscriptions on these coins monitor changing ideas about the languages considered appropriate for communication with the coins' users – their *public*, to use Auerbach's term. Thus they provide insight into the competition between literary/ linguistic paradigms within Sicily.

Auerbach's account of the relation between spoken and literary languages, and the importance of interaction between the two languages in the development of literature during the Middle Ages, remains indispensable to students of literary history. In order to address the complexity of literary development in regions like al-Andalus and Sicily, however, Auerbach's fundamental account must be augmented. In the passage on the literary languages of al-Andalus quoted above Auerbach acknowledges the complexity of linguistic reality in one region and during one era of medieval history. The evolution of literary languages in particular, and of the languages of culture in general, in Sicily compels the literary historian to consider such complexity not as parenthetical to literary

development, but as a constitutive factor in that development, even though subsequent thinkers would deem some of the details of the Sicilians' linguistic experimentation irrelevant.

Arabic "vernacular" culture

The idea of vernacular culture outlined in Auerbach's essay is anomalous in the Arabic context. To the present day, the division between the formal written language and the spoken languages of daily life is maintained in the Arabic-speaking world: colloquial Arabic is not written, and the written language is not spoken, except in formal situations.² Formal written Arabic is not completely static. It has been influenced by the linguistic cultures with which the Arabs have come in contact – by Persian literature during the 'Abbasid period, for instance, and by European literatures during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But Arabic literary culture is fundamentally conservative, and the literary language has changed remarkably little between the era when its first monuments – the pre-Islamic poetry and the Qur'an – were recorded, and the present time.

Given this fundamental difference between the Arabic and Romance vernacular paradigms, it is tantalizing to consider the parallels between the emergence of the Romance vernacular literary cultures, and the development of new Arabic poetic forms, the *muwashshah* and the *zajal*, in al-Andalus. The *muwashshah* is a strophic poem written in classical Arabic,³ which concludes with a *kharja*, a stanza generally written in colloquial

² The exception to this generalization, arguably, is the literature of Malta. Maltese is an Arabic dialect with a large number of Italian loan-words. Though certainly anomalous – it is written in the Latin alphabet, and the Maltese are Christians – a case may be made for Maltese language and literature as being the only colloquial Arabic literary tradition.

³ The *muwashshah* was also adopted by Andalusian Hebrew poets, and many of the pioneering modern studies of the form focus on works in Hebrew.

Arabic, or in a language other than Arabic. Medieval Arabic scholars report that the first muwashshahs were written in al-Andalus at the beginning of the tenth century AD. The zajal imitated the basic structure of the muwashshah, with certain differences, but was written in the colloquial, spoken Arabic of al-Andalus.⁴ Samuel Miklos Stern's studies of the muwashshahs introduced the form to modern scholars; in 1948, Stern published an article in which he identified in certain kharjas an attempt to write the spoken Romance dialect of al-Andalus.⁵

The polemic that erupted in the wake of Stern's publication responded both to the essential difficulty of the texts, and to the ambiguous, and potentially revolutionary, significance of his discovery. The kharjas are recorded in unvowelled Arabic texts. And because the manuscripts in which they survive were produced at a historical and geographic distance from the environment in which the poems were originally written, we can assume that the scribes were copying works whose meaning was not at all clear to them, and would inevitably have introduced errors into their transcriptions. Thus the linguistic interpretation of the texts we possess becomes an extremely complex task. Even more problematic, however, is the question of the literary-historical significance of the muwashshah. In the years since Stern's studies were published, scholars have keenly, and at times contentiously, asserted and refuted the idea that the muwashshah is proof of

⁴ See, however, Jarir A. Abu-Haidar, "The Language of the Zajal – Is It Vernacular?", for a refutation of the notion that the language of the zajal is truly "vernacular." Abu-Haidar notes that the zajals of Ibn Quzmān, the master of the genre, are full of classicisms, and concludes that the zajal balances colloquialism and classicism in order to achieve a kind of burlesque of literary conventions.

⁵ Stern's studies of muwashshahs are collected in the volume *Hispano-Arabic Strophic Poetry*. The first publication of his translations of Romance kharjas, "Les vers finaux en espagnol dans les muwaššahs hispano-hebraïques: une contribution à l'histoire du muwaššah et à l'étude du vieux dialecte espagnol 'mozarabe,'" originally appeared in *Al-Andalus*, vol. XIII. It was subsequently translated into English and included in *Hispano-Arabic Strophic Poetry*.

See, however, Armistead, "A Brief History of Kharja Studies," 8, for interpretations of Romance kharjas in Hebrew muwashshahs that predate Stern's studies. Stern was not the first to translate the Romance kharjas; but his studies were the first that inspired a broad and vigorous response from other scholars.

literary contact between the Romance- and Arabic-speaking populations of the Iberian peninsula, and thus suggests that the two literatures could have influenced each other.

The questions of origin or influence that often inform muwashshah-scholarship will not interest me in this study; instead, I will focus on broader, comparative issues. I will discuss the accounts of the muwashshah in order to explore the parallels between the reception of the Andalusian poetic form in the Arabic-speaking world, and the reception of Romance vernacular poetry in the Latin world. It seems reasonable to assert, despite all the uncertainties that still cloud our understanding of the muwashshah, that it was perceived by those who wrote about it as different in important ways from conventional Arabic poetry. It was identified with a certain kind of linguistic experimentation. It was originally perceived as a regional literary form. And certain of the innovations that it introduced were ultimately absorbed by the larger Arabic-speaking world. The works that I will consider in this chapter represent stages in the assimilation of the muwashshah, the steps by which Arabic culture identified and classified the innovative form that had developed in al-Andalus, and preserved those aspects of it that seemed to be of lasting value. The parallels that I will identify between the reception of the muwashshah by the larger Arabic-speaking world and the reception of Romance-vernacular poetry in Latin Europe do not constitute direct literary influence between the Arabic speakers and the Romance speakers who lived in the Iberian peninsula. But they suggest that Auerbach's formulation summarized above, tracing the decline of literary Latin and the rise of the Romance vernaculars as literary languages, may serve as well to characterize certain literary developments in al-Andalus, and that the Arabic poets who originated the muwashshah and brought the form to perfection responded to urges fundamentally similar to those that inspired the Romance poets of Latin Europe.

We possess a number of works written by medieval Arabic scholars describing the nature, origin, and development of the muwashshah. The earliest was written by Ibn Bassâm (d. 1147), who compiled a four-volume collection of poetry from his native al-

Andalus (*Al-Dhakhîra fî mahâsin ahl al-Jazîra* [A treasure-trove of the beauties of the people of al-Andalus]). He did not include muwashshahs in this anthology, but he described the form in passing, in order to account for his omission. His statements, though brief, are tantalizing, and have been the focus of some scrutiny by modern scholars. The Andalusian philosopher Averroes (1126-1198) touches on the poetic forms in a passage from his commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics*. Ibn Sanâ' al-Mulk (1155-1211), who lived in Cairo for most of his life, was the first Easterner to compose muwashshahs. He wrote an *ars poetica* of the form (*Dâr al-Tirâz* [The House of Embroidery]) which remains a valuable, though problematic, resource for scholars of Andalusian muwashshah. As far as we know, Ibn Sanâ' al-Mulk never travelled to al-Andalus. His study is the earliest stylistic analysis we possess, but is not necessarily an accurate reflection of the conception of the muwashshah that was current in al-Andalus during the period of its initial invention and development. Finally, Ibn Khaldûn (1332-82) includes an account of the muwashshah and related poetic forms in his monumental work *Al-Muqaddima* (*The Introduction to History*). Perhaps because his interests are more general than the other two writers' – while their focus is explicitly literary, Ibn Khaldûn is concerned with broader historical issues – and despite the fact that he wrote from a greater historical distance, Ibn Khaldûn gives us the fullest account of the environment in which the muwashshah and the zajal developed. Therefore, I will focus on his description in this chapter, making brief references, where relevant, to the works of Ibn Bassâm, Ibn Sanâ' al-Mulk, and Averroes.

Ibn Khaldûn begins his account of the muwashshah by identifying it as the chief poetic achievement for which the Andalusians were known in the greater Arabic-speaking world, and by hailing it as a significant poetic innovation:

In al-Andalus, poetry developed, and its forms and varieties were refined. Elaborate composition reached an apogee among the Andalusians. Modern [poets] among them invented a new form which they call the muwashshah.

Arabic text, 767 (See Appendix p. 121, Ibn Khaldûn #1); English tr., 440

In this brief statement, Ibn Khaldûn confirms the regional specificity associated with the muwashshah: he – like all the other commentators mentioned above – identifies it as an Andalusian form. And he indicates that it constitutes a noteworthy formal innovation, an *invention*, significant for its difference from conventional Arabic poetic forms. He will use the same verb later in this chapter to characterize the appearance of the zajal, stating that Andalusian poets “invented” (*istahādathā*) these new forms. Ibn Bassâm and Averroes, too, tell us that the new poetic forms were invented by the poets of al-Andalus, though they use different verbs.⁶ The standard meaning of the adjective that Ibn Khaldûn uses to describe the muwashshah poets (*al-muta’akhhirîna*) which I have translated as “modern,” is “recent.” Clearly, when Ibn Khaldûn uses the word in this context, he is not drawing on its narrow temporal significance. He will go on to identify the inventor of the new form as Muqaddam Ibn Mu’âfir al-Qabrîrî, who lived some four and a half centuries earlier (Ar. 767, Eng. 440). In a literary context, the word Ibn Khaldûn uses to describe the muwashshah poets can evoke a contrast, expressed or implied, with the term *al-mutaqaddimîna* (“preceding” or “antecedent”); in this usage it denotes “post-classical” authors (Wehr/Cowan, s.v. *a-kh-r*). Ibn Sanâ’ al-Mulk, in introducing the muwashshah to the readers of his *ars poetica*, will use the same term, stating that “modern writers precede (or outstrip) classical writers by means of this (new poetic form)” (*wa sabaqa bihi al-muta’akhhir^a al-mutaqaddim^a*) (Arabic text, 29; Spanish tr., 29). The early commentators on the muwashshah agree in identifying it as an Andalusian invention; they attribute to the form a sense of modernity and of regional specificity.

The characteristic that Ibn Khaldûn most celebrates in the muwashshah is its “ease,” its lack of “artificiality.” He records a charming statement, attributed to the muwashshah poet Ibn Ḥazmûn, describing the primary importance of ease of diction in the composition of the muwashshah: “A muwashshah is not a muwashshah until it is free

⁶ Ibn Bassâm uses the verb *ikhtara’a* (469); Averroes uses the verb *istamabata* (Ar. 61; Eng. 63-64).

of artificiality (*or mannerism*)" (Ar. 772; Eng. 448 [See Appendix p. 121, Ibn Khaldûn #2]). When his companion asks for an elucidation of this statement, Ibn Hazmûn responds by quoting verses from a muwashshah he has written. Ibn Khaldûn considers the notion of "ease" so essential to the muwashshah that he introduces it at the very beginning of his chapter on Andalusian poetry. Here he is discussing the early development of the form in al-Andalus:

They strove with each other for excellence in this [poetry], and all the people found it charming, both the upper classes and the common people, because it was limpid and easy to grasp [*lit.*: because of the ease of grasping it and the nearness of its path].

Arabic text, 767 (See Appendix, p. 121, Ibn Khaldûn #3); English tr. 440

The precise nature of the "ease" to which Ibn Khaldûn alludes is difficult to pin down. He, like Ibn Hazmûn, resorts to quotation in order to illustrate it for his readers. Averroes also makes reference to the "ease" of the Andalusian poetic forms, calling them "natural poetries" (*al-ash'ar al-ṭabī'iyya*) because in them poetry is united with music: they are sung (Ar. 61; Eng. 64). Ibn Khaldûn's notion of "ease" is more ambiguous. In this introductory passage, however, he suggests that it constitutes for him an essential aspect of the innovation initiated by the poets of al-Andalus: the modern poetic form he describes became popular because the literary public responded with enthusiasm to its "ease."

When Ibn Khaldûn discusses the zajal, he will again take up the idea of "ease." He will again state that Andalusian poets produced remarkable and innovative works by striving to attain eloquence using the accessible new medium they have developed. And he will introduce a theme that will occupy him for the rest of his discussion, an explicit focus on the language used by these modern poets. This passage marks the transition between Ibn Khaldûn's treatments of the muwashshah and the zajal:

This muwashshah-craft spread among the people of al-Andalus. The common people took it up, because of its ease and the elegance of its vocabulary and its ornamentation. The common people in the towns followed in their footsteps, and composed poetry in this manner in their city-dialects, without adhering to the declensional endings [of classical Arabic]. They invented a form which they called

the zajal, and they continue to compose in this form to the present day. They have achieved marvels in this form, and have produced works of great eloquence, using their non-Arabic tongues [*lit.* and there has been widened within this form a scope for eloquence according to their non-Arabic tongues].

Arabic text, 778 (See Appendix, p. 121, Ibn Khaldûn #4); English tr. 454

The zajal, in his telling, constitutes both a departure from and a continuation of the innovations introduced by the muwashshah. As the muwashshah poets invented a "modern" literary form that distinguished their works from traditional Arabic poetry, so the zajal poets departed from the conventions established by the muwashshah poets. The aspect of the zajal that most interests Ibn Khaldûn is its linguistic innovation. He states that the zajal poets developed a new form of poetry by adapting the muwashshah to accommodate elements of their spoken dialects, and that they then strove successfully to produce eloquent works in the genre they invented.

Reference to the other early accounts of the muwashshah and related poetic forms indicates that Ibn Khaldûn's focus on the linguistic aspects of these forms is not typical. Ibn Sanâ' al-Mulk and Ibn Bassâm, in their discussions of the muwashshah, mention the different linguistic registers that were usually introduced into the *kharija*, the final stanza of the poem. But linguistic difference is not the focus of their accounts, as it becomes for Ibn Khaldûn. Ibn Bassâm is explicitly concerned with defining the difference between the muwashshah and traditional Arabic poetry. He justifies his decision to exclude muwashshah from his anthology of Andalusian poetry in this sentence:

The meters of these muwashshahs are beyond the scope of this work, since most of them do not follow the prosody of the Arabs.⁷

(See Appendix p. 121, Ibn Bassâm #1)

Ibn Bassâm's purpose is to compose a record of the literary culture of al-Andalus. He, like Ibn Khaldûn, recognizes the difference between the "modern" works of the muwashshah-poets and classical Arabic poetry; his decision to edit muwashshahs out of his anthology

⁷ Ar. 470. For a translation of the brief passage in which Ibn Bassâm discusses the muwashshah, see Armistead and Monroe, 1985, 224-225. Monroe discusses the passage at length and offers several revised translations; he also includes, in an appendix, eight previously published translations into European languages.

arises from his awareness of this difference. But the salient difference for him is not linguistic, but metrical: muwashshah poetry incorporates prosodic forms that are not used in classical Arabic poetry.

Ibn Khaldûn will go on from his discussion of the zajal to talk about poetry written in other parts of the Arabic-speaking world that incorporates elements of local, colloquial language. After discussing and citing muwashshah-like poetry written by poets from the Maghrib and from Baghdad, he concludes the chapter with a comment that affirms his keen interest in the muwashshah-poets' linguistic experimentation:

It should be known that literary taste, regarding the recognition of eloquence, comes to one who is immersed in the language in question, and who uses it constantly, and has spoken it amongst its people, until he acquires mastery of it, as we said in the case of the Arabic language.

Arabic text, 790 (See Appendix p. 122, Ibn Khaldûn #5); English tr. 479

Ibn Khaldûn had begun this chapter by suggesting that his topic will be the poetries of al-Andalus. By the time the chapter closes his focus has shifted significantly. His essay has become a survey of linguistic experimentation by poets throughout the Arabic-speaking world. Before reviewing the trajectory of Ibn Khaldûn's discussion, however, I will address another theme implicit in the passage just cited: the integration of the innovations introduced by the Andalusian poets into Arabic literature.

Ibn Khaldûn expresses enthusiasm throughout this chapter for the achievement of the poets writing in the new forms he describes. In the opening sentence of the chapter (quoted above, page 84), he states, "Elaborate composition reached an apogee among the Andalusians;" he then introduces the muwashshah, suggesting that it is chief among the compositional triumphs of the Andalusians. When he turns to the zajal, he affirms that Andalusian poets "have achieved marvels in this form, and have produced works of great eloquence" (quoted above, page 87). His approbation implies an acceptance of the innovative forms as valid, modern literary developments. Even Ibn Bassâm acknowledges

the power of the new poetry, opening his brief treatment of the muwashshah with a famous and much-quoted line:

Upon hearing them, closely guarded bosoms – and even hearts! – are shattered.
Arabic text, 469 (See Appendix p. 122, Ibn Bassâm #2)

This elliptical statement may imply moral condemnation, as easily as admiration. But for evidence of unambiguous acceptance of the muwashshah as a new and valid poetic genre, we need look no further than Ibn Sanâ' al-Mulk, whose study of the form was intended to aid poets who wished to imitate the works of the Andalusians, and thus represents a wholehearted affirmation of the literary value of the new genre. Ibn Bassâm, the earliest of the writers I have discussed, responds to the muwashshah with a certain hesitation, and makes a careful distinction between it and the classical poetry of the Arabs. Ibn Sanâ' al-Mulk, the next writer in chronological order, produces an *ars poetica* of the muwashshah, and thus bears witness to its growing literary acceptance. Ibn Khaldûn affirms its acceptance by admiring the achievement of the poets who have used the form, and studies it in order to understand and describe its peculiar charm.

In the passage from the conclusion of the chapter on the muwashshah and the zajal quoted above, Ibn Khaldûn affirms the eloquence of local vernaculars, and draws a parallel between vernacular eloquence and eloquence in formal, written Arabic. This statement implies an acceptance of the linguistically experimental poems he has discussed as literary works comparable to classical Arabic poetry. It also suggests that, for Ibn Khaldûn, the fundamental literary significance of Andalusian poetry lay in the possibility it opened up for linguistic experimentation. Ibn Khaldûn began this chapter with the phrase *wa-amma ahl al-Andalus* (literally, "and as for the people of al-Andalus...."), implying that his subject matter will be the poets of al-Andalus. He introduces the first literary innovation inaugurated by modern Andalusian poets, the muwashshah, and identifies it with a new sense of "ease" and accessibility, in the opening sentences of the chapter. His discussion of the muwashshah, however, includes examples of the genre written by non-Andalusian

poets; his topic has broadened to include responses to the Andalusian innovation produced by poets from other parts of the Arabic-speaking world. When he turns to the *zajal*, he returns to al-Andalus, repeats the themes of innovation and ease, and introduces a new theme: linguistic experimentation. The remainder of the chapter surveys parallel forms of linguistic experimentation written by Andalusian, Baghdadi, and Maghribi poets. In his concluding remarks, he celebrates vernacular eloquence in its discrete, regional forms. The development of his argument suggests that his primary concern is not to produce a *précis* of Andalusian poetry, nor even of a particular, innovative Andalusian poetic form. Rather, his intent is to discuss the emergence of modern poetic forms, which appeared first in al-Andalus and then spread to other parts of the Arabic-speaking world, and are associated with accessibility and with a specific linguistic innovation, the incorporation of elements of local colloquial tongues.

Auerbach, in his discussion of the rise of the vernacular literatures in medieval Europe, describes a situation that is in many regards similar to the development outlined by Ibn Khaldûn. Vernacular poets produced works that were "easier" and more accessible. These works were marked by a focus on new subject matter (most notably, the courtly love theme) and by the invention of new stanzaic forms. But the most salient innovation introduced in this poetry was the use of the spoken tongue, rather than Latin, as a vehicle for formal literary composition. The modern poets vied, in competition with each other and with literary history, to achieve eloquence in the genres they invented. Ibn Khaldûn writes that the first composers of *muwashshahs* "strove with each other for excellence in this [poetry]" (see above, page 86). And he states with approval that the *zajal* poets "have achieved marvels in this form, and have produced works of great eloquence" (see above, page 87). James Monroe, in an essay on the *muwashshah*, speculates that "the cultural and political rivalry existing between East and West probably was one of the important factors which led Andalusian poets to invent a formal innovation such as the *muwashshaha*, thus freeing themselves from the burden of Oriental traditionalism in poetry" (Monroe, *The*

Muwashshahat, 21). In a similar way, according to Auerbach, Dante when writing the *Divine Comedy* strove to produce a monument that could surpass the works of other regional vernacular poets, and stand alongside the literary works of Latin antiquity. Such competition is, of course, common to all authors, wherever and whenever they write. The parallel between the medieval Arabic and medieval Romance writers, however, is striking because of the similarity of the traditions against which the modern writers were pitted. Both groups wrote innovative poetry which addressed the disjuncture between the language of literature and the language of daily life; both used the spoken language to give their poetry a new vitality. And both strove to produce works, using these new languages and poetic forms, which could be deemed as eloquent as more linguistically conventional poetry.

If there are structural similarities between medieval Arabic and Romance literary experimentation, however, there is one definitive difference between the two traditions. The regional languages which were first used as a literary vehicle by the Romance vernacular poets were to evolve into the languages of modern Europe. After the Renaissance, Latin literary culture would survive only in very limited environments: as a language of convenience for scientists and other intellectuals; as the language of the Roman church. The linguistic experimentation of the muwashshah poets, however, was to remain a discrete event, without revolutionary impact on Arabic literary culture. The muwashshah survives to the present day as a form of popular song. But formal, written Arabic remains a vital, living literary language in the Arabic-speaking world.

Ibn Khaldūn's chapter on the muwashshah and related poetic forms is the last of his monumental work *al-Muqaddima*. Reading over the comment with which he concludes that final chapter, one is struck by its open-endedness, the sense of possibility that it conveys. I give those concluding comments here in full:

It should be known that literary taste, regarding the recognition of eloquence, comes to one who is immersed in the language in question, and who uses it

constantly, and has spoken it amongst its people, until he acquires mastery of it, as we said in the case of the Arabic language. The Andalusian does not understand the eloquence of the poetry of the people of the Maghrib; and the Maghribi does not understand the eloquence of the poetry of the people of al-Andalus or of the East; and the Easterner does not understand the eloquence of the poetry of the people of al-Andalus or of the Maghrib. Rather, the local languages and their [literary] composition differ one from the other, and each person is aware of the eloquence of his own language and has a taste for the beauty of the poetry of his own people. "In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the differences of your languages and your colors, there are signs for those who understand." [Qur'an 30:22]

Arabic text, 790 (See Appendix p. 122, Ibn Khaldûn #6); English tr., 479-80

This extraordinary passage, with which Ibn Khaldûn closes the body of his work, is perhaps most remarkable for its lack of closure. It would be a mistake to overread Ibn Khaldûn's treatment of the discrete literary voices emerging within the Arabic tradition, to suggest that he is describing a literary/linguistic revolution parallel in its conception and intentions to the Romance vernacular revolution, one which differed only in its failure to transform Arabic literature. However, I would like to close this discussion of Ibn Khaldûn's treatment of the *muwashshah* and related literary forms by pointing out two of the themes that this passage opens up: first, his suggestion, simply stated but profound in its implications, that "vernacular eloquence" is comparable to eloquence in formal, literary Arabic. And secondly, his attention to regional difference, his attempt to define the regional voices that in their totality constitute the Arabic-speaking world by pointing out their difference from each other.

The *De vulgari eloquentia* and the Romance vernacular traditions

The literary critic Gianfranco Contini has argued, persuasively and influentially, that the works of Dante embody a sense of *plurality* that would subsequently disappear

from Italian literature. In one of the essays in which he addresses this issue, he states: "Of the most visible and summary attributes that pertain to Dante, the first is plurilingualism" (Contini, 171). Contini's notion of plurilingualism is broadly defined; he specifies that he refers not only to the fact that Dante wrote both in Latin and in Italian, but also to the wide range of literary styles and literary genres represented in his works. Dante's eclecticism, in Contini's reading of him, is a result of his life-long project of self-examination, which itself is the result of his struggle to define himself and his poetics against the plurality of possibilities which he recognized in his environment and in literary history. "There is no peace in him," Contini writes in another essay, "but the torment of the dialectic" (320). Throughout his life, in both his literary and literary-critical works, Dante engaged in a dialogue with Latin and Romance vernacular authors, seeking to understand what others had written before him and to define and defend the potential that he perceived for vernacular literature. The "dialectic" to which Contini refers is this constant interrogation of literary tradition, Dante's ongoing analysis and contextualization of his own work.

Auerbach's reading of Dante in his essay "The Western Public and Its Language" focuses on the struggle between Latin literary history and the new Italian vernacular literature witnessed in Dante's work. Dante's *Comedy* is singled out by Auerbach as a monument in the development of the Romance vernaculars. In it, Auerbach asserts, Dante demonstrated that the Italian language, no less than Latin, was able to express lofty ideas and to achieve sublime literary effects. Indeed, the tension between Latin tradition and Romance innovation is central to the *Comedy*, and to Dante's works in general. In this chapter, however, I will consider Dante's work in a different perspective, as a response not to the problem of Latin/vernacular *bilingualism*, but – taking a cue from Contini – to the problem of *plurilingualism*. In the century before him, Italian literature was written in Franco-Veneto, in Occitan, and in the Sicilian dialect. These Italian literatures – Italian because they were written on the Italian peninsula, not because they were written in

Italian – were produced by writers who were aware of, and engaged, the new literary traditions established in the Occitan and French works of the troubadors and the *trouvères*. Dante's idea of literary Italian is articulated in response to these other languages, as well as to the Latin tradition. In addition to attempting to produce a *modern* language as eloquent as the Latin of antiquity – the aspect of his work on which Auerbach's reading is focused – Dante also strove to define a *regional* language able to compete with the other regional literary languages of the Europe of his time. Herein, I will build on Auerbach's account of Dante's literary/linguistic project by shifting the terms of the discussion. Rather than focus on a binary opposition between Latin and Romance literatures, I will consider Dante's work in the context of European plurilingualism. And rather than approach Dante from a temporal perspective, as the central intellectual and literary figure in the creation of a modern European literary tradition, I will approach him from a synchronic, geographical perspective, addressing his awareness of his position in relation to the other literary traditions of his day.

My reading will center on Dante's most focused and technical treatment of language and literature, the *De vulgari eloquentia*. In this work, Dante discusses the Romance vernacular literatures of his era in general, and then turns to the problem of the Italian poetic vernacular in particular. Though it remained unfinished, the *De vulgari* is a monumental and subtle study of the difficulties and the potential of poetic composition in the spoken tongue. I will focus on one aspect of Dante's project: on his response to the plurilingualism of the tradition within which he wrote. My notion of plurilingualism will be more literal than Contini's. I will be interested in Dante's specific awareness of a plurality of other literary and linguistic traditions, and in his perception of their relevance to his work. Other writers before Dante had produced manuals of poetic composition. Though the *De vulgari eloquentia* differed from those works in important respects, Dante was certainly aware of and drew on them in conceiving his own study. I will refer briefly to Occitan grammatical and poetic manuals in my reading of Dante in order to

demonstrate the importance of a sense of plurilingualism to the earliest vernacular grammarians. Raimon Vidal's *Razos de trobar*, composed between 1190-1213, was the first grammatical work composed in or about a Romance vernacular language.⁸ Mallorcan Berenguer d'Anoia wrote his *Mirall de trobar* during the closing years of the thirteenth century or the first quarter of the fourteenth century.⁹ Both of these works bear witness to the tendency to define the linguistic and literary tradition which is the subject of study by opposing it to a plurality of comparable traditions.

At the beginning of the *De vulgari eloquentia*, Dante defines the language that will be the subject of his work first by characterizing it as "natural," and then by contrasting it with Latin, which is learned only through formal study. In this passage he introduces his conception of the vernacular:

vulgarem locutionem appellamus eam qua infantes assuefiunt ab assistentibus cum primitus distinguere voces incipiunt; vel, quod brevius dici potest, vulgarem locutionem asserimus quam sine omni regula nutricem imitantes accipimus. Est et inde alia locutio secundaria nobis, quam Romani gramaticam vocaverunt; hanc quidem secundariam Greci habent et alii, sed non omnes.¹⁰ Ad habitum vero huius pauci perveniunt, quia non nisi per spatium temporis et studii assiduitatem regulamur et doctrinamur in illa. (DVE I, i, 2 [p. 30])

We call "vernacular speech" that which infants become accustomed to from those around them when they first begin to distinguish words; or, more briefly stated, we assert that vernacular speech is that which we acquire by imitating our nurse, without any training. We also have also another, secondary language, which the Romans called the *gramatica*: this secondary language the Greeks possess, and others, but not all [peoples]. Few come to the possession of this language, however, because we are trained and schooled in it only by means of a lengthy and assiduous study.

The vernacular is our mother tongue, the language that we learn "sine omni regula" – literally, *without any rule* – as infants. In addition to this first language, we possess

⁸ Marshall's dating (Marshall, lxx).

⁹ Landoni's dating (Landoni, 126).

¹⁰ Mengaldo places a period after "vocaverunt" and a colon after "omnes." I have revised his punctuation, in order to better reflect the sense of the passage: Dante is arguing, first, that certain nations possess a vernacular and a *gramatica*; and secondly, that among the peoples who do possess a *gramatica*, there are few individuals who manage to learn it well.

"another, secondary language," one which is acquired only by those who undergo a demanding program of study in order to master it. His choice of words is judicious. The Latin word *secundarius*, like the English word "secondary," can mean both "subsequent" and "second-rate." Dante goes on to argue that of these two languages, the vernacular is the more noble, in part "because it is natural to us" ("quia naturalis est nobis"; DVE I, i, 4 [p. 30-32]).

In this introduction of the subject of his study, the comparative nature of Dante's argument is already evident. Dante specifies that the dual linguistic tradition he describes – the opposition of "natural" spoken language and learned formal language – is possessed by the Romans, the Greeks, "and others." Mengaldo, editor of the *De vulgari eloquentia*, indicates in his footnote to this passage that modern scholars believe that Dante is probably thinking of the Hebrew and Arabic traditions, and quotes Roger Bacon, who parallels the *grammatica* of the Greeks, the Hebrews, and the Arabs (DVE, 31, note 7). Identification of the "others" to whom Dante refers is less important, in the present context, than the nature of the methodology which he uses to set up his argument. Dante begins his study by acknowledging a plurality of parallel linguistic traditions, and defining the subject he will treat as one among them.

The urge to initiate a linguistic or literary analysis by balancing the tradition to be treated against other, parallel traditions is also attested in Occitan grammatical works. The scope of the two treatises I will discuss differs in important ways from that of the *De vulgari eloquentia*, and their authors' intentions are distinct from Dante's. However they approach their subject, as Dante does, by way of a comparatist methodology, by balancing it against other similar traditions. Berenguer d'Anoia begins his literary study, the *Mirall de trobar*, with an account of the origins of the alphabet. He relates that the alphabet was invented by a nymph who lived on an island in the sea of Sicily (82/83); in this, as in other details of his linguistic history, he is following Isidore. He then goes on to describe the history of the word "alphabet":

I aixi' s'anomena alfabet, que procedeix o es pres del grec, i en hebraic es diu alfabet, i en arabic es diu alifbet. (85)

Therefore it is called "alphabet," which comes from or is close to the Greek, and in Hebrew it is called "alfabet," and in Arabic it is called "alifbet."

Berenguer will not go into further detail regarding the Greek, Hebrew, and Arabic traditions. He uses them to provide a context for his discussion of Occitan literature: he traces the Latinate tradition he will describe back to an origin that has parallels in the Greek-, Hebrew-, and Arabic-speaking worlds. Near the beginning of Raimon Vidal's *Razos de trobar*, we find a similar comparatist formula:

Totas genz cristianas, iusieuas et sarazinas, emperador, princeps, rei, duc, conte . . . clergue, borgues, vilans, paucs et granz, meton totz iorns lor entendiment en trobar et en chantar . . . (Marshall. 2)

All people. Christians. Jews, and Saracens, emperor, prince, king, duke, count . . . clergyman, burger, peasant, great or small, think every day about the composition and singing [of songs] . . .

Like Berenguer, Raimon begins by sketching a broad panorama, in order to provide a context for the particular matter he will discuss. He is not interested in the songs of the Jews or the Saracens. Their relevance is exhausted once he has used them to demonstrate that the Occitan tradition which he will describe is but one among a number of like traditions.

The Jews, the Arabs, and the Greeks share with the Latins a common concept of the alphabet: Berenguer traces the Occitan literary tradition he will describe to a Greco-Latin source. Christians, Jews, and Saracens sing songs; Raimon will discuss one of the lyric traditions of the Christians. The Romans, the Greeks, "and others" possess a formal written language and a vernacular; Dante will be concerned with the Latinate tradition. Despite the differences between the specific subject matters they treat, each of these writers uses a similar strategy in order to attain a comparable goal. Each, at the outset of his work, evokes a plurilingual backdrop against which he will set the particular literary or linguistic tradition he will treat. This backdrop, in each case, is roughly defined. None of the writers displays any keen interest in or knowledge of the other traditions he mentions;

each will proceed, from the disparate images with which they begin their works, to a discussion of a particular Romance vernacular literary/linguistic tradition. The comparatist formulas which appear at the beginning of their studies evoke a broadly-defined plural tradition which is considered relevant not in its details but in its general outline to the specific matters they will address. This plurilingual context serves as a starting point for their discussions; they will proceed from the plural to the particular.

Dante's project in the *De vulgari* is more ambitious than Raimon's or Berenguer's, and he must pass through several intermediary stages before reaching his goal: he will parallel a number of literary/linguistic traditions, the scope of his comparison gradually narrowing until he focuses on the Italian literary and linguistic situation. A review of the structure of Dante's argument will suffice to demonstrate the steps by which he articulates his comparative analysis. He cites the Biblical story of the tower of Babel in order to account for the diversity of human tongues (I, vii). He gives a brief list of the languages of Europe, encompassing both Germanic and Romance families (I, viii, 3). He divides the Romance languages into three primary groups, French, Occitan, and Italian, and cites poetry in order to illustrate the distinct achievements of poets writing in these languages (I, viii-ix). He then subdivides the third item on this list still further: he points out that the Italian language is not monolithic and clearly defined, but is spoken differently in different parts of the Italian peninsula. He surveys the varieties of Italian in both its spoken and written forms: he analyzes the differences between the Italian dialects, and judges their individual merits and shortcomings (I, xi-xv). Throughout this discussion of the languages and literatures of contemporary Europe, the methodology of Dante's analysis is comparative: he strives to define the particular in opposition to the plural.

Auerbach's discussion of Dante in "The Western Public and Its Language" focuses on an agonistic, binary struggle between a modern vernacular writer and the authors of Latin antiquity. The reading that I offer here is intended not to challenge but to augment Auerbach's reading. I have pointed out moments when Dante strives to place himself in

relation to other contemporary European literary/linguistic expression, and have identified two similar passages in grammatical works by Occitan writers, in order to suggest that opposition to parallel contemporary traditions was crucial to Dante's project of self-definition, and that other early vernacular writers demonstrate a similar urge to define their literary identity by listing and distinguishing parallel traditions. Dante begins his linguistic analysis, in the passage quoted above, by evoking an opposition between a learned language and a spoken vernacular; and certainly, if we read the *De vulgari eloquentia* with an awareness of his other works and of the literary issues that concerned him throughout his life, we must acknowledge the centrality of Latin literary history to his conception of contemporary literature in general, and his own works in particular. The details of the project he undertakes in the *De vulgari*, however, encourage us to read his competition with the Latin heritage as only one facet of his attempt to define a literary identity.

The "plurilingualism" which Contini perceives in the figure of Dante provides a point of departure for understanding and describing the comparative nature of these writers' approach to self-definition. Contini places Dante in a medieval environment where the boundaries between Latin and the vernacular, between literary genres and literary styles, were not yet distinctly drawn. My reading of "plurilingualism" in this discussion differs from Contini's in its more literal focus. I have identified moments when Dante, Raimon, and Berenguer define the literary/linguistic tradition they will discuss by paralleling it to similar traditions in other languages. The details of the comparisons which these authors set up are not as relevant to my current discussion as the role this comparatist strategy plays in the structure of the authors' arguments. Each initiates a discussion of a particular linguistic/literary tradition by referring to a larger generality. Dante takes the comparatist methodology several steps further. He draws a circle large enough to encompass the linguistic/literary heritage of the Romans, the Greeks, "and others," and places the Latin and Romance vernacular traditions within it; he locates and

discusses the French, Occitan, and Italian variants within the vernacular tradition; he identifies the diverse Italian dialects within the Italian tradition, and submits them to a sustained and detailed comparative analysis. What Contini called "the torment of the dialectic" is in constant evidence in the *De vulgari*, as Dante strives to compare and define, to defend or critique what is distinct about each linguistic tradition he discusses.

The Sicilian Vernaculars: Coinage in Sicily, ss. XI-XIII

The foregoing discussions have focused on two issues central to the development of ideas about vernacular culture current in different linguistic communities during the late Middle Ages. In Latin Europe, poets wrote in the spoken tongue, striving to articulate an immediate, living literary language; in al-Andalus, too, Arabic poets integrated elements of the spoken language into their poetry, and this innovation was imitated by poets from other parts of the Arabic-speaking world. The works of the Romance vernacular poets were defined in opposition to Latin, the single, transcendent literary language of Christian Europe; Dante's treatise on poetry in the Romance vernaculars illustrates a simultaneous urge to characterize the works of vernacular poets by comparing them to each other, to define the particular by opposing it to a plurality of variants.

I will return to these two issues in the conclusion to this chapter, addressing the centrality of the notions of regional and historical difference to medieval thinking about vernacular culture. First, however, I will consider the relevance of these broader European developments to cultural production in the Sicilian context. In the foregoing chapter, I discussed the unique historical circumstances that led a Christian monarch to support and encourage Arabic cultural production in his kingdom. Here I will explore in greater depth the linguistic and cultural complexities of the Kingdom of Sicily during the

Norman and early Hohenstaufen periods. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries monarchs used innovative linguistic methods to communicate with and to govern the populations of Sicily, and to represent their kingdom to non-Sicilians. The Arabic poetry written during the reign of Roger II constitutes an attempt to depict the Sicilian court for the benefit of a *literary* audience. The coins produced in Sicily provide information regarding Sicilian self-representation to an *economic* audience, both within Sicily and throughout the Mediterranean. And they demonstrate the sophistication of the Norman use of the Sicilian tongues in constructing a particular historical and regional self-representation.

The first coins produced in Sicily by the Norman invaders were minted in the name of Robert Guiscard (Duke of Puglia, 1059-1085), who – along with his brother, Roger II's father, Count Roger – mounted the initial invasions of Muslim Sicily. The legends on his coins were entirely in Arabic, and were even Muslim in content: the date was given in the year of the *hijra*, and the inscriptions make reference to the Prophet Muḥammad (see Spahr, 138). These coins demonstrate the extent to which the first Norman occupiers of Sicily strove to adapt existing Muslim institutions: rather than transform Sicilian coinage in order to reflect the new, Latin, Christian dynasty, Robert simply imposed his name as ruler on standard Siculo-Muslim coinage.

Count Roger introduced an approach to the design of Sicilian coins that was to be continued by his successors, until the early years of the reign of Frederick II. The obverse of his coins was inscribed in Arabic and remained graphically similar to the coins produced in Muslim Sicily. The verso incorporated a new motif: designs in the shape of a letter T, at times elaborated with dots on either side of or above the T, or with flourishes added to the bars of the T. The origin of this T-motif constitutes a mystery that scholars have not been able to resolve. Some have speculated that it refers to the ancient Greek name for Sicily, Trinacria. Amari was among those who believe that it is an homage to Roger's and Robert's father, Tancredi (*I musulmani di Sicilia*, vol. 3, 835-6). And Spahr, in his study

on Sicilian coinage, maintains that the simplest and most plausible explanation is that the T was intended to suggest a cross. "At the beginning of their dominion," he writes, "the Normans, a small minority in the midst of the Muslims, could not permit themselves to display openly the symbol of their faith on the money that had to serve also, and particularly, for commerce with the Arabs" (Spahr, 140).¹¹

The T-motif would disappear from Sicilian coinage during the early years of Roger II's reign. However the innovation that Count Roger introduced by replacing the obverse of the traditional Siculo-Arabic coinage with the T-motif was to have a lasting impact on the design of coins in Norman Sicily. Count Roger had transformed Sicilian coinage by pairing a conservative motif – inscriptions imitating the design of Siculo-Arabic coinage – with an innovative, peculiarly Norman motif. Under Roger II, the T-motif was transformed into an explicitly Christian symbol: when it ceased to appear on Sicilian coins, there appeared in its place a cross accompanied by the Greek letters IC-XC NI-KA, an abbreviated form of *Ἰησοῦς Χριστός νικᾷ*, *Jesus Christ will triumph* (Spahr, 150 ff).¹² The obverse resembled in design the Arabic-language coins produced by Count Roger and by Robert Guiscard, which in turn resembled the coinage of Muslim-ruled Sicily.

A more detailed description of the coins mentioned above will illustrate the stages by which the T/cross motif evolved.¹³ The few coins which were minted under the name

¹¹ For further speculation regarding the significance of the T-motif, see the Excursus below (page 119).

¹² For a discussion of this motto on medieval coins – which seems to have been used first in Norman Sicily, and subsequently became a common inscription in European coinage – see Kantorowicz, *Laudes Regiae*, 7-9. Zeitler discusses the significance of the motto IC-XC NI-KA in Byzantium in general, and in Sicily in particular, in "Urbs Felix Dotata Populo Trilingui," 136-38. Also, see Jeremy Johns' account of the complexities of language and confessional practice in Sicily during the Norman period ("The Greek Church and the Conversion of Muslims in Norman Sicily?"): he demonstrates that Christians in Sicily during this period maintained a fundamental allegiance to the Eastern Rite and to the Greek language, and thus helps to explain why the Normans would incorporate a Greek Christian, rather than a Latin Christian, inscription in their coinage.

It should be noted, finally, that the development of the T-motif into a cross lends credence to Spahr's suggestion that the T was initially intended – at least in part – to suggest a cross

¹³ It should be noted that, though the cross with the legend IC-XC NI-KA remained one of the most common inscriptions on Sicilian coinage throughout the Norman era, many coins were minted in Norman Sicily without the T/cross motif. I have singled out these coins for discussion because their development

of Robert Guiscard were inscribed wholly in Arabic. Obverse and verso were graphically identical, with a band of lettering running around the periphery of the coin, and within that band several parallel lines of script. During the reign of Count Roger, the parallel lines of inscription were replaced, on the verso, with the T-motif; the Arabic inscription around the periphery of the coin remained. These coins continued to be produced for some years after Roger II came into power. Between 1130 and 1140 the first coins were minted with the cross and the inscription IC-XC NI-KA. The band of Arabic inscription still appeared around the periphery of the coin, surrounding the cross and the Greek inscription; the inscription on the obverse was entirely in Arabic. Coins were produced in this format throughout the years of Norman rule. The Arabic text generally gave the name of the city in which the coin was minted, and the monarch's *'alâma*, his Arabic royal title, which typically accompanied his name when he communicated with an Arabic-speaking, Muslim public. I list here the *'alâmât* of the Norman monarchs of Sicily as they appeared on their coinage:

Roger II Count of Sicily, 1105-1127 Count of Sicily and Duke of Puglia, 1127-1130 King of Sicily, 1130-54	<i>al-mu'tazz bi-llâh</i>	"Who exults in the glory of God"
William I King of Sicily, 1154-66	<i>al-hadî bi-amri-llâh</i>	"Who rules justly by the grace [or under the command] of God"
William II King of Sicily, 1166-89	<i>al-musta'izz bi-llâh</i>	"Who has become powerful in God"
Tancredi King of Sicily, 1189-94	<i>al-manşûr bi-llâh</i>	"Who is victorious by the grace of God"
William III King of Sicily, 1194	<i>al-mu'tazz bi-llâh</i>	"Who exults in the glory of God" ¹⁴

provides a particularly resonant and compelling perspective on the development of linguistic culture in Norman Sicily.

¹⁴See Spahr, 148.

The coinage produced in Sicily during the reign of Frederick II marks a break from that of the Norman era in several significant ways.¹⁵ During the period 1209-1220 – when Frederick had been made King of Sicily, but had not yet become Emperor – coins were produced which maintained the basic format described above; but their Arabic content grew increasingly stylized, and degenerated finally to a design element, devoid of lexical content. On the verso the cross and the letters IC-XC NI-KA appeared, surrounded by a band of pseudo-kufic inscription. On the obverse Frederick's name appeared in Arabic (he did not use an Arabic *'alâma*) (for example, Spahr, #56 and #59 [p. 188]). During this same period, however, coins were also minted which paired the IC-XC NI-KA inscription with a representation on the obverse of an eagle (Spahr, #66 [p. 189] and #73 [p. 190]). The pseudo-kufic border decorations were replaced on these coins by simple geometric design elements. Thus they were devoid even of pseudo-Arabic inscription. The IC-XC NI-KA coins produced after Frederick became Emperor linked the motif with Latin inscriptions on the obverse (Spahr, #92 [p. 193] and #97 [p. 194]); Arabic and pseudo-kufic elements disappeared from Sicilian coinage.

The coins with the T/cross motif bear witness to the effort to define and articulate Sicily's linguistic and cultural affiliations. The T-motif first appeared (during the period of Count Roger) as an effort to symbolize Norman Sicily, to state its difference from the Siculo-Muslim state that had preceded it. Under the rule of Roger II, this T-motif was replaced by a cross, accompanied by a Greek inscription. Norman Sicily thus differentiated itself further from Muslim Sicily, and symbolized its allegiance with the Christian world. These coins – with the cross on one side, the monarch's *'alâma* on the other – were produced throughout the period of Norman rule. During the reign of

¹⁵ During the brief period between the reigns of William II and Frederick II, Sicilian coins were minted under the name of Henry VI, son of Constance (Roger II's daughter) and Frederick Barbarossa. For the sake of brevity, I will not include his coinage in my discussion. However, for the sake of completeness, I will mention, parenthetically, that coins were produced during his reign with the IC-XC NI-KA inscription, and Henry's name in Arabic script.

Frederick II, the conception of Sicilian identity changed enough that these coins no longer seemed relevant or appropriate. Frederick's coinage – after an initial period, during which it imitated the coinage of the Norman era – linked the IC-XC NI-KA symbol, which had been central to Siculo-Norman self-representation, to a Latin inscription on the obverse. Thus it expressed a connection between Sicily and the Latin Christianity of continental Europe.

This numismatic evidence serves to demonstrate the stages by which the rulers of Sicily conceived and articulated links between their kingdom and the greater Muslim and Christian worlds with which they maintained commercial contacts. My purpose, in this discussion, is to explore the manipulation of language in this context: to sketch the linguistic and cultural resources on which Sicilian rulers drew in order to represent their kingdom to an audience both within Sicily and beyond Sicily, and to demonstrate the sophistication of their use of those resources. It would be easy, on the basis of the evidence presented thus far, to draw a certain conclusion regarding the use of available linguistic and cultural resources in Sicily: namely, that earlier rulers perceived Sicilian Christianity as a Greek phenomenon, and exploited the Greek language to express Christian sentiments; and that it was Frederick II who forged the first explicit links between Sicily and the Latin Christianity of the European continent. This is an oversimplification of a more complex reality. The Latin motto *Christus vincit, Christus regnat, Christus imperat* (Christ conquers, Christ governs, Christ rules), for instance, appeared on coinage and in seals during the era of Count Roger and Roger II, and was used as a *bull* by Frederick II, during the early years of his reign. Ernst Kantorowicz links Count Roger's use of a fragment of this phrase – "Jhesus Christus vincit" – in one of his seals to the Greek formula Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς νικᾷ, calling it "the Latin version of the Greek inscription" (Kantorowicz, *Laudes Regiae*, 9-10). This brief example should suffice to demonstrate the Normans' ability to use Latin, as well as Greek, when communicating with a Christian audience. The Greek, Latin, and Arabic inscriptions cited in this discussion demonstrate a

sophisticated ability to draw on the multiple linguistic resources of Sicily in order to convey a single message. And the coinage discussed above attests a consistent attempt to draw on the Christian/Muslim duality of Norman Sicily as a central element in the construction of Sicilian self-representations.

The mottoes and royal titles cited above use diverse cultural and religious expressions to state an identical, triumphalist message. The *'alâma* "Who exults in the glory of God," the Greek motto "Jesus Christ will conquer," and the Latin phrase "Christ conquers, Christ governs, Christ rules" all evoke a sense of contest and triumph. The official context in which such expressions were used linked the figure of the conquering Lord with the Sicilian monarch, whether the Lord was represented by Muhammad (as in the coinage produced under Robert Guiscard), by Allah (as in the Norman monarchs' *'alâmât*), or by Jesus Christ (as in the Greek and Latin mottoes). It is worth noting, however, that while Muhammad, Allah, Jesus Christ could equally be used as symbols of triumph, this does not signify that the names were appropriated and used without reference to the devotional or cultural context in which they more typically appeared. Inscriptions on the coinage produced by Count Roger gave the two attestations of the Muslim faith – one of the pillars of Islam – in Arabic (*there is no god but God; Muhammad is his prophet*; Spahr, 141). Again, a similar inscription appears on a coin minted during the reign of Roger II (Spahr, 148). On the other hand, Roger II introduced the use of a cross, the symbol of Christianity, in conjunction with the Greek formula referring to the Christian savior. The complexity of the Sicilian environment did not, apparently, drain these uses of Christian and Muslim motifs of their significance in a less ambiguously Christian or Muslim context. Rather, the motifs retained a religious (or cultural) specificity; and the two registers were used in tandem, complementing and balancing each other.

This tendency is expressed nowhere more forcefully than in the inscriptions in the ceiling of the Cappella Palatina. Here, Roger II had a Christian chapel decorated with

Arabic words – "victory and perfection and perfection and ability and power . . . and riches and acquisition and victory and power" – which Sinding-Larsen speculates were "derived from theological and moralistic discourse" (69) and Jeremy Johns terms "almost a litany of the power of the king" ("I re normanni e i califfi fatimiti," 25). What is revealed by this evidence is not so much a competition between various linguistic/literary paradigms as an ongoing effort to exploit the diverse linguistic/literary paradigms available to express an identical sentiment, to represent the power of the Norman monarchs; the goal implicit in the uses of these inscriptions and mottoes is not linguistic hegemony, but rather the articulation of a simple message through the mediums which existed in the Sicilian context, in order to communicate with Sicily's two populations. When Sicilian coinage was modified to reflect the fact that the kingdom in which it was produced had come under the rule of the Normans, the new, Norman motifs did not edge out the Arabic content of the coins. Instead, the Normans used the Greek and Arabic languages to restate the same information, to affirm the power of the new Norman rulers of the island. At no time during the Norman rule of Sicily did there seem to be a desire to elevate any one of the three literary/linguistic paradigms to the position of a single official language. Rather, the languages continued to be used in concert to translate and transmit the message of Norman dominance.

The IC-XC NI-KA coins also advertise one of the more remarkable aspects of the Normans' conception of their Sicilian kingdom: its Muslim/Christian duality. Coins were produced from the early years of Roger II's reign until the end of the Norman rule with the Arabic name of God on the obverse and the Christian cross on the verso. Arabic inscriptions were included on Sicilian coinage even during the reign of Frederick II, when – as the final decadence of the Arabic lettering on the coins to a simple design element attests – the language was no longer understood by those who designed and minted the coins. These coins tell us a great deal about how the Sicilian rulers perceived their kingdom, and how they wished to represent it to a broader economic community: they

symbolize, in an efficient and compact manner, Sicily's unique blending of Muslim and Christian populations. To the non-Sicilians who used them, the coins would have conveyed a particularly potent message, broadcasting the island's advantageous position as a geographic and cultural crossroad between the Muslim and Christian markets. In a domestic context, the coins would have demonstrated the monarchs' ability to communicate with and to govern Sicily's Muslim and Christian populations.

Ibn Khaldūn's and Dante's discussions of the vernacular poets of the late Middle Ages indicate that, in both the Arabic and Latin worlds, poetic works that integrated local, spoken languages were associated with a sense of regional identity, and that these poetries were perceived as a radical departure from traditional poetic conventions. No parallel form of vernacular poetry developed in Sicily during the brief period of Norman rule. However the IC-XC NI-KA coins represent a similar attempt to use language in innovative ways in order to express regional and temporal difference. The T-motif was introduced into Sicilian coinage as a symbol of a new, Norman-ruled Sicily; the cross and the Greek inscription that appeared in subsequent coin designs further articulated this sense of difference, representing the new Sicily's economic and cultural ties with the Christian world. If Sicilian coinage demonstrated an attempt to distinguish between a modern, Norman-ruled Sicily and the Muslim-ruled Sicily of the past, however, it also witnessed a simultaneous effort to maintain a sense of continuity with the contemporary Arabic-speaking world. The Arabic content of the coins served to underscore Sicily's ongoing communication with Muslim communities outside Sicily, and to symbolize the vitality of an Arabic-speaking population within Sicily. The degeneration of the Arabic inscriptions to a pseudo-Arabic design element during the early years of Frederick II's reign suggests that this sense of continuity with the Muslim world continued to seem important even when those who designed and minted the coins no longer understood their Arabic content. The inscriptions on Sicilian coinage drew on the spoken languages of Sicily to express a regionally and historically discrete sense of identity, advertising the kingdom in which they

were minted as a Christian land where Arabic was spoken and where certain Muslim institutions were maintained.

Auerbach described the vernacular revolution of the late Middle Ages as a response to the disjuncture between a written literary language and the spoken tongues of everyday life: because Latin was no longer spoken by most people, it could no longer serve to express the issues that most vitally concerned the literary public. In Norman Sicily, too, the linguistic content of cultural expression strove to reflect the linguistic realities of everyday life. The coins of Norman Sicily – like the inscriptions and murals of the Cappella Palatina and La Zisa, or the Arabic poetry written at the court of Roger II – demonstrate an attempt to use diverse literary/linguistic paradigms in innovative ways, in order to represent a historically and regionally discrete content. Auerbach's study focuses on dialectical contests between Latin and the individual vernaculars spoken in Europe. Cultural production in Norman Sicily suggests that linguistic experimentalism during the late medieval period could draw on broader resources, and that the goal of such innovation was not always linguistic hegemony. Poets, artists, and artisans who worked to produce new cultural expressions in Norman Sicily drew on Greek, Latin, and Arabic sources; the IC-XC NI-KA coins and the Cappella Palatina do not give evidence of a tension between a spoken language and a written one, but witness a tension between diverse literary/linguistic paradigms. It was not until the period of Frederick II that Arabic ceased to play an important role in Sicilian self-representations. But even during Frederick's reign Arabic translators were employed by the royal court; the royal chancery produced documents and letters in Greek, Arabic, and Latin; and Greek continued to be used by Sicilian poets, while the *Scuola Siciliana* poets were writing the first lyric love poetry in the Italian language. Rather than elevate a single language to the position of "official" language, the Norman rulers and Frederick II exploited Sicily's plurilingualism. The balanced use of Greek and Arabic on the small canvas of a coin served to symbolize, in

shorthand, the unique plurilingual character of the Sicilian kingdom in which the coins were produced.

The vernacular "avant gardes" of the Middle Ages

In his essay "The Literary Language of the Western Public," Auerbach provides a narrative for understanding the emergence of vernacular cultures in medieval Europe. My readings of Ibn Khaldûn, Dante, and the coinage of Norman Sicily have built on Auerbach's basic narrative in specific ways, in order to suggest that the contest that Auerbach described in the context of Latin Europe constituted a part of a broader attempt to use language in new ways in order to define and articulate a unique sense of regional and historical identity. I have used Auerbach's narrative to read Ibn Khaldûn and have used Ibn Khaldûn's narrative to expand on Auerbach, pointing out that Arabic poets' use of the spoken vernaculars of al-Andalus was perceived as a regional, modernizing innovation, much as the vernacular Romance poets' works were perceived as a regionally and historically specific challenge to Latin tradition. I have read Dante in response to Auerbach's essay in order to demonstrate that Romance vernacular poets defined their work in opposition to poetry in other Romance vernaculars, as well as to the Latin tradition. The coinage of Norman Sicily opens up Auerbach's narrative in another direction, suggesting that in certain times and places artisans, artists and writers drew on traditions other than the Latinate in order to construct regionally and historically localized self-representations. In the discussions above, I have engaged individual voices in a dialogue with Auerbach's essay, but have not cross-referenced those discrete readings. In conclusion I will compare the information that has emerged from the readings above, and address the relevance of this material to the case of Sicily.

Ibn Khaldūn's account of the language of the muwashshahs of al-Andalus focused on a notion of "ease." Muwashshah poetry was perceived as innovative because it was, in Ibn Khaldūn's words, "limpid and easy to grasp" (see above, page 86); it became popular among the elite and the common people alike "because of its ease" (see above, page 86). Dante's description of the language of vernacular poetry introduces a similar notion of ease. He states, in the passages quoted above, that "vernacular speech is that which we acquire by imitating our nurse, without any training" (see above, page 95); and again, that the vernacular is the superior literary language "because it is natural to us" (see above, page 96). The notion that the vernacular is to be valued for its accessibility to a broader audience is repeated in many of Dante's discussions of the language of literature. In the *Convivio*, for instance, he writes: "lo latino non ha conversazione con tanti in alcuna lingua con quanti ha lo volgare di quella, al quale tutti son amici" (Latin is not familiar to as many people in any language as is their vernacular, with which all are intimate; *Convivio*, I, vi, 10 [p. 40]). The "ease" of the languages used by the vernacular poets is a central, though largely implicit, theme in Auerbach's discussion of the attempts that medieval writers made to bring the language of their literary works closer to the language of their daily lives. In this passage, he is commenting on the rationale behind Dante's use of the vernacular, rather than Latin, for lofty literary composition:

far more numerous were those whom he could address in Italian, and he could speak with far greater directness in Italian to those who understood Latin a little, or who understood it quite well after a moment's reflection, but who did not understand it immediately, completely, and without difficulty. (Auerbach, 311)

The new poetry of both Arabic- and Latin-speaking Europe was considered innovative for a similar reason: it drew on elements of the spoken language in order to communicate more readily and more immediately with a broader public.

But while a sense of ease was central to ideas about vernacular poetry, it was balanced in both the Arabic and Latin worlds by an effort to articulate the "easy" new forms: to define them, to judge their literary worth, and to develop further those

innovations which seemed to be most valuable, in order to create a new poetry that was at once easy and eloquent. Ibn Sanâ' al-Mulk defines and codifies the muwashshah for the benefit of poets from the greater Arabic-speaking world who wish to compose in the form. Ibn Khaldûn tells us that the muwashshah poets "strove with each other for excellence in this [poetry]" (quoted above, page 86); he praises the zajal poets, who "have achieved marvels in this form, and have produced works of great eloquence" (quoted above, page 87). His discussion of the new poetic forms is less technical than Ibn Sanâ' al-Mulk's, but he will voice judgements on the works he quotes, saying for instance that vernacular poetry was written by the Tunisians, but it is not good enough to cite (Ar. 786, Eng. 475). Dante's project in the *De vulgari eloquentia* is to defend the efficacy of the vernacular as a vehicle for serious literary composition. To this end, he critiques the works of previous vernacular poets, and analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of the various Italian vernaculars in order to define an Italian that could serve as a vehicle for literary eloquence.

No accounts comparable to Dante's or Ibn Khaldûn's were written to describe the linguistic experimentation undertaken in Norman Sicily. However, we do have an elliptical reference bearing witness to an effort to adapt formal Arabic in order to express a new content, and a subsequent critique of that linguistic innovation. In the late fourteenth century, a scholar named al-Qalqashandî produced an enormous anthology of letters to serve as a reference and a manual for Arabic chanceries. He includes a letter from the caliph al-Hâfiz to Roger II,¹⁶ which makes reference to a mistranslation which had appeared in an earlier letter, written in Roger's chancery. I quote the relevant paragraph here in full:

As regards the secretary's apology concerning what was written to him, to wit that when an expression is translated from one language to another, its basic meaning may be disturbed and its sense skewed, particularly when a word is introduced which exists in the one language but not in the other: it has become clear that the charge that was laid against him arose from negligence of the correct usage [of the

¹⁶ For discussions of this letter, see Canard, "Une Lettre du Calife Fatimite al-Hafiz," and Johns, "I re normanni e i califfi fatimiti," 26-29.

word], and his apology was accepted, and his devotion is not thrown into doubt by this [gaffe].

Arabic text, Al-Qalqashandî, vol. 6, 463 (see Appendix, p. 122)

As is clear from this passage, a letter was written from Roger's chancery in which an Arabic word was used to translate a word which existed in another language, but which did not have a clear Arabic parallel. In a response from al-Hâfiz' chancery, the mistranslation was pointed out. In a third letter Roger's secretary apologized for the mistranslation. And in this fourth letter al-Hâfiz accepts the apology. The passage provides a perspective on the efforts undertaken in Roger's court to adapt the Arabic language to new uses. Faced with the challenge of translating a word which "exists in the one language but not in the other," a secretary improvised. The chain of correction and apology which followed the initial letter illustrates the difficulties that could arise when languages were used to express new and unfamiliar content, and the negotiations that were necessary to clear up momentary confusion.

The vernacular poets of al-Andalus and Latin Europe forged a new poetic medium, which was perceived as attractive largely for its "ease." Literary studies like Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia* or Ibn Sanâ' al-Mulk's *Dâr al-tirâz* bear witness to a period of evaluation and consolidation, as poets and scholars sift through the innovations introduced by first-wave vernacular poets, determine where they diverge from traditional literary conventions and defend those divergences that they think valuable, and codify the new poetic forms so that subsequent poets can labor to achieve new works of eloquence using them. The letter from the chancery of al-Hâfiz illustrates a similar stage in the development of an innovative bureaucratic language. Roger's secretary (like a vernacular poet) had used a neologism to express a new concept; al-Hâfiz' secretary (like Ibn Khaldûn or Dante) had critiqued the expression, on the grounds that it violated standard linguistic usage, and presumably had offered a correction. The new vernacular mediums that I have discussed in this chapter possessed an initial attraction because of their revolutionary approach to language: they were easy and immediate, they could be used to communicate

with a broader audience, and they could serve to express new concepts. At a subsequent stage, however, they became the object of study and elaboration. They came to be perceived as valuable because they were capable of eloquence. Poets, literary scholars, and chancery secretaries worked to codify the new mediums, striving to define and realize their unique potential.

In Sicily, the effort to use language in new ways in order to express a new content responded to the richness of the available linguistic resources and the complexity of the political situation which informed and guided cultural experimentation. Poets, artists, artisans, and chancery secretaries drew on the Arabic, Greek, and Latin traditions, striving to develop hybrid forms or to renovate existing tongues in order to create uniquely Sicilian works. At times – in the IC-XC NI-KA coins or the Cappella Palatina, for instance – Sicilians used a combination of linguistic registers. Other works – the letter from al-Hâfiz to Roger II, the Arabic poetry of Roger's court – bear witness to an attempt to use established literary languages and forms in new ways in order to express a new content. Poets like al-Atrâbanishî used the Arabic language and traditional Arabic poetic forms to praise a Christian ruler. Secretaries used Arabic words in new ways in order to communicate new ideas. In a subsequent period, Sicilian poets would write in Italian, inventing a new literary Romance vernacular and articulating a new connection between Sicily and the Italian mainland. Responses to these innovations from intellectuals and scholars like 'Imâd al-Dîn, al-Hâfiz's secretary, and Dante demonstrate the subsequent negotiations that were necessary to evaluate and accommodate the linguistic innovations introduced by Sicilians.

But this Sicilian experimentation, though it produced works that were efficacious in the short term, would disappear as political upheavals transformed the environment in which it arose. Works like the IC-XC NI-KA coins or the Arabic poetry of Roger's court served as remarkably efficient symbols of the plurilingual Norman Sicilian kingdom. But no subsequent Sicilian rulers would share the Normans' enthusiasm for supporting

multilingual cultural expressions in general, or the Arabic language in particular; and no Arabic poetry would be written in Sicily after the end of the period of Norman rule. The Arabic poetry in praise of the Christian monarchs of Sicily would have no impact on Arabic literary history, but would be preserved by anthologists, in fragmentary form, as a literary curiosity. The Italian poetry written in Sicily a century later would be absorbed into a subsequent Tuscan tradition. I will discuss in the next chapters the Tuscanization of the poetry of the Scuola Siciliana, and the importance of Dante's discussion of the Sicilian poets in the *De vulgari eloquentia* to that process. Here I return to Contini's discussion of Dante for a concise description of his enduring impact on ideas about Italian literary history: "We state the obvious," he writes, "when we say that the history of our early lyric poetry is still written according to Dante's scheme, which certainly corresponded to general critical exigencies of his era, but in truth was established by Dante's imperative" (319-320). He goes on to cite the "constitution of the Scuola Siciliana" as one of Dante's most potent imperatives. In the *De vulgari eloquentia* Dante would define the Scuola Siciliana as the prehistory of the *dolce stil novo*, and his definition would determine the way the Italian poetry of Sicily was read.

Sicilian poets (and artisans and secretaries) used language in a new way, in order to express a new regional voice, and in order to distinguish their works from those that had been produced in the same region during an earlier period. Some of their innovations would disappear without having any appreciable influence on literary history. Others would be absorbed into subsequent literary trends. Political history would have a profound impact on the development of literary history: as Sicilian monarchs redrew the map, in order to link Sicily more closely to the European continent, the Arabic culture of Sicily would fade in importance, and Romance vernacular culture would come to seem more relevant. The narrative that emerges from these readings of Sicilian culture, in most of its details, confirms Auerbach's account of the rise of vernacular culture. Throughout the Norman and early Hohenstaufen period, Sicilian poets strove to bring the language of

culture closer to the language of daily life. However, the culture of Sicily during this period builds on Auerbach's narrative by demonstrating that the mechanism which generated vernacular culture did not always function in a strictly binary, dialectical way. Sicilian cultural expression responded to the diversity of linguistic registers present in Sicily, integrating and adapting Arabic, Greek, and Latin traditions to arrive at a unique, hybrid regional voice. And Auerbach's narrative must also be adjusted in order to account for the failures of the Sicilian experiments. In "The Western Public and Its Language," Auerbach writes a triumphalist history of the emergence of the literary languages of modern Europe: he traces the intellectual history which required a writer like Dante to invent a new literary language, and gave him the arsenal to succeed in the endeavor. But Sicily did not produce a monument like the *Divine Comedy*, and the literary languages used in Sicily did not form the foundation of new literary traditions. In order to read Sicilian culture, in order to understand its failures and its qualified successes, we must modify the triumphalist focus of Auerbach's narrative.

The Arabic and Italian poets of Sicily, the muwashshah poets of al-Andalus, and the Occitan poets of Provence used new linguistic forms to express a new content. Subsequent generations would evaluate those poets' innovations, preserving and building on some of them and rejecting others. In most of these cases, a regionally specific linguistic difference would disappear while the innovative form or content of the poetry would serve as the basis for further development. Thus the Occitan lyrics of the troubadours would find French and Sicilian imitators; Siculo-Italian poetry would serve as a point of departure for Tuscan poets; muwashshahs would be written in other parts of the Arabic-speaking world. Like the modernist avant gardes of the early twentieth century, the Sicilian, Andalusian, and Occitan poets transformed contemporary cultural practice, in response to radical political and intellectual upheavals. And as in the case of the modernists, the experimentation of these medieval poets generated an "avant garde

excess," innovations which could not be accommodated by mainstream artists and thinkers, and would be rejected or normalized by subsequent literary history.

These two shifts in the basic narrative structure of Auerbach's essay – from a triumphalist narrative, designed to describe the emergence of the literary languages of modern Europe, to an avant garde model, focused on experimentalism as an end in itself; from a binary opposition between a written language and a spoken tongue to a plural opposition of diverse literary/linguistic paradigms – allow us to produce a more sophisticated reading of the works of the Sicilian poets. Arabic, Greek, and Latin cultures converged in Norman Sicily. The Norman rulers of Sicily encouraged cultural expression which drew on the diverse linguistic resources of the island in order to produce unique, regionally specific works, works which expressed Sicily's difference either by using existing languages in new ways, or by combining different languages to form hybrid texts. Sicilian artists were not concerned with inventing a single literary language which could challenge the authority of the single language of literary history. Rather, they strove to invent a particular voice that could represent Sicily to plurilingual audiences outside Sicily. The construction of such a voice and the form it took was made more complex by the fact that in Sicily, the particular was itself plurilingual. Norman Sicilian rulers never attempted to elevate one language as an "official" tongue; Sicily's diverse linguistic registers were used at the Norman court to produce unique works which expressed Sicily's particularity. The Arabic poets of Roger's court and the Italian poets of Frederick's court worked largely within the parameters of existing Arabic and Romance-vernacular literary traditions. But they introduced innovations that marked their work as different from poetry written in other parts of the Arabic and Latinate worlds, and as different from poetry written in Sicily during other ages. Their experimentation would be observed, evaluated, and contained by subsequent poets and literary historians. By looking for the particularity of this Sicilian poetry, we can begin to understand its difference, and evaluate the challenge that

difference presented both to previous literary conventions and to subsequent literary history.

In the next chapter, I will read the works of the Italian poets of Sicily, looking for traces of a sense of Sicilian difference. Dante's discussion of the Sicilian poets in the *De vulgari eloquentia* would define them as the forerunners of the *dolce stil novo* poets, thus subsuming them into a subsequent, peninsular Italian tradition. Some modern literary historians have characterized their works as the final degeneration of the conventions established by the earlier troubadour poets. The readings I have undertaken in this chapter, however, suggest other points of departure for reading their poetry. Like the Arabic poets at the court of Roger II, the Italian poets of Frederick II's court wrote works informed by a sense of modernity and of regional specificity. They wrote with an awareness of other traditions, but modified those traditions to express a new content. The kingdom in which they wrote was plurilingual, and served as a crossroad between the Muslim and Christian worlds. But it was ruled by a strong monarch whose domestic policy was geared to account for the diverse populations present in his kingdom in order to forge them into a single, governable state. The Italian poets of Sicily responded to the linguistic plurality and the religious duality of their kingdom, and to the plurilingual intellectual life of the European and Mediterranean lands with which they were in contact, in their attempt to create a single Siculo-Romance vernacular which could serve as a vehicle for uniquely Sicilian poetic composition.

Excursus: The T-motif coins and the palm as a symbol of Norman Sicily

The T-motif was used on coinage by Count Roger and during the early years of Roger II's rule (see above, pages 101-102). In his discussion of it, Amari points toward an additional relevance which might have accounted in part for its original use on the coins, or which it might have acquired subsequently. In certain cases, Amari states, "the perpendicular stroke, wide and arabesqued, resembles the trunk of a palm" (*I musulmani di Sicilia*, v. 3, 836). Indeed, in some coins the T-motif is so extensively elaborated that it looks more like an organic form – quite possibly a palm – than like the letter T (see, e.g., Spahr, plate XVIII, no. 27 and no. 42). And further evidence may be adduced in support of reading the T-motif as a reference to a palm in the coins produced during the reign of William II, which used explicit representations of palm trees (Spahr, plate XX, no. 112, 110, 117). If Amari was right in reading the elaborated T's of the coins produced during the era of Count Roger and Roger II as allusions to palm trees, then the coins produced during the era of William II with explicit depictions of palm trees could embody references to those earlier coins.

The possibility that the T-motif was intended as a reference to a palm tree gives rise to an intriguing line of speculation: namely, that the palm was used as a symbol of Norman Sicily, or possibly as a symbol of the Norman monarch himself. Representations of palms were used by Roger II in at least two key places: the coronation robe he wore when he was crowned King of Sicily is decorated with a prominent depiction of a palm running up the center of the back (Gabrieli and Scerrato, 138-9, plate 149). And the Gioaria, a section of the Palazzo Reale which derives its name from the Arabic *al-Jawahariyya*, "adorned with precious stones," includes two murals with central representations of palms, one of them in the so-called "stanza di Ruggiero," thought to be

the king's private apartment (Gabrieli and Scerrato, 51, plate 27; 52, plate 29). If it is true that the palm tree served as a symbol of Sicily and its monarch, then al-Aṭrābanishī's celebration of the "two palms" of Favara takes on an added significance: the palms would have been readily understood to refer to the Sicilian king and his queen – presumably Elvira, to whom Roger was married for 14 years and who bore him seven children – whose love is idealized, and whose protecting strength is celebrated.¹⁷

I discussed above the fact that Roger II's and William II's *ʿalāmāt* are drawn from the same etymological root (page 68); and William III's *ʿalāma* was identical to Roger II's. The similar design elements in coins produced during the end of the Muslim era and the beginning of the Norman era, and in those produced during the end of the Norman era and the beginning of Frederick II's reign, indicate an attempt to stress continuity during periods of political upheaval; and the continuity of coinage within the period of Norman rule is demonstrated by the consistent minting of the IC-XC NI-KA coins, and possibly by the citation of the palm suggested by earlier T-motif coins in the coins produced during William II's reign. Finally, the use of the image of the palm tree in coinage, in palace decorations, on Roger II's coronation robe, and in al-Aṭrābanishī's panegyric suggests an ongoing attempt to establish and develop symbols that could convey the power and the potential of the Sicilian kingdom to diverse audiences both within Sicily and in the greater economic and cultural world with which the Normans were in contact. The Normans' ability to balance cultural conservatism and innovation allowed them to produce – in works like the Cappella Palatina and La Zisa as well as in coinage and palace decoration – extraordinarily sophisticated civic monuments, institutions, and artifacts, integrating the cultural and linguistic traditions that converged in Sicily in order to celebrate and advertise their "idea of Sicily."

¹⁷For the idea that the palm tree was used as a symbol of Norman Sicily, I am indebted to art historian William Tronzo, who made this suggestion in a lecture given at the University of Toronto in the spring of 1997.

ابن خلدون ١

وأما أهل الأندلس فلما كثر الشعر في قطرهم وتهذبت مناحيه وفنونه، وبلغ التتميق فيه الغاية، استحدث التأخرون منهم فنا منه سموه بالموشح

ابن خلدون ٢

لا يكون الموشح بموشح حتى يكون عاريا عن التكلف

ابن خلدون ٣

وتجاروا في ذلك إلى الغاية واستظرفه الناس جملة، الخاصة والكافة، لسهولة تناوله، وقرب طريقه

ابن خلدون ٤

وأما شاع فنّ التوشيح في أهل الأندلس، وأخذ به الجمهور، لسلاسته وتميق كلانه وترصيع أجزائه، نسجت العامة من أهل الأمصار على منواله، ونظموا في طريقته بلغتهم الحضريّة من غير أن يلتزموا فيها إعرابا؛ واستحدثوا فنا سموه بالزجل، والتزموا النظم فيه على مناحيهم لهذا العهد، فجاؤوا فيه بالغرائب واتّسع فيه للبلاغة مجال بحسب لغتهم المستعجمة

ابن بسام ١

وأوزان هذه الموشحات خارجة عن هذا الجيوان إذ أكثرها على غير أعاريض أشعار العرب

ابن خلدون ٥

واعلم أن الأذواق كلّها في معرفة البلاغة إنّما تحصل لمن خالط تلك اللغة وكثر استعماله لها ومخاطبته بين أجيالها حتى يحصل ملكتها كما قلناه في اللغة العربية

ابن بسام ٢

تُشَقُّ على سماعها مصوناتُ الجنوب بل القلوب

ابن خلدون ٦

واعلم أن الأذواق كلّها في معرفة البلاغة إنّما تحصل لمن خالط تلك اللغة وكثر استعماله لها ومخاطبته بين أجيالها حتى يحصل ملكتها كما قلناه في اللغة العربية؛ فلا يشعر الأندلسيّ بالبلاغة التي في شعر أهل المغرب، ولا المغربيّ بالبلاغة التي في شعر أهل الأندلس والمشرق، ولا المشقيّ بالبلاغة التي في شعر أهل الأندلس والمغرب؛ لأنّ اللسان الحضريّ وتراكيبه مختلفة فيهم، وكل واحد منهم مدرك لبلاغة لغته وذائق محاسن الشعر من أهل جلدته؛ وفي خلق السماوات والأرض واختلاف ألسنتكم وألوانكم آيات العالمين

القلقشندي

وأما اعتذار الكاتب عما وُجّه إليه بأن من الكلام ما إذا نُقِلَ من لغةٍ إلى لغةٍ أخرى اضطرب مَبْنَاهُ فاختلَّ معناه، ولا سيما إن غُرس فيه لفظٌ ليس في إحدى اللّغتين سواه؛ فقد أبان فيما نُسب إليه السهو فيه عن وضوح سببه، وقد قُبِلَ عذره ولم تُفكَّ يده عن التمسك به

Frederick II and the Norman Kingdom of Sicily

William II, the last Norman king of Sicily of any power or longevity,¹ died in 1189; and Frederick II did not attain his majority until 1208. The 19-year interregnum that passed between the reigns of William and Frederick brought disorder and warfare to the kingdom, as the German king Henry VI, who had been crowned King of Sicily in 1194, successfully fought off Norman contenders for control of the state. Henry died in 1197, and his wife, Constance – Roger II's daughter – ruled as regent for her young son, Frederick. In 1198, Frederick was crowned King of Sicily; a few months later, Constance died. In the year following Henry's death, Constance had formed a close alliance with the pope, Innocent III, and on her death Innocent became Frederick's guardian, and feudal lord of Sicily. In December 1208, at the age of 14, Frederick assumed power.

During the interregnum between the death of William II and the succession of Frederick II, a major shift occurred in the Sicilian political landscape. Constance's overtures to Innocent involved the papacy intimately in the government of the kingdom.

¹Tancred, William's illegitimate cousin, ruled Sicily 1190-94, and William III, Tancred's son, was king briefly in 1194. I leave them out of this accounting because their reigns were too brief and troubled to bring any sense of stability to Sicily.

Her primary motive in enlisting the pope's aid seemed to be to contain and combat German power in Sicily. But the alliance she established with the pope, along with other factors (most notably Frederick's European political ambitions), served to revolutionize Sicily's relationship with the states and the rulers of the Christian west. Frederick, although he was reared in Sicily and remained affectionately attached to it, and although he fought bitterly with successive popes and would be excommunicated twice (in 1227 and 1239), forged closer political and cultural ties with mainland Europe than his Norman ancestors had. The Norman kings had perceived and ruled Sicily as an independent Mediterranean kingdom with connections to the Muslim, Eastern Christian and Western Christian worlds. Frederick would operate as a Christian king and would pursue a primary alliance with the Latin Christian world (he was crowned German Emperor in 1211 and Roman Emperor in 1220), although he would gain a reputation as a ruler with access to the Muslim world, and observers would either admire him or regard him as ambiguous and suspect as a result.

The radical revision of Sicily's place on the map that took place during the years of Frederick's rule is reflected in a letter, written in 1236 and addressed to the citizens of Sicily, in which Frederick gives his own version of Sicilian history:

Sed postquam ad regni nomen terre tam nobilis ambitus, quam inter se per vicarias occupantium injurias Romanorum et Grecorum imperia [non] placidis finibus dividebant, virtuosa majorum nostrorum et prima consolidatione pervenit, in tantum regie dignitatis nomen et solium dilexere regnicole, ut, eisdem antecessoribus nostris ab eis in reges et dominos adoptatis, et fideliter acquisita defenderent, et virtuose subjicere populos barbaros conarentur. Et licet ex memorate virtutis initiis progenitorum fecundata nostrorum satis extiterit generosa plantatio; hanc tamen sub creationis nove propagine, que nascentibus in regno coaluit, nec inferiorem industria credimus nec strenuitate minorem.

Huillard-Bréholles, vol. 4, pt. 2, pp. 930-931

This so noble span of land, under the occupying armies' destructive deputies, had been divided up by the empires of the Romans and Greeks into restive territories. But after it came to be called a kingdom, through our ancestors' first, valiant consolidation, so greatly did its inhabitants love the name of regal dignity and the throne that, having chosen our ancestors as kings and lords, they faithfully

defended the lands acquired, and valiantly strove to subject barbarous peoples [to their rule]. And although after those beginnings, memorable for their virility, there came forth [from the labors] of our progenitors an ample and fertile harvest, nevertheless we believe these fruits – the harvest of a new creation, thriving for those born in the kingdom – to be neither inferior in industry nor lesser in strength.

Frederick traces a line from the Roman and Greek rule of the island to the Norman conquest, without mention of the centuries of Muslim rule that lay between. Indeed, he does not mention the Muslims of Sicily, unless they are the "populos barbaros" whom the Sicilians of the first Norman era strove valiantly to subject to their rule. In Frederick's history of Sicily, the Normans liberate the island from the colonial powers that ruled it during Antiquity and the early Middle Ages; and the line of succession from the Norman rulers to himself is boldly sketched. He, of course, is the "new harvest," scion of the Normans and harbinger of a second and more virile Norman era.

Alberto Varvaro, in a passage quoted above (see pages 9, 68-69), points out that Sicily was perceived throughout its history as an extension of the diverse mainland kingdoms that colonized it. During the reign of Frederick II, for the first time since the collapse of the Roman Empire, Sicily came to be seen and ruled as an extension of the European mainland: although its cultural ambiguities, the result of centuries of Greek and Arabic rule, endured, for the first time in its history its connections with Latinate Christianity became primary. Unlike his Norman forebears, Frederick displayed little interest in promoting Greek culture in Sicily, or establishing connections with the Greek-speaking world.² On the other hand, he genuinely admired the culture of the Arabic world: like his ancestors, he modeled his notion of kingship on Muslim models, emphasizing extravagant public displays of his vast wealth and power; and he exploited the access to the scientific and philosophical traditions of the Arabic world that Sicily afforded him. But during his reign, Sicily's Muslim population began to be viewed as a threat to the

²See, e.g., Charles Homer Haskins' study of culture and science at the court of Frederick II: "Greek versions of his laws were issued, and Italian poets sang his praises in Greek verse, but the influence of Byzantium had declined with the fall of the Greek empire, and we hear little of Greek scholars or Greek translations in the South" (Haskins, 244).

kingdom's domestic stability, and Frederick took pains to contain and control it. In an extraordinary act of ethnic engineering which I will examine later in this chapter, Frederick undertook in 1224 to deport Sicilian Muslims from the island and resettle them in a Muslim ghetto city on the Italian mainland.

Modern historians writing about the transition between Norman and Hohenstaufen rule in Sicily stress the continuities between the two eras that persisted despite political disruptions.³ Frederick admired and maintained or recreated many elements of his Norman heritage, in the context of a very different conception of Sicily's cultural and political place in the world; and the difference between Frederick's Sicily and the Sicily of the Norman era is nowhere more evident than in Frederick's dealings with the Muslim world. The Norman rulers of Sicily governed a kingdom with a large Muslim population, and established economic and cultural connections with Muslims both within Sicily and throughout the Mediterranean. Frederick, while he admired the political and scientific culture of the Muslim world, preferred to admire it from a distance. He communicated with Muslim scholars in other parts of the world, but made little effort to bring them to Sicily; and he strove to segregate the Muslim and Christian worlds within Sicily. The distance between Frederick and the Muslim world would allow him to manipulate it: to select and exploit those elements that were of cultural, political, economic, and military use, and to contain and distance what was awkward or threatening.

In this chapter, I will read a poem by Giacomo da Lentini, the most accomplished and best-known of the group of poets associated with Frederick II, in order to evaluate the cultural project of those poets. Modern literary historians believe that the Siculo-Italian poets, who wrote the first body of poetry in an Italian vernacular, began to write during the 1230s (Antonelli, 59), a century after Sicilian poets had written panegyrics for Roger II in

³See, e.g., Matthew, 286, for the continuity of the Norman state during the period immediately following William's death; and Roncaglia, "Le corti medievali," 126, for a discussion of the continuity between the Norman era and the reign of Frederick.

Arabic. This linguistic shift constitutes the most striking discontinuity between the two groups of poets, and it will be one of my goals in this reading to sketch the environmental changes that made such a shift possible. The invention of an Italian literary vernacular, and the inauguration of a poetic movement using that vernacular as its medium, constitute the most radical and significant cultural development that occurred in Sicily during the years of Frederick's rule. In the discussion of Siculo-Italian poetry and of Muslim-Christian relations in Sicily that follows, I will focus on the transformation of cultural allegiance which allowed men resident in a state where civic poetry had been written in Arabic a century before to make a significant contribution to Romance vernacular literary history. It is necessary to understand the significance of the linguistic shift that occurred between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in Sicily, and the mechanism by which that shift was effected, in order to begin to look for the continuities between the two groups of poets that accompany that radical discontinuity.

Giacomo da Lentini and Siculo-Italian poetics

Like the Siculo-Arabic poets of the twelfth century, the Siculo-Italian poets of the early thirteenth century are generally defined as "court poets." The motivation for this definition is quite obvious in the case of the Arabic poets, who wrote in praise of Roger II. The Italian poets, however, are not believed to have performed their poetry at the royal court, wrote no panegyrics, and in fact wrote no political poetry at all. The tendency to identify them as "court poets" seems to depend on the affiliation of many of them – most notably, Giacomo da Lentini and Pier della Vigna – with Frederick's court,⁴ on the fact

⁴Of the 32 Sicilian poets of the "Frederician group" (i.e., the first generation of Sicilian poets) listed by Ernest Langley in his 1913 bibliographic study, 22 have some direct association with Frederick or with the

that Frederick himself was a poet (three of his poems have been preserved), and on Dante's discussion of the Sicilian poets in the *De vulgari eloquentia* (the earliest literary-historical account of them). The Sicilian poets were the first to write in an Italian dialect, and thus provide an obvious point of departure for Dante's history of the Italian poetic tradition. His discussion focuses less on their poetry than on the state in which it was written, and in particular on the monarchs who ruled it:

Sed hec fama trinacrie terre, si recte signum ad quod tendit inspiciamus, videtur tantum in obproprium ytalorum principum remansisse, qui non heroico more sed plebeio secuntur superbiam. Siquidem illustres heroes, Fredericus Cesar et benegenitus eius Manfredus, nobilitatem ac rectitudinem sue forme pandentes, donec fortuna permisit humana secuti sunt, brutalia dedignant. Propter quod corde nobiles atque gratiarum dotati inherere tantorum principum maiestate conati sunt, ita ut eorum tempore quicquid excellentes animi Latinorum enitebantur primitus in tantorum coronatorum aula prodibat; et quia regale solium erat Sicilia. factum est ut quicquid nostri predecessores vulgariter protulerunt. sicilianum vocetur: quod quidem retinemus et nos, nec posterius nostri permutare valebunt.
(DVE I, xii, 4 [p. 100-102])

But the fame of the Sicilian land, if we perceive correctly where the signs lead, seems to inspire particular scorn for the Italian princes, who – not in the manner of heroes, but in the manner of commoners – pursue their haughty pride: so indeed did the illustrious heroes, King Frederick and his good son Manfred, manifesting their splendid nobility and righteousness, for so long as fortune permitted, pursue whatever was refined, and scorn brutality. Thus those noble in heart and gifted with grace strove to connect themselves with the majesty of such great princes, so that during their time whatever the excellence of the Italian spirit strove for appeared first in the court of such great monarchs. And because the royal land was Sicily, it came about that whatever our predecessors produced in the vernacular was called Sicilian. We uphold this as well, and those who come after us will not be able to change it.

Dante celebrates the refinement of the Sicilian leaders, and cites this refinement as a catalyst and an organizing force for the works written by the poets of their era. Most

government of the kingdom of Sicily. 10 poets have been identified as *podestà* or judges of various towns (four of those identifications are tentative): five had some direct connection with Frederick or with the royal court (including Giacomo and Pier); four were members of the royal family (Enzo Re, Federigo Re d'Antiochia, Giovanni Re, and Frederick himself); and two were Frederick's falconers. (See Langley, 465-472.) However, the poets' association with the government of the kingdom of Sicily does not imply that the king of Sicily took a direct and defining interest in literary development or in contemporary poetics: he certainly did not – as Roger II apparently did – support panegyrists at the royal court.

interesting to students of early literature in the Italian vernacular is his definition of the term "Sicilian." In his account, the adjective loses all geographic or cultural specificity. So irresistible was the influence of the Sicilian monarchs that all poets who wrote in Italian during the years of their reign would be termed Sicilian: Dante's definition effectively blurs the geographic, linguistic, and cultural boundaries separating "Sicilian" from "Italian," and erases whatever was specifically Sicilian in the genesis of the Italian tradition.

In place of other boundaries distinguishing "Sicilian" from "Italian," Dante erects a temporal boundary. He had introduced his readings of the Sicilian poets Giacomo and Guido delle Colonne in an earlier passage with the following statement:

Et primo de siciliano examinemus ingenium: nam videtur sicilianum vulgare sibi fama pre aliis asciscere eo quod quicquid poetantur Ytali sicilianum vocatur . . .
(DVE I. xii, 2 [p. 98])

First, let us examine the genius of the Sicilian (tongue); for it seems that the Sicilian vernacular won fame for itself before the other (vernaculars), because whatever poetry Italians write is called Sicilian . . .

"Sicilians" are defined here as all those who wrote in Italian before the emergence of the new poets whose work Dante will describe, after discussing the Sicilian poets by way of prologue. It is interesting to note that, though in this description the line between "Sicilian" and "Italian" becomes quite permeable – "whatever poetry Italians write is called Sicilian" – still Dante elsewhere in the *De vulgari eloquentia*, his contemporary Brunetto Latini, and Machiavelli, who wrote two centuries later, distinguish between Sicily and mainland Italy, making Sicily in effect an independent nation.⁵ Dante's effort to claim the

⁵In defining the regions of Italy, Dante describes each as being "of the eastern (or the western) part of Italy": thus Friuli and Istria "non nisi leve Ytalie esse possunt" (can only be considered to be of the eastern part of Italy). In defining Sicily and Sardinia, however, Dante corrects his terminology: "nec insule Tyreni maris, videlicet Sicilia et Sardinia, non nisi dextre Ytalie sunt, vel ad dextram Ytaliæ sociande" (and the islands of the Tyrrhenian sea, namely Sicily and Sardinia, are of the western part of Italy, or rather *are associated with* the western part of Italy. DVE, I. x. 6 [p. 88]; emphasis added).

Brunetto is discussing the geography of Europe: "Et sachiés que entre Sezille et Ytaile si a .i. petit bras de mer enmi ki est apelé Far de Mechine: por quoi li plusor dient que Sesille n'est mie en Ytaile, ains est un païs par soi" (Know that a small arm of the sea passes between Sicily and Italy, called the Strait of Messina: for which reason most people say that Sicily is not part of Italy, but rather is a land unto itself. Latini. *Li tresors*, I. 123. 9).

poetry of the Sicilians as an Italian phenomenon thus appears to be a subtle, and probably unconscious, act of cultural appropriation: he recognizes the political and greater cultural differences between Sicily and Italy at one moment, and in the next overlooks the boundary between the two regions in order to gain possession of the Sicilian poetic tradition.⁶

"Sicilian" poetry is defined by Dante as whatever was written during the age of Frederick and his son Manfred, before the emergence of a new generation of poets represented by Dante himself and his friends. Dante concludes his treatment of the Sicilians in the passage cited above, and affirms his definition of "Sicilian" as "whatever our predecessors produced," with the curious phrase "we uphold this as well, and those who come after us will not be able to change it." This defiant assertion is certainly meant to balance and complete the historical sequence he sketches: having spoken of those who came before him, he mentions those who will come after, and thus throws the poets in the middle – Dante and his contemporaries – into a position of high relief, defining them as the watershed that marks the boundary between "before" and "after." In retrospect, Dante's pronouncement possesses an air of prophecy. Subsequent writers and readers have not been able to change his definition of the Sicilian poets: as Dante did, they have continued to perceive the figure of Frederick II as instrumental to literary development during this era, despite the fact that no documentation, apart from the poems authored by Frederick, exists to demonstrate that Frederick took a direct interest in contemporary poetry, or personally supported poets. The belief that Frederick in some way legislated

Machiavelli is responding to the methodology, invented by Dante in the *De vulgari*, of classifying the romance vernaculars by distinguishing between the way speakers say "yes" in the various tongues: "Alcuni altri tengono che questa particula *Si* non sia quella che regoli la lingua, perchè, se la regolassi, et i Siciliani et li Spagnuoli sarebbono ancor loro, quanto al parlare. Italiani: e però è necessario si regoli con altre ragioni" (Certain others hold that this particle *Si* is not what regulates language, because if it were, both the Sicilians and the Spaniards would also be, with reference to language. Italians: therefore it is necessary to regulate it by other means. Dialogo, 15 [Nicolò Macchiavelli e il "Dialogo intorno alla nostra lingua," 227]).

⁶This tendency to blur the boundary between "Sicilian" and "Italian" in regard to poetry is reflected as well in the Tuscanization of the language of the Sicilian poetry.

the Siculo-Italian poetic movement into being has contributed to the tendency evidenced by some critics to see their poetry as bureaucratic in spirit. The habit of perceiving the Siculo-Italian poets as "government workers" who wrote on command and without passion is reflected in the somewhat sterile label "Scuola Siciliana," the name by which they came to be known after Adolph Gaspari invented it in his nineteenth-century study.⁷ Again as Dante did, scholars have often treated all the lyric love poets who wrote between the era of Frederick and the emergence of the *dolce stil novo* poets (with the exception of Guittone and Guinizelli) as generically "Sicilian," although many of the poets who wrote under this designation were northern Italians of a later period imitating the works of the first generation of Sicilian poets.⁸ Finally, as Dante did, literary historians have continued to view the Siculo-Italian poets as a transitional stage between the earthy elegance of Occitan lyric and the sublime works of the *dolce stil novo* poets.

The Siculo-Italian poets whom Dante memorialized wrote from the margins of Romance vernacular lyric culture, and their poetic project reflects both the limitations and the possibilities inherent in their marginal position. The Sicilian court had not, before the era of Frederick II, played a role in the evolution of Romance vernacular culture; the Latin production of the Sicilians was limited to a handful of chronicles, epic poems, and translations from the Greek and Arabic. Poets writing in the *langue d'oc* and *langue d'oïl* had already explored the psychological and social implications of the drama of courtly love from every angle. The Sicilian poets embraced and manipulated the traditions established by the Occitan and French poets who had gone before them, translating into an Italian vernacular the conventions of the courtly love drama, but modifying both the form and the

⁷Scholars have contested the validity of this label. Gianfranco Folena, for instance, argues that the name should be dropped. "or at least it should be recognized that, as in the *Magna curia* there were different *scholae*, that is sections or offices, so too among these poets not only is there a place for different voices, but also for different poetic families" (314). However, the name is still generally used to refer to both the Sicilian poets of the era of Frederick II, and the later, northern, "Sicilianizing" poets.

⁸Folena points out the limitations of this habit, and argues cogently against it, in his article on the Sicilian poets. "Cultura e poesia dei siciliani."

content of those conventions. In this study, I will focus on the first generation of Sicilian poets, those who were contemporary with Frederick II and produced the first Italian response to the Romance vernacular lyric tradition. The poem that I have chosen as a focal point for my reading of Siculo-Italian poetics acknowledges and problematizes the Sicilians' relation to that tradition. I give the text of Giacomo's poem here in full:

5	<p>Amor non vole ch'io clami merzede c'oun'omo clama, nè che io m'avanti c'ami, c'ogn'omo s'avanta c'ama: chè lo servire c'onn'omo sape fare non à nomo; e no è in pregio di laudare quello che sape ciascuno: a voi, bella, tale duno non vorria apresentare.</p>	<p>Love does not wish me to demand mercy⁹, which every man demands, nor that I pride myself on loving, because every man that loves prides himself; for the service that every man knows how to perform has no name;¹⁰ and what everybody knows is not worthy of praise: to you, beautiful one, such a gift I would not wish to present.</p>
15	<p>Per zo l'amore mi 'nsigna ch'io non guardi a l'autra gente: non vuol ch'io resembri a scigna, c'ogni viso tene mente. E per zo, madonna mia, a voi non dimandaria merzede nè pietanza, chè tanti son li amatori, ch'este scinta di savori merzede per troppa usanza.</p>	<p>For this reason love has taught me not to look to other people: he does not wish me to resemble a monkey, which minds¹¹ every appearance¹². And for this reason, my lady, I would not ask from you mercy nor pity, because there are so many lovers that mercy has lost its taste from overuse.</p>
25	<p>Ogni gioia ch'è più rara tenut'è più preziosa ancora che non sia cara de l'altr'è più graziosa; ca, s'este orientale, lo zafiro assai più vale, ed à meno di vertute. E per zo ne le merzede</p>	<p>Every delight that is more rare is held to be more precious even though it is not of more value it is more gracious than another; for, if it is Oriental, the sapphire is worth that much more, though it has less power. And for this reason my heart</p>

⁹*Merzede*, like its Occitan cognate *merce*, is a key courtly term signifying the lady's gracious acquiescence to the lover's desire to love her.

¹⁰That is, it is common, and of no value.

¹¹*I.e.*, "looks at and imitates."

¹²Or "face."

30	lo mio core non v'accede, perchè l'uso l'à 'nvilute.	does not go out to you for mercy, because [over]use has cheapened it.
35	'Nviluti li xolosmini di quel tempo ricordato, ch'erano sì gai e fini, nullo gioi non à trovato. E le merzè siano strette, nulla parte siano dette, perchè paian gioie nove: nulla parte sian trovate, nè da gli amador chiamate,	Cheapened are the turquoises of that remembered age, that were so gay and fine, no one found delight [in them]. May mercies be restricted, may they not be mentioned anywhere, so that they might appear to be new delights: may they not be sung of anywhere, nor called on by lovers,
40	'nfine che compie anni nove.	until nine years have passed.
45	Senza merzede potete saver ben lo meo disio, c'assai meglio mi vedete ch'io medesmo non mi vio. E però s'a voi paresse altro ch'esser non dovesse	Without mercy you can well know my desire, for you see me much better than I see myself. However, if it seems right to you to have something else which ought not to be
50	per lo vostro amore avire. unque gioi non ci perdiate: cusì volete amistate? inauzi vorria morire. ¹³	in order to possess your love, don't waste any of your delights: do you want that sort of love? rather, I would prefer to die.

In this poem, Giacomo positions himself in the context of the courtly love tradition established by the poets who have written before him, and describes the difficulty of his position: Others have already sung all the joys and the pains of love; what strategy remains for the lover who wishes to make a convincing and original bid for his lady's affections? The author of one of the earliest studies of the Siculo-Italian poets termed this poem a "manifesto," and certainly it does, like a manifesto, describe an aesthetic problem and agitate for a solution. I will return to this characterization later. For the moment, it is sufficient to point out that, unlike a manifesto, Giacomo's lyric does not define the steps that will lead to solution of the problem, but focuses on analysis of the problem itself: thus

¹³Ed. Panvini. *Poeti italiani della corte di Federico II*. 14-16. Hereafter all citations of Panvini's editions refer to this volume.

it reads more like an interrogation of courtly poetics and its limitations than a plan for renovation of an enervated genre.

The problem, as Giacomo defines it, is that loving as every lover has loved is no tribute. Each of the stanzas is organized into two uneven sections; the first four verses of the 10-line stanza introduce a thought or an image, and the final six verses comment on or illustrate the theme thus introduced. After presenting the problem in the first four verses of the opening stanza – "love does not wish me to demand/mercy, which every man demands" – Giacomo initiates his analysis of the problem: "for the service that every man/knows how to perform has no name" (vv. 5-6). If every poet uses the same words to represent his love, no particular value can be attributed to any individual representation. In the first section of the following stanza, this idea is expressed using another image: "(love) does not wish me to resemble a monkey,/which minds every appearance" (vv. 13-14). A monkey sees and duplicates gestures and expressions he does not understand; Giacomo speaks out against the chafing influence of the poetic tradition that preceded him, suggesting by citing this negative example that he wishes to write poems in which the emotions and symptoms of love find a fresh and intelligent expression. In both these brief passages Giacomo develops a focus not on psychological analysis of love, but on the poetic representation of love. He is interested less in loving well than in writing well about his love, using new names and fresh images.

In the third and fourth stanzas, Giacomo continues his analysis of the difficulty facing poets of courtly love, and begins to sketch his solution, using a pair of lapidary images to illustrate both the problem and its resolution. "Every delight that is more rare," he writes, "is held to be more precious" (vv. 21-22). He introduces an example of something "more precious" – the Oriental sapphire – in the second half of the third stanza, and an example of something cheapened by overuse – the turquoise – in the first half of the fourth. Antonino Pagliaro, writing in the 1950s, solved a puzzle that had troubled critics by identifying the gem Giacomo describes in these lines (the word that he uses,

xolosmini, is related to the Armenian word for turquoise, and seems to have been transliterated and transmitted through the Arabic alphabet), and traced Giacomo's intimation that the color and quality of the turquoise can degenerate with the passage of time, unfamiliar in Christian Europe, to the Arabic lapidary tradition (Pagliaro, "Inviluti sono li scolosmini . . ."). In characterizing the turquoise, he refers to it as the gem "of that remembered age" (v. 32). The age to which he refers is ambiguous; its most obvious referent is the vaguely-defined era of all the poets who have written before him, who have exhausted the strategy of invoking the beloved for mercy, just as time exhausts the beauty of the turquoise.

In the second half of the fourth stanza Giacomo suggests a tongue-in-cheek solution to the lover's problem. Let no one beseech his beloved for her mercy, he writes, "until nine years have passed" (v. 40). By declaring a moratorium on invocations for the beloved's sympathy, the poet produces a melodramatic representation of the impasse that courtly poets have reached, and illustrates the comic despair of the lover who can find no original way to convince his beloved to submit to his petitions. The first four verses of the final stanza re-state this solution in a more serious way. He asserts that he does not need to ask for mercy "for you see me much better/than I see myself" (vv. 41-42). These lines have a particular resonance for readers familiar with Giacomo's poetry; he is fond of using discussions of vision (for example, in the sonnets "Or come pote sì gran donna intrare," or "Eo viso e son diviso da lo viso") and of representation (most notably in the *canzone* "Maravigliosamente") to talk about the lover's response to the beloved. In "Amor non vole" he attributes to the beloved the power to gaze on and, implicitly, to represent the lover and his intentions. The beloved can see and interpret the lover's desire without requiring him to submit to the indignity of asking. The closing verses of the poem constitute an ultimatum to the beloved: if she persists, perversely, in demanding tired invocations for mercy, the lover will retire from the theater of amorous action. When Giacomo writes that he "would prefer to die" (v. 50), he at once gestures toward the lover's cliché response to

the beloved's devastating beauty or brutal coldness, and dramatizes again the solution he had offered in the previous stanza. Rather than repeat tired erotic formulas, the poet prefers not to write (at least for nine years), the lover chooses to die rather than to love.

In a study published in 1894, G. Alfredo Cesareo wrote of "Amor non vole" that "to me, it seems to be nothing less than a true literary manifesto" (Cesareo, 343). Indeed, Giacomo's poem employs some of the stylistic and formal conventions found in the classic manifestos of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The writer outlines an untenable situation, in this case a literary problem: one of the fundamental conventions of the lyric love tradition has become meaningless, its value debased through overuse. He suggests a resolution to the problem, declaring a 9-year moratorium on use of the cliché, and calling on his audience (the beloved) to participate in the proposed program of renovation. The use of hortatory verbs (the repetition of the verb *siano* in vv. 35, 36, and 38) and the second-person address to the audience in this section of the poem are devices particularly reminiscent of the manifesto tradition. However, although the poet calls for abandonment of the problematic convention, he does not put forward any realistic strategy for replacing it or learning to live without it. The rousing climax typical of the true manifesto ("Workers of the world unite!") is wholly missing; the lover's offer to die does not constitute a feasible solution to the difficulty.

Cesareo's parenthetical comparison of the poem to a manifesto was certainly not intended to be read so literally, and I do not mean to distort his intention here. However, the differences between Giacomo's poem and a true manifesto serve to illuminate the poet's position in relation to literary tradition and his response to that position. The Siculo-Italian poets were the last of the major Romance-vernacular poetic avant gardes, and Giacomo's poem illustrates his awareness of his position as heir to an established revolutionary tradition. Later poets would make a deliberate and explicit effort to distance themselves from that tradition (the *Vita nuova*, for instance, is in many respects closer to a true manifesto than "Amor non vole"). Giacomo was an intelligent reader of the works of

the troubadours who wrote before him, and introduced brilliant innovations, in both form and content, of the conventions of courtly love. But his poetic project seems geared to reflect the difference between him and his poetic predecessors and to stress continuity between them and himself in equal measure. The literary manifesto typically describes a cataclysmic event that provokes a conversion experience in the writer; thus, for instance, the psychological and spiritual milestones described in the *Vita nuova* compel Dante to evolve a radically new approach to the conceptualization and writing of love poetry.

Giacomo, however, works largely within the bounds of the lyric love tradition as it was defined by his predecessors: rather than breaking with lyric conventions, he comments on them. Like a mannerist or a post-modernist, he produces a close and critical reading of a previous revolutionary movement, and his difference from his predecessors is defined by the nuances he insinuates into his reading.

The Siculo-Italian poets accepted many of the received traditions of courtly lyric. They refined those traditions, on the one hand, by imposing radical formal and thematic limitations on them, and on the other by introducing a handful of formal and thematic innovations. Their poetry addressed the problems and joys of love with a single-minded sense of purpose. Unlike the troubadours and *trouvères*, they did not write poetry on political, religious or moral themes; in Giacomo's corpus, only a single poem on a non-amorous theme – the sonnet "Quand'om a un bono amico leiale," a meditation on the subject of friendship – survives. The troubadours had written love poetry, *sirventesi*, political satires, religious meditations, dialogues on moral problems, occasional poems. Why, when the Sicilians worked to translate this vast tradition into an Italian vernacular, did they edit it so radically?

The Sicilians' narrowing of the thematic content of their poetry is echoed by their reduction of the repertoire of prosodic forms used by the poets who had written before them. They did not use most of the lyric forms devised by the troubadours. A handful of *discordi* (poems in which each stanza has a different meter and rhyme scheme) survive;

but the vast majority of the Sicilians' poetry consists of *canzoni*, a form used by the troubadours for love poetry, and sonnets, which the Sicilians invented. In a recent essay on the Siculo-Italian poets, scholar Furio Brugnolo, discussing this prosodic limitation, speculates that it follows naturally from the thematic reduction imposed by the Sicilian poets: because they did not write political or moral poetry, the Sicilians had no need for the forms normally used by earlier Romance vernacular poets to write about those themes (Brugnolo, 320). This argument offers a persuasive explanation for the motives for the Sicilians' editing, although it does not account for the extent of their manipulation of received tradition. Why did the Sicilians not attempt, for instance, the more complex prosodic forms, like the *sestina*, or the more populist forms, like the *alba* or the *pastorela*, which had been used by previous poets as vehicles for love poetry?

Giacomo's poem "Amor non vole" demonstrates the extent to which the Sicilian poets were aware of the courtly love tradition that preceded them. The Sicilians responded to that tradition by limiting it, excising those elements of it that seemed unnecessary or irrelevant. They used the small arena that remained to introduce circumspect but crucial innovations in content and form. I outline here the Sicilians' most decisive departures from Romance vernacular tradition, focusing on the scope of the modifications introduced, rather than on the thorny question of the motives behind them:

The love poem as a vehicle for scientific meditation. Giacomo, in particular, perceives in the conventions of the courtly love drama a theater for speculation on scientific issues. Thus, in one sonnet, he plays on the conventional notion that love enters through the eyes:

Or, come pote sì gran donna intrare
per gli occhi mei, che sì piccioli sone?
ed. Panvini, 57, vv. 1-2

Now, how can so great a lady
enter my eyes, which are so small?

The question at once parodies the courtly convention by literalizing it, and provides an occasion for a technically detailed interrogation of the mechanics of vision. None of the other Siculo-Italian poets demonstrates a consistent enthusiasm for scientific analysis equal to Giacomo's. However, the opening lines from one of Guido delle Colonne's *canzoni* rival Giacomo at his most speculative:

Ancor che l'aigua per lo foco lassi
 la sua grande freddura
 non cangerà natura
 s'alcun vasello in mezzo non vi stassi,
 anzi avverrà senza lunga dimura
 che lo foco astutassi
 o che l'aigua seccassi;
 ma per lo mezzo l'uno e l'altra dura.
 ed. Panvini, 100, vv. 1-8

Although water, because of fire, loses
 its great coldness
 it would not change its nature [i.e., its coldness]
 if some vessel did not stand between [it and the fire]:
 rather, it would happen rapidly
 that the fire would be extinguished
 or the water would evaporate;
 but because of the intermediary [vessel], both stay the same.¹⁴

In the following lines, Guido asserts that love (which burns like fire) has entered the poet (who would be like chill water without love's heat), and that his lady functions like the vessel that contains the fire and allows it to warm the water. In works like these, intellectual vitality replaces the emotional and psychological vigor of the troubadour lover, and transforms the court of love into an arena for scientific speculation. The Sicilian poets' fondness for citing lapidaries and bestiaries represents another facet of this enthusiasm for exploring the nature of things. In "Amor non vole," Giacomo makes reference to the turquoise (known in the Arabic-speaking world for its tendency to fade with the passing of time) and the rare Oriental sapphire. Stefano Protonotaro draws on

¹⁴The first verse of this poem is one of the two examples of Sicilian poetry given by Dante in the *De vulgari eloquentia*.

bestiary descriptions of exotic animals in both of the poems attributed to him. In "Pir meu cori alegrari," he compares himself to the tigress, seduced by her own image in the mirror (ed. Panvini, 174, vv. 24-31); in "Assai mi placera," he likens himself to the unicorn, bewitched by a virgin (ed. Panvini, 178-9, vv. 35-39), and his beloved to the basilisk, which can kill with its gaze (ed. Panvini, 179, vv. 40-45). In their lapidary and bestiary references, and particularly in their discussions of scientific problems like thermodynamics or the mechanics of vision, the Sicilian poets treat the love-drama as an opportunity to engage contemporary scientific speculation and natural philosophy.

The invention of the sonnet. Most literary historians believe that Giacomo himself created the new form, both because he is the most brilliant and most innovative of the Sicilian poets and thus the most likely candidate for inventor, and because he produced the largest body of sonnets. The Sicilians typically used the sonnet to explore a single image or theme in depth. Thus in the work by Giacomo cited above, "Or come pote," the poet uses an absurd question – how can my beloved enter my heart through my eyes, since she is substantially larger than they are? – to launch a lively discussion of the mechanics of vision. And in another sonnet, Giacomo sets himself the task of producing a coherent love poem using the word "viso" and its compounds two or three times in each line:

Eo viso e son diviso da lo viso
e per aviso credo ben visare;
però diviso viso da l'aviso
c'altr'è lo viso che lo divisare . . .

ed. Panvini, 64, vv. 1-4

I see, though I am distant from the face [of my beloved]
and I believe that I see well, by means of my rational faculty;
however I distinguish between sight and imagination,
for seeing is one thing, imagining another . . .

The theme of the sonnet resonates with Giacomo's tendency mentioned above (page 135) to use discussions of vision and representation in order to characterize the lover's perception of the beloved. Both the brevity of the sonnet and its stanzaic structure,

already well-defined in the earliest preserved examples, make it inherently well-suited to sustained development of a single thought, theme, or image: a problem is introduced in the opening quatrain, developed in the second quatrain, and resolved in the pair of tercets that conclude the poem.¹⁵ Thus it serves well to support the scientific analysis and discussion of natural philosophy that is central to Giacomo's poetics, and a number of Giacomo's sonnets focus on treatment of scientific themes.¹⁶

The separation of poetry and music. The troubadours, who wrote the first lyric poetry in a Romance vernacular, sang their poems to musical accompaniment, and the musical arrangement of some of their works has been preserved. No musical arrangements survive for the poems written by the Siculo-Italian poets, and we have no contemporary accounts of musical performances of the Sicilians' works. The intricate meter and rhyme scheme of many of the Sicilian *canzoni* would suggest that – in the words of Aurelio Roncaglia – "for the complexity of a melodic-verbal composition, the Sicilians substituted the intensity of a purely verbal invention, wholly concentrated on the value of the word" (Roncaglia, *Il costituirsi di una tradizione lirica*, 153). The sonnet, with its lines of equal length and its emphasis on sustained, meditative analysis of a single image or concept, was certainly not conceived for musical presentation. For these reasons, scholars now generally believe that, while some of the poetry of the Sicilians may have been sung, the greater part of their work was intended for recitation without music. The production

¹⁵This structure bears an intriguing resemblance to the stanzaic structure of "Amor non vole." As noted above (page 134), each stanza of the *canzone* is divided into two unequal sections: the first four verses of the stanza introduce a theme or image, and the final six verses develop it. Thus each stanza is shaped like a sonnet, but with a single quatrain rather than two. There are substantial differences between the metric structure of this *canzone* and the structure of Giacomo's sonnets: his sonnets are hendecasyllabic, and "Amor non vole" is octosyllabic; the final six verses of each stanza of "Amor non vole" have the rhyme scheme ABC ABC, a scheme that is not used in the concluding tercets of any of Giacomo's sonnets. However the similarity between the two forms helps to explain in part the conceptual sophistication and elegance of the *canzone*: Giacomo is comfortable with the basic organizational structure – a theme is introduced in a quatrain, resolved in a pair of tercets – and works well within its strictures.

¹⁶See, e.g., in addition to "Or come pote," "Sì como 'l parpaglion, ch' à tal natura" (ed. Panvini, 68), which cites a variety of animals believed to be able to endure exposure to fire; and "Sì come il sol, che manda la sua spera" (ed. Panvini, 56), in which the poet uses optical metaphors to describe the operation of the arrows of love.

of lyric poetry meant to stand without musical accompaniment, capable of exciting and sustaining its audience's interest through the use of words alone, constitutes one of the most significant formal innovations associated with the Sicilian poets.

The Sicilians modified the Romance vernacular lyric tradition they inherited, on the one hand, by radically reducing its thematic and formal scope, and on the other by developing a conception of the lyric love poem as a format for analysis of scientific or philosophical problems. The presentation of poetry without musical accompaniment, and the evolution of a prosodic form uniquely suited to the interrogation of a single theme or problem, were innovations that served to support their effort to renovate the tradition they inherited by shifting its emphasis. Literary history demonstrates that subsequent poets recognized the relevance of the Sicilian poets' manipulation of the Romance vernacular tradition. The Tuscan poets who wrote after them would not produce many works conceived for musical presentation. They would not revive the prosodic forms neglected by the Sicilians, but would work to perfect the canzone and the sonnet.¹⁷ And they would, like the Sicilians, develop a focus on the love poem, using the love-situation as a setting for philosophical speculation.

The Sicilians' poetry differs from the works written by previous Romance vernacular poets in other significant ways. For instance, the Sicilians, unlike the troubadours, were not professional poets and performers, but men of learning who also wrote poetry. Their translations of Occitan poetry are the only formal poetic translations produced in medieval Europe, and stand as a further indication of their keen awareness of and response to poetic tradition.¹⁸ And they seem to be, as a group, more cohesive than any parallel school of Romance vernacular poets: they were associated by their contemporaries with the Sicilian court and the figure of the Sicilian King, as Dante's

¹⁷They would also make use of a third form, often thought to be a Tuscan invention but in fact traceable to the later "Sicilian" poets, the *ballata* (see Folena, 323).

¹⁸For discussions of the Sicilians' poetic translations, see Roncaglia, "De quibusdam provincialibus translatis in lingua nostra": and Brugnolo, 302-318.

discussion of them attests; Giacomo da Lentini serves as *caposcuola* for the group as a whole, and other Sicilian poets responded to his innovations more explicitly than, for instance, the Occitan poets responded to William IX, the first troubadour (see Brugnolo, p. 295). It is in part this cohesiveness that has compelled literary historians to perceive the Sicilians as "court" poets, despite the fact that they did not write *sirventesi* dedicated to a court patron, and are not known to have performed their poetry in a court setting. Space does not allow a more detailed discussion of these aspects of Siculo-Italian poetics. I have focused on the formal and thematic departures from tradition in part because they are the most important and influential innovations introduced by the Sicilian poets, and in part because they serve to throw into greater relief a question that is of central interest to this study: How did the Sicilian situation influence the development of Siculo-Italian poetics? The Sicilian poets were aware of and responded to the conventions established by earlier Romance vernacular poets: how did they use the cultural elements unique to the Sicilian situation to modify this tradition?

Giacomo's "reading" of Romance vernacular courtly poetry refashions the love poem as an arena in which the poet engages contemporary trends in science and natural philosophy. Sicily was known as a center for scientific translation from the Arabic, second in importance only to the Christian courts of the Iberian peninsula. Giacomo's enviable access to the newest trends in scientific thought may help to account for his tendency to introduce scientific analysis of the phenomenology of courtly love into his lyrics. In the sonnet "Or come pote" (discussed above, pages 135, 140), for example, he uses this simile to characterize the miraculous action of his beloved's image:

ma voglio lei a lumera assomigliare,
 e gli occhi mei al vetro ove si pone:
 lo foco inchiuso poi passa di fore
 lo suo lostrore, senza far rottura;
 così per gli occhi mi pass'a lo core,
 no la persona, ma la sua figura.
 ed. Panvini, 57, vv. 7-12

but I wish to compare her to a lamp,
 and my eyes to the glass behind which it is placed:
 the enclosed fire then passes without
 its brilliance, without breaking [the glass];
 so through my eyes she passes to my heart –
 not her person, but her form.

Here, Giacomo compares his beloved to a lamp which imprints its image – its "form" – on the viewer's eye. Giorgio Agamben, in his discussion of this sonnet, points out the conceptual similarities between it and Averroes' gloss on Aristotle's *De sensu et sensibilibus* (Agamben, 81-83 and 94-96). Whether or not he draws explicitly on Averroes, it is clear that Giacomo is making use of the theory of perception put forward by Averroes, known as *intromission*: the idea that we see because stimuli impose their "forms" on our eye. The detailed schematic of the operation of vision that he offers in this poem demonstrates Giacomo's fluency in the most current developments in optical science – a fluency out of reach for poets in other courts, who do not have such ready access to translations of Arabic scientific texts.

The pair of lapidary references that form the centerpiece of "Amor non vole" draw on natural philosophy, and link the gems cited with the Arabic world. Giacomo makes reference to a property associated with the turquoise that was recognized in Arabic lapidaries, but unknown in Latin Europe. And his assertion that "if it is Oriental/the sapphire is worth that much more" (vv. 25-26) may be read as a sly reminder of the Sicilian poet's advantage as a resident of a kingdom that grants him access to the East and its intellectual and material treasures. Indeed, his celebration of "the turquoises/of that remembered age" (vv. 31-32), which most explicitly suggests (as I stated above) the era of the Occitan troubadours that preceded him, may have another level of reference: the poet may intend to bring to mind the age when Arabic was the primary cultural tongue of the Sicilian court, when Muslim scientists introduced new ways of thinking about the natural world (like the property here attributed to the turquoise) and Muslim poets honored a Christian king in Arabic. We cannot determine all the specific nuances that these verses

bore for the poet or for a contemporary audience; it is noteworthy, nonetheless, that he set this pair of lapidary references, with their "Oriental" resonances, at the center of a poem addressing his relation to the Romance vernacular tradition of Christian Europe.

Such references to the learning and the material wealth of the Arabic-speaking world are not common in Sicilian poetry, and it would be a mistake to assert that Arabic culture had a direct and significant impact on Siculo-Italian poetics. It seems more appropriate to suggest that the access to the Arabic world granted to Sicilians, by virtue both of the history of Muslim-Christian cohabitation in Sicily and the economic and cultural ties maintained with Arabic states by Frederick II, had been and remained an important aspect of the Sicilian cultural situation; and the Sicilian cultural situation in turn influenced the evolution of Siculo-Italian poetics. Furio Brugnolo, discussing the evolution of what he terms the Sicilian "cultural project," points out that Sicilian poetry takes the works of the troubadours as its model and does not respond to an appreciable degree to other literary influences. However, the convergence of cultural influences in Sicily seems to constitute

a factor of capital importance from the historical point of view, since it confirms what had been revealed time and again by other kingdoms (think of the Plantagenet court of Henry II of England, or the Castilian court of Alfonso X): that the decisive push toward the development and consolidation of the new vernacular literatures is attested precisely there where there is greater interaction between different languages and cultures . . .

Brugnolo, 272-3

In northern Italy, where the conflict between linguistic cultures was not nearly as marked, the earliest vernacular poets wrote in Occitan and in Franco-Veneto. The Italian literary vernacular was invented by Sicilians, who wrote from a land where cultural identity was more problematic, toward the established Romance vernacular tradition of the European mainland.

Brugnolo identifies the "interaction between different languages and cultures" as a crucial element in the formation of Romance vernacular culture. A close reading of the

cultural history of Sicily, taking into account in particular the developments that preceded the emergence of a literature in an Italian vernacular, allows us to fine-tune Brugnolo's observation. Cultures converged in Norman Sicily, but Romance vernacular literature did not emerge as a result: the culture of the Norman court integrated Arabic, eastern Christian and western Christian elements, and court poets wrote in Arabic. During the reign of Frederick II the linguistic and cultural affiliations of the royal court shifted. Frederick's diplomatic and cultural activities indicate an attempt to maintain and exploit his connections with the Arabic-speaking world; but he worked simultaneously to segregate the Muslim population within Sicily: the "Kingdom of the Two Sicilies" became not only geographically but also linguistically, culturally and ethnically divided. And as the role of Arabic culture in Sicily was circumscribed, the western Christian tradition came to assume a more primary position. A similar dynamic can be found in the Iberian peninsula during the period of the Reconquista. As Christians gained land and political control, Christian appropriation of valuable Muslim scientific knowledge and cultural forms increased: translations of Arabic scientific works were produced at Christian courts; certain Islamic architectural motifs and other art forms were integrated into the vocabulary of Christian settlers. The art historian Oleg Grabar notes that "this preservation of allegedly Muslim forms often took place while Islam itself and those who professed it were persecuted, often quite brutally, and eventually physically expelled from the Iberian peninsula" (Grabar, 589).

In Sicily, and in the Iberian peninsula, the growth of Christian political and economic power was accompanied by Christian appropriation of Muslim cultural forms that seemed particularly relevant or useful. The developments of the early thirteenth century – the maintenance of valued cultural connections with the Arabic-speaking world outside Sicily; the distance established between Muslim and Christian populations within Sicily; and the growing hegemony of Latinate Christian culture in Sicily – allowed Sicilian Christians both access to Arabic culture, and leverage to manipulate it. Not only cultural

convergence, but more importantly the containment of Arabic culture, constitute the necessary prerequisites for the emergence of an Italian vernacular culture in Sicily.

The Two Sicilies

Frederick II was the grandson of the greatest Norman ruler of Sicily, and his activities as monarch demonstrate his eagerness to maintain and to build on the state created in Sicily by his Norman ancestors. In the 1236 letter sketching his version of Sicilian history, Frederick stresses the unbroken line of descent between the Norman rulers of Sicily and himself. He opens the letter by noting that the Sicilian people "to the envy of all states . . . have always possessed the zeal of a certain innate affection for their lords".¹⁹ He then moves quickly to present himself as the greatest of the Norman lords, and his accomplishments as the culmination of the Normans' Sicilian rule: "Although . . . there came forth [from the labors] of our progenitors an ample and fertile harvest, nevertheless we believe these fruits – the harvest of a new creation, thriving for those born in the kingdom – to be neither inferior in industry nor lesser in strength" (quoted above, pages 124-25).

In certain of his activities Frederick strove to restore and reinforce institutions created by the Normans. Thus, for instance, he renovated the gardens which had symbolized the potency of the Norman kings and the splendor of their island kingdom (see Bresc, 370). His programs could also be more visionary in conception, however, and the difference between his policies and those of his Norman ancestors could be more marked. His reorganization of Sicilian coinage purged it of Arabic and pseudo-Arabic inscriptions

¹⁹"in invidiam omnium nationum . . . innate cujusdam affectionis zelum fideles regni Sicilie semper ad dominos habuerunt": Huillard-Bréholles, vol. IV, pt. 2, p. 930.

(see above, page 104). And his manipulation of Sicily's Muslim population must be considered to stand among his most remarkable and aggressive public projects.

In 1224, Frederick began to deport Muslims from the island of Sicily to Lucera, a small city in the mainland half of the Kingdom of Sicily. By this time, the majority of the Muslim population had left the cities of Sicily; the Muslim communities in the hill country were a source of civil unrest and insurrection. The purported motive for the removal of Muslims from Sicily was to restore peace and order to the territory. Pietro Egidì, author of the most exhaustive study we have of Muslim Lucera, speculates that Frederick was also moved to relocate the Sicilian Muslims to Puglia in order to promote cultivation of land which was currently underworked, because underpopulated.²⁰ Jean-Marie Martin, in a more recent article on Lucera, disagrees with Egidì on this point, asserting that the region was populated and thus attributing to Frederick's constitution of the Muslim colony there a more aggressive quality. Frederick, Martin writes, "made his principal residence in the Capitanata and transformed the habitat and the countryside there, in order to make it resemble the region of Palermo. The installation of a reserve of devoted soldiers [in Lucera], without attachments in the surrounding countryside, seems to us to enter the same category" (Martin, 796). Whether Egidì's suggestion that Frederick took over a drastically underpopulated tract of land in order to create the Muslim colony, or Martin's assertion that the area was populated and that Frederick displaced its Christian population, is the more correct, the fact remains that the establishment of the colony constituted a hubristic act of ethnic (and agricultural) engineering.

As Martin's comment suggests, one of the primary functions of the colony at Lucera was the provision of a standing army for Frederick. In addition to supplying wartime support and undertaking agricultural reclamation of the surrounding land, the colonial subjects in the city manufactured arms, and produced wood inlays (Egidì, 638). It

²⁰Egidì, vol. 36 (1911), 605. Hereafter, all references to Egidì refer to the same volume and year.

seems that Frederick made ongoing efforts to provide for the material comforts of Lucera's citizens. We have a record of him ordering clothing for the women of Lucera in 1239 (Huillard-Bréholles, vol. 5, 486-7). He requested that a copper fountain sculpted in the image of a man and a cow be brought to the city (Ryccardus de Sancto Germano, 216), and had eight camels and two leopards sent to Lucera from Malta (Huillard-Bréholles, Introduction, cxci). We know that he built a palace in Lucera and that he spent a good deal of time there, although we have little information about palace life in the city.²¹ The creation of the colony at Lucera, in sum, is a work of political genius typical of Frederick II: it eliminated a chief source of unrest on the island, contributed to the cultivation of underutilized land, and provided a ready source of military support. Frederick's attention to the maintenance of the city, and his practice of spending time there, demonstrate his own interest in and enjoyment of his project.

Frederick apparently made some efforts to protect his Muslim colony from the Christian lands that surrounded it, and in particular from the machinations of the Pope. Throughout his life, Frederick would bicker with the Pope over Lucera: and one of the chief sources of disagreement between them was the question of sending priests to Lucera to convert the Muslims. Frederick claimed to be in favor of the Pope's envoys. But his reception of them seems to have been less than enthusiastic. Gregory IX complained that Frederick did not allow the priests entrance to the city; and Egidi speculates that, even if Gregory exaggerated Frederick's hostility, it seems likely that Frederick did little to support the priests once they arrived in Lucera. Egidi notes that the conversion of the Muslims would have reduced the antagonism between them and their Christian neighbors "which fomented the military spirit in them," would have diminished their ardor to fight with Frederick against the Pope, would have increased the Pope's power in southern Italy, would have deprived Frederick of a valuable agricultural work force (Egidi, 631): in brief,

²¹On the palace at Lucera, see Egidi, 627; Nunzio Tomaiuolo, "Il 'Palatium' di Lucera"; D.B. Whitehouse, "Ceramiche e vetri medioevali provenienti dal castello di Lucera."

Frederick had clear and compelling motives for preserving the difference between the Muslim colony and the surrounding countryside.

In Lucera, Frederick created a segregated Muslim colony, which he protected, maintained, and preserved apart from the Christian land that surrounded it. His investments in the colony were repaid handsomely: it provided a standing army and an agricultural workforce, manufactured arms and wood inlay, and furnished a royal retreat, an "oriental" idyll which the king visited regularly throughout his life. Frederick's policy toward Sicily's Muslim population, characterized by containment of Muslims and exploitation of the more valuable aspects of their culture, bears a strong resemblance to his relations with the Muslim world outside Sicily. Frederick strove to import and translate important Arabic scientific texts, to maintain diplomatic relations with Muslim rulers in the Holy Land, to communicate with Arabic scholars. However, he did not promote an Arabic cultural presence within Sicily: he did not bring Muslim scholars to his court, or support Siculo-Arabic cultural production. Rather, he commissioned professional translators – first Michael Scot, then Theodore of Antioch – to produce his Arabic correspondence and interpret the scientific texts he imported; and through his scientific and diplomatic correspondence with distant, eminent Muslims, he constructed an idealized Muslim "virtual community."²²

Under the Norman rulers, Muslim cultural influence had been central to the Sicilian sense of cultural identity. A century later, that influence had not abated; however, though it remained important, its weight had shifted. Arabic culture came to be treated as something distant, to be imported, modified, and redistributed to the Christian world. During the first half of the thirteenth century, Sicily was finally and irrevocably divided into "the Two Sicilies": not only split between mainland and island, but also segregated

²²On Frederick's philosophical correspondence with Ibn Sab'in, see Michele Amari, "Questions philosophiques." Frederick's letters to Fakhr al-Din, who had served as his guide in the Holy Land during the 1229 crusade, can be found in *Biblioteca Arabo-Sicula*, 1857, Second Appendix, 34–37, and are translated in *Arab Historians of the Crusades*, 280–283.

into Muslim and Christian. The unique cultural composition of the Norman state – a state inhabited by Muslims and Christians, which maintained many of the institutions of the previous Muslim state under the rule of a Christian monarch – was remembered, but was radically transformed.

This transformation, of course, did not occur overnight, but had already begun during the Norman era. At Roger's court, al-Idrisî wrote his famous geography in Arabic; no attempt was made to translate that work into Latin and make it available to Christian Europe. The poets of Roger's era wrote in Arabic, and the monarch apparently did not encourage production of courtly lyric in a Romance vernacular. During the rule of William II – when the poet Ibn Qalâqis came to Sicily for an extended visit, and composed poetry in praise of the Norman king – Sicilian "vernacular" culture continued to use Arabic as a medium. Still, Umberto Rizzitano speculates that the shift at the Sicilian court from original literary production in Arabic to a focus on translation from the Arabic had begun with Roger's death: Arabic cultural production was reduced during the late Norman period, and a tendency toward "transmission of ancient knowledge through translations" began to emerge (Rizzitano, 283); and during Frederick's era, this emphasis on communication of Arabic culture to the Christian world was consolidated.

The interregnum between the great Norman kings and Frederick's ascendance to the Sicilian throne provided the distance necessary for a substantial revisioning and renovation of the Siculo-Norman state. When Frederick II came to power, nineteen years had passed since the death of William II. Many of the Norman institutions survived, and the state never descended into complete anarchy. However the upheavals had brought a temporary end to cultural production in Sicily; Frederick did not simply *maintain* existing Norman cultural institutions, but *reconstructed* them following a brief abeyance of cultural activities. And while his vision of the resources and the potential of Sicilian culture was similar to Norman ideals in certain crucial respects, it also differed in equally important ways. Frederick, like the Norman monarchs, perceived Sicily's access to Arabic culture to

be an important advantage. His sense of the value of that access is demonstrated by his communications with the Muslim world – he commissioned translations of Arabic scientific texts, including a work on falconry that provided an important source for his own study, *De arte venandi cum avibus* (*On Hunting with Birds*); he communicated with Muslim scholars; he negotiated his way to a victory in the 1229 crusade for which other European leaders might have paid dearly in money and lives. And the response of non-Sicilians to those communications reveals the profound discomfort which Frederick's intimacy with the Muslim world could inspire in the Christian world. Pope Innocent IV, for instance, castigates Frederick for the manner in which he carried out his crusade in this 1245 letter:

Et quo execrabilius est, olim existens in partibus transmarinis, facta compositione quadam, immo collusione verius cum Soldano, Machometi nomen in templo Domini diebus et noctibus publice proclamari permisit.

Huillard-Bréholles, vol. 6, 325²³

And what is even more execrable, while he was overseas [i.e., in the Holy Land], having entered into a certain pact – or more truly a collusion – with the Sultan, he permitted the name of Muhammad to be proclaimed day and night in the temple of the Lord.

This passage is entirely typical of the vividly imagined accusations levelled against Frederick by his enemies, and particularly by his enemies within the Roman church. However, while he strove to maintain cultural and diplomatic ties with the Muslim world, Frederick unlike the Normans did not support Arabic cultural production within Sicily. In his reconstruction of Sicilian culture, a Muslim influence remains central, but is viewed as ancillary: it serves to stimulate the new, Latinate culture of Sicily, and particularly to provide it with revolutionary technical and scientific concepts. His deportation of Sicily's Muslims to Lucera demonstrates his simultaneous effort to contain and control those aspects of Muslim culture that had begun to appear too disruptive.

²³See also a letter written by Innocent in 1246, which uses almost identical language to condemn Frederick's character (Huillard-Bréholles, vol. 6, 427-8).

The new voice of Sicilian culture, and the new (Christian) Sicilian attitude toward Muslims, finds a reflection in Giacomo's poem "Amor non vole." "If it is Oriental," Giacomo writes, "the sapphire is worth that much more": this statement echoes the valorization of "Oriental" culture as foreign, and precious. However the context in which the statement appears serves to undermine the value of the "Oriental sapphire":

- | | |
|---|---|
| 21 Ogni gioia ch'è più rara
tenut'è più preziosa
ancora che non sia cara
de l'altr'è più graziosa;
25 ca, s'este orientale,
lo zafiro assai più vale.
ed à meno di vertute. | Every delight that is more rare
is held to be more precious
even though it is not of more value
it is more gracious than another;
for, if it is Oriental,
the sapphire is worth that much more.
though it has less power. |
|---|---|

The value attributed to the rare Oriental sapphire is merely apparent. In fact, the sapphires from the East have less power: it is the distance they traverse to reach the consumer that compels the undiscerning to see them as valuable. Again, Giacomo's mention of the "turquoises of that remembered age," with its reference to the Arabic lapidary tradition and its use of an Arabizing Sicilian name for the gem, evokes the value of the stone only to undermine it:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 31 'Nviluti li xolosmini
di quel tempo ricordato.
ch'erano sì gai e fini,
nullo gioi non à trovato. | Cheapened are the turquoises
of that remembered age.
that were so gay and fine,
no one found delight [in them]. |
|---|--|

During "that remembered age" – be it the time of the troubadours, or the era of Muslim cultural dominance in Sicily – turquoises possessed the power to enchant the observer. Time has cheapened the charm of the gem, however; what seemed so appealing in that age no longer can seduce. In both these lapidary references, a stone with some connection to the Muslim world is held up at one moment as uniquely valuable and exposed as a sham in the next, as the poet first celebrates the exotic treasures of the Arabic world, and then undermines the value of those treasures, and distances himself from them.

During the twelfth century, Sicilian poets had written in Arabic. Writing less than a century later – and probably only a few decades after the poet Ibn Qalâqis' residence in Sicily – Giacomo strives both to acknowledge his access to the Muslim world, and stress his proximity to the Romance vernacular tradition of the European mainland. The insistent affirmation of the Romance tradition in the works of the Siculo-Italian poets may, in fact, be read as an attempt to disavow cultural ambiguity, to evoke an unproblematic line of descent connecting the troubadours and themselves. Simultaneous, explicit references to the Arabic world, like those in "Amor non vole," are not common in this poetry, and when they occur they tend to be more generic than Giacomo's. Thus, in Cielo d'Alcamo's well-known contrast, the beloved makes a number of references to the fabled riches of the East:

Donna mi son di perperi d'auro massamotino.
 Se tanto aver donassemi quanto à lo Saladino
 e per aiunta quant'à lo Soldano,
 toccareme no poteri a mano.
 ed. Panvini, 221, vv. 28-30

I am mistress of golden *massamotino* coins.
 If you gave me the riches of Saladin
 and in addition as much as the Sultan possesses,
 you couldn't even touch my hand.

The *massamotino*, used by the lady as a symbol of fabulous wealth, was a coin minted by the Muslim rulers of North Africa and al-Andalus. The beloved refers again to the riches of the Sultan later, and draws a rather saucy parallel between his wealth and the wealth of the Pope:

non ti degnàra porgere la mano
 per quanto avere à 'l Papa e lo Soldano!
 ed. Panvini, 226, vv. 99-100

I wouldn't deign to give you my hand
 for all the riches that the Pope and the Sultan possess!

This association of the Oriental world with extravagant riches is echoed in a later verse, where the beloved makes reference to "iscarlatto o sciamito" (v. 117); precious fabrics

imported from the East. The voice of the beloved in Cielo d'Alcamo's contrast, like Giacomo in "Amor non vole," links the "Orient" with material wealth. Such references may be intended, in part, to draw the reader's attention to the fact that the Sicilian poet has access to the riches (and in Giacomo's case to the intellectual wealth) of the Arabic-speaking world; contemporary readers may have been impressed by such access, during an era when the Oriental sapphire and the golden coins of the kings of al-Andalus symbolized fabulous value.²⁴ These "arabesques" found occasionally in the poetry of the Sicilians, however, are ornaments adorning a fundamentally Europeanizing literary movement. The Siculo-Italian poets wrote for a Latin Christian audience; they wrote toward the Romance vernacular tradition of the European mainland.

But, if they wrote toward a tradition that was unambiguously European and Christian, the land and the tradition *from which* the Siculo-Italian poets wrote was emphatically more uncertain. Although explicit references to the Arabic world are not common in their works, nevertheless tantalizing hints of contact with poetic conventions and cultural traditions other than the Latinate lurk in their poetry. In the discussion of Giacomo's poem and of Siculo-Italian poetics above I focused on conscious nods toward the Arabic world: the scientific language used liberally by Giacomo (which might call to the reader's mind the prestigious Arabic scientific tradition); the references to the riches of the Muslim world. Explicit citation, however, is only one of many possible kinds of intertextual reference. Naming the "Orient" in a poem does not constitute poetic influence, but demonstrates a general awareness of another culture which the Sicilian poet deems worthy to include in his poem. If Siculo-Italian poetry embodies another kind of

²⁴It is interesting that the beloved makes reference to the riches of the Orient in Cielo d'Alcamo's poem, while the lover does not. The poet may be mocking the facile judgement of the lady (as Giacomo mocks those who think that Oriental sapphires are worth more), and thus belittling the fabled riches of the Orient. However, it is also possible that he responds, without intention to parody, to the conservative cultural and linguistic role that women play in society. Cicero famously noted that his mother's speech preserved certain ancient mannerisms, words and constructions; Cielo's beloved could mention the Arabic world because she, like Cicero's mother, remembers old ways of talking in her speech, the offhand reference to Muslim figures and institutions that would have been common in a state like Norman Sicily.

intertextual reference – acknowledgement of another poetic tradition, and a sign of poetic influence, more properly speaking – it is expressed implicitly, rather than explicitly.

In the conclusion to his brilliant, recent article on the Siculo-Italian poets, Furio Brugnolo touches on two of the issues raised by those poets' work that have troubled modern literary historians: the socio-economic position of the Sicilian poets, so different from that of the troubadours and *trouvères* of the north; and the fact that the Sicilians' poetry does not seem to have been sung. The Siculo-Italian poet constituted a "new figure of the poet: no longer a poetry professional who lives in the shadow of protectors and sponsors, but a cultured dilettante who cultivates literature 'as an evasion of daily reality.'"²⁵ Brugnolo identifies in the Sicilians' poetry "a kind of sovereign distance from one's material, which is not exhibited, but rather discussed, analyzed, and internally debated." And he speculates that the witty and provocative use of scientific language typical of Giacomo and certain other poets – the technical vocabulary; the tendency to develop the themes of the love poem "in an argumentative and dialectical fashion" (328) – grew out of the distance between poetry and "daily reality." Brugnolo dubs the Sicilians' works "poesia di corte . . . ma non poesia *per* la corte" (329), and points out that, because it was not performed in court, the musical component central to troubadour poetics was naturally irrelevant to the Sicilians. The troubadour had been a professional artist who performed his songs about love and life for pay before a courtly audience. The Sicilian poet wrote intellectually playful poems, designed to amuse without music, to be read aloud either in company or in solitude.

Comparison to Arabic poetic practice sheds an intriguing light on these troubling aspects of Siculo-Italian poetics – the absence of musical performance, the different socio-economic position of the poet, the new pseudo-scientific language and argumentative technique. The typical Arabic poet, unless he is an extraordinarily good poet, is not a

²⁵Brugnolo. 328. The final phrase of the sentence is a citation of Folena.

"poetry professional," but a cultured man who composes poetry in a more casual way. The Siculo-Italian poet, too, was not a professional with extraordinary technical abilities, but a man of learning who turned out an occasional poem, the fruit of his general culture rather than of a peculiar talent: thus, for instance, during the early thirteenth century, members of the Sicilian royal family, or gentlemen in the employ of the royal court, wrote poetry not because they were poets, but because they were cultured men with discerning tastes.

Traditional Arabic poetry, like the innovative Romance vernacular lyrics of the Siculo-Italian poets, is not sung, but is intended for recitation.²⁶ The fact that there is no musical accompaniment to distract the audience's attention from the play of words encourages the Arabic poet to work toward a high level of conceptual, lexical, and prosodic complexity.²⁷ This complexity finds expression in the integration of various forms of technical argumentation or terminology into the poem, as well as in scintillating verbal gymnastics. Giacomo's conception of the love poem as a forum for brilliant verbal play and for focused examination of issues of interest to contemporary natural philosophers calls to mind the Arabic love poem as much as it does the troubadour love-song. Indeed, the repetition of the word *viso* and its compounds in Giacomo's sonnet "Eo viso e son diviso da lo viso" (discussed above, pages 135, 140), in which Brugnolo perceives echoes of "certain late Antique and medieval Latin formalisms" (328), also bears a strong resemblance to a very common Arabic rhetorical figure: *tajnîs*, the use of words derived from the same etymological root in close proximity to each other.

There is, of course, no proof of direct Arabic influence on Siculo-Italian poetics, and we cannot reasonably expect to find any such proof. The concepts of origins and of poetic influence so central to modern literary-historical studies did not hold great interest for medieval literary historians. Those writers who speak of literary lineage – like Dante in

²⁶The *muwashshah* and *zajal* poetry of al-Andalus was sung: but we have no reason to believe that these Andalusian poetic forms were known in Sicily.

²⁷There are, of course, other factors which contribute to the verbal sophistication of Arabic poetry: I highlight the absence of musical accompaniment for the sake of comparison.

the *De vulgari eloquentia*; like the writers of the Occitan grammars discussed in the previous chapter – follow the path established by literary tradition, and do not attempt to study diverse poetic traditions or to interview poets in order to identify more unexpected sources and influences for the developments they discuss. It is also possible that they, like Frederick in the "history of Sicily" quoted above (pages 125-26, 148), strive consciously to disavow any influence that may make the erotic poets of the new Romance vernacular tradition seem culturally ambiguous or suspect.

Finally, however, it seems most likely that, if Arabic poetics had an influence on Siculo-Italian poetics, the influence was such that it would not be likely to leave obvious traces. There is no reason to believe that Arabic poetics had any direct, technical influence on Siculo-Italian prosody, or on the Sicilian conception of the courtly love drama. The Sicilians inherited a marvellously complete poetic tradition from the Romance vernacular poets who preceded them. They had no need to turn to the poetry of the Arabs for guidance in terms of technique, imagery, or psychological detail. Rather, they wrote a body of love-lyric that was essentially Europeanizing, its conventionalism geared to stress the continuity between Sicily and the European continent. If the Sicilians looked to Arabic poetry for inspiration, they would likely seek subtle but decisive ways to distinguish their Europeanizing poetry from that of the Romance vernacular poets of the continent. And the refinements they introduced – the separation of poetry and music, the use of scientific or technical vocabularies, the conception of the poet as a gifted man of culture rather than a specialist possessed of a peculiar and extraordinary genius – could well have been inspired, at least in part, through casual conversation with men travelling through or resident in Sicily who were familiar with Arabic poetry and able to describe it in a common tongue. Such "influence" would not be noted by the poets themselves or perceived by outsiders unless they were, as we moderns are, hyperrealist scholars and tireless taxonomists.

Contemporary Sicilian cultural history, as well as the poetic project of the Siculo-Italian poets, offers arguments in support of such speculation. Arabic culture had been a part of court life in Sicily for four centuries preceding the emergence of vernacular Italian poetry. During the reign of Frederick II, *literature* in Arabic seems no longer to have been known at the Sicilian court; however, Arabic *culture* remained important, and served specifically as a touchstone for Latinate cultural development. As Frederick looked to Arabic falconers for guidance in training his birds, as his court translators Michael Scot and Theodore of Antioch sought Arabic scientific texts that could advance the knowledge of the Latin west, so the poets of Sicily may have looked to Arabic poetics for aid in refining the Romance poetic tradition they had inherited. It does not seem likely that any of the Sicilian poets knew Arabic; and it is equally unlikely that many of them engaged in the dinner-table banter and literary experimentalism that would have been necessary in order to translate Arabic poetic notions into a Romance vernacular context. A more realistic scenario would place a small group of poets – or possibly Giacomo, the most ambitious, most accomplished, and most influential among them, alone – at the center of this process. The knowledge that Frederick was a great admirer of Arabic culture might have encouraged such a courtier to integrate certain useful elements from Arabic poetics into his own work.

The Romantic scholars of the nineteenth century, who wrote groundbreaking histories of the lyric poetry of the troubadours, the *trouvères*, and the "Scuola Siciliana" poets, believed that the first and most genuine expression of the native genius of the European nations was to be found in their first vernacular literatures. Indeed, the Romance vernacular poetry of the late Middle Ages did contribute to the genesis of a sense of national consciousness; the comparative methodology used by Dante in the *De vulgari eloquentia* represents one writer's attempt to delineate and analyze the new boundaries generated by the new languages and literatures (see above, pages 93-100). Defining one Romance vernacular tradition by contrasting it to another is only one of the

comparative gestures used by medieval grammarians: when relevant, the Romance tradition could also be paralleled with the Greek, Hebrew, and/or Arabic traditions (see above, pages 96-7).

In Sicily, where the "vernacular" culture of the court had been cast in Arabic in the recent past, it was necessary both to distinguish the Romance vernacular culture that emerged in the early thirteenth century from other Romance traditions of the European mainland, and to distance it from the Siculo-Arabic tradition. The Latinization of cultural life at the Sicilian court and the deportation of Sicilian Muslims to a ghetto city on the mainland are only two facets of the attempt to contain Arabic culture launched during this period. At the same time, the Sicilian court undertook to acquire and utilize elements of Arabic culture that were relevant, through translation and communication with Arabic scholars. Thus Latin Sicilians strove to distinguish their culture from the culture of Arabic Sicilians, and to distance themselves from Arabic Sicilians, while still preserving and promoting those connections that were perceived as relevant and desirable.

It is possible that the composition of poetry for recitation rather than musical performance, the conception of poetry as a cultured activity undertaken by men of learning rather than by poetry professionals, the use of the lyric love poem as a forum for analysis of scientific or technical problems, represent borrowings from the Arabic poetic tradition. It is even possible that, though documentation may not appear to support this supposition, closer readings of the Sicilians' poetry may allow scholars to formulate articulate responses for or against it. In the meantime, recognition of this process of self-definition – of the importance of defining one's difference not only from the Romance literary traditions evolving in northern Europe, but also from the Arabic literary tradition, more distant in heritage, and closer physically – may help us to produce more nuanced readings of the Siculo-Italian poets' works. Certainly Giacomo's "manifesto" gains a new level of significance when it is read with an awareness of the evolution in Sicilian culture occurring at the time when it was written. "Every delight that is more rare," Giacomo

writes, "is held to be more precious; even though it is not of more value, it is more gracious than another. For, if it is Oriental, the sapphire is worth that much more, though it has less power": the attempt to distance another culture, while maintaining possession of those of its attributes that seem to be of peculiar value, sings forth from these lines.

The "Arabic theory" and the poetries of Sicily

Non che i fonti della nostra eloquenza e poesia nati sieno dalle arabiche scuole, non che i loro libri sieno stati i modelli a' nostri poeti ed oratori; ma il lor esempio di poetare e di scrivere cose piacevoli in lingua nativa e intesa da tutti potè forse destare negli europei il pensiero di coltivare i medesimi studj. e di guadagnarsi gli applausi de' lor nazionali collo scuotere la loro immaginazione. e istruire la mente scrivendo in un idioma ad essi commune.

Juan Andrés

Dell'origine, de' progressi, e dello state attuale d'ogni letteratura. vol. 1. p. 261

It's not that the sources of our eloquence and poetry arose from Arabic schools, nor that their books were models for our poets and orators; but their example of writing poetry and of writing amusing things in a language native to and understood by all could perhaps have quickened in Europeans the thought of cultivating similar studies, and of earning the applause of their countrymen by stirring up the imagination and instructing the mind, while writing in a tongue common to them.

△ △ △

Nearly everywhere, the great ages of poetry have been, not coincidentally, periods of intense translation. With no news from abroad, a culture ends up repeating the same things to itself. It needs the foreign not to imitate, but to transform.

Eliot Weinberger

Outside Stories, p. 61

Sicilian poetry, ss. XII-XIII

During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries Sicilian cultural and civic life underwent a radical transformation. Under Roger II, Sicilian culture used the Arabic language and Arabic cultural forms as vehicles for self-expression: Muslim monarchical and governmental institutions were maintained; poets praised the Sicilian monarch in Arabic; architecture integrated Arabic structural devices and ornaments. The Kingdom of Sicily was a Christian state during this period, and the Norman kings clearly did not perceive cultural production in Arabic as a threat to Christian hegemony in Sicily: rather, they promoted Arabic culture as an appropriate medium for both maintenance and celebration of their kingdom. During the period of Frederick II, however, Sicilian culture went through a process of Latinization. Poets composed in a Romance vernacular, and in a Romance vernacular style. Literary production in Arabic ceased, and Sicilian Arabs were resettled in a ghetto city on the Italian mainland: thus Arabic culture was marginalized, and Muslims began to be treated as a distinct and potentially threatening population.

I have argued in this study that Sicilian culture of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries reflected the duality of the Sicilian population: however, the relationship between the two elements of the duality did not remain stable during this period. If Muslim/Christian relations during the Norman era could be described as an uneasy truce, during the reign of Frederick II that truce came to an end. The polarization of the Sicilian population had already begun during the years of Norman rule; Ibn Jubayr provides a valuable witness to the progress of this process. Under Frederick the gap between rulers and ruled widened. While on the one hand Frederick quarantined Sicilian Muslims in Lucera, on the other he recreated an idealized Muslim presence in his court through translation activities and correspondence with Muslim scholars. Arabic traditions were

central to Sicilian cultural formations during the Norman period, and after Sicily had been purged of Muslims, the memory of their cultural influence and of the years of cohabitation remained a touchstone for Christian Sicilians. In reflection of the complexity of its formation, Sicilian culture retained an element of duplicity, traceable in Giacomo's citation of the gems of the Orient in his response to the Romance vernacular lyric love tradition, in non-Sicilians' representations of Frederick as an "orientalist," in Frederick's own communications with the Muslim world.

The Siculo-Italian poets of the thirteenth century defined themselves in opposition to the Romance vernacular lyric tradition of the European mainland, writing works that were Europeanizing in their conformity to the established conventions of the lyric love tradition, and simultaneously asserting a "Sicilian difference" by distinguishing themselves in certain ways from that tradition. At the same time, Sicilian culture strove to differentiate itself from the Arabicizing Sicilian culture of the previous century, and this effort is at moments reflected in the works of the Siculo-Italian poets: Giacomo may at one moment proudly display his knowledge of natural philosophy, his birthright as a citizen of a state with a privileged access to the scientific traditions of the Arabic-speaking world, and at the next attempt to distance himself from the extravagant treasures of the Orient, considered to be "worth that much more, though [they have] less power" (see above, page 132).

Thus Giacomo defines himself, on the one hand, in terms of his relation to Sicilian culture – that Christian Sicilian culture that expressed itself using Muslim conventions – and, on the other, in relation to the new Romance vernacular poetic culture of the European mainland. Although the two cases are not identical, Siculo-Arabic poets had used similar strategies to position themselves in relation to the literary traditions of the Arabic-speaking world. They had written conventional Arabic poetry, but had asserted a "Sicilian difference": they made reference to the affiliation of their homeland with the Christian world by writing in praise of a Christian ruler, the "King of the Caesars" (see

above, page 41), or by symbolizing its two populations as two lovers. The Siculo-Arabic poets' works are distinguished from the Siculo-Italian poets' mainly by the historical developments that followed the first flowering of their literary experiments. Had the Norman state survived and prospered, had the Arabic language remained central to Sicilian cultural expression, the poets of Roger's era might have been remembered as the initiators of an innovative literary movement and, like the *muwashshah* poets of contemporary al-Andalus, might have had an impact on poetic practice in other parts of the Arabic-speaking world. Because the output of the Siculo-Arabic poets was so limited, however, they must be seen (as they were by their contemporaries) as a geographically and temporally localized literary anomaly.

Both the Siculo-Arabic and the Siculo-Italian poets defined themselves in opposition to other traditions – those that were closer to them culturally, but more distant physically, and those of the other Sicilian population, closer to them physically and more distant culturally – striving to articulate their similarity to and difference from both of these cultural presences. Their stance can be seen as a result of Sicily's ambiguous position during this period. Earlier colonizers had treated the island as an extension of various mainland states; the Normans reinvented it as a discrete and independent state; and in Frederick's era its connections with mainland Europe came to be viewed as primary. The production of Sicilian poets of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries reflect Sicily's cultural negotiations with the two great colonizing powers of the Mediterranean, Latinate Christianity and Arabic Islam.

I began this study by asking how the poets of twelfth and thirteenth century Sicily can contribute to current academic discussions of the "Arabic theory," the notion that Arabic poetics influenced the earliest Romance vernacular poets. As the socio-historical situation and the literary project of those poets comes into sharper focus, the inability of the "Arabic theory" to account for Sicilian literary developments becomes more apparent. Rather than a reading strategy grounded in a narrowly defined concept of influence, the

Sicilian situation calls for a literary-historical formulation able to perceive, evaluate, and describe the more complex ways that different literary traditions can respond to each other. Giacomo acknowledges the troubadour tradition by imitating it and by writing against it; he responds to the Arabic cultural presence in Sicily by celebrating it, and by distancing himself from it. So too al-Aṭrābanishī imitates Arabic poetic conventions and distances himself from them (and poetic convention, in the person of ʿImād al-Dīn, underscores the distance between al-Aṭrābanishī and more traditional Arabic poets): he responds to the Christian European cultural presence in Sicily by celebrating it, using a radical new form to do so: traditional Arabic poetics.

The literary concept of influence, understood as simple imitation, does not describe the relations between Arabic and Italian poetics in Sicily. Sicilian poets wrote to define and celebrate a cultural identity during a difficult and turbulent period, describing their identity as a unique compound of difference (from other poets) and sameness. Berenguer d'Anoia reminds us in the *Mirall de trobar* that Greeks, Hebrews, and Arabs have an alphabet, before proceeding to discuss one of the traditions that descend from the alphabet of the Greeks; Raimon Vidal's *Razos de trobar* begins by mentioning the poetic traditions of the Christians, Jews, and Saracens, then goes on to discuss the Christians' songs (see above, page 97). The poets of Sicily do not articulate such literal comparatist gestures. But their poetic project implies a similar awareness of, and investment in, other cultural traditions.

Earlier, I examined Giacomo's response to the Arabic culture influence in Sicily, and al-Aṭrābanishī's response to his unique and difficult position as an Arabic poet writing in praise of a Christian king. In concluding this study it will be useful to approach the question of Sicilian poets' conception of their literary identity from another direction: to ask whether Siculo-Arabic and Siculo-Italian poets share certain common characteristics, in reflection of their common Sicilian patrimony. I discussed above (see pages 136-140) Giacomo's fascination with introducing a certain kind of technical language into his love

poems; here, I will return to Giacomo's scientific preoccupations, paralleling one of his sonnets with a poem by Ibn Hamdis and with another by Chrétien de Troyes, in order to explore some of the differences between a Sicilian and a northern European approach to the conceptualization of the lyric love drama. Giacomo wrote some two centuries after Ibn Hamdis, and a century and a half later than Chrétien. There is no reason to believe that he knew Ibn Hamdis' works; the similarities between the sonnet I will discuss and a passage from one of Chrétien's romances, however, suggest that it was at least possible that he was familiar with Chrétien's. The surface similarities between Giacomo's sonnet and Chrétien's romance, however, must be balanced against the conceptual and structural distance between those two works, on the one hand, and the proximity between Giacomo's and Ibn Hamdis' formulation on the other, in order to produce an accurate and nuanced reading of Giacomo's sonnet and his position in relation to literary history.

In the sonnet "Or come pote sì gran donna intrare" (discussed above, pages 135, 140, 143-4) Giacomo exploits two of the clichés of the lyric love tradition – that the lady is like a light and that love enters through the eyes – and transforms these ideas into an intriguing conceit by combining them with reflections on the physiology of perception. The sonnet opens by approaching the physical evocation of the beloved, and the poet's lament at his possession by love, from a physiological perspective:

Or come pote sì gran donna intrare
per gli occhi mei, che sì piccioli sone?
ed. Panvini, 57; vv. 1-2

Now, how can so great a woman enter
through my eyes, which are so small?

Giacomo describes the process of falling in love as a scientific paradox: his beloved, despite her size, manages to enter his heart – though the place where she gains entrance does not appear – and to dwell there, accompanying him wherever he goes. He resolves this physical dilemma by means of an optical metaphor:

ma voglio lei a lumera asomigliare,
 e gli occhi mei al vetro ove si pone
 vv. 7-8

but I wish to compare her to a lamp,
 and my eyes to the glass behind which it is placed

It was, of course, common practice in courtly lyric to compare the beloved to a light.

Giacomo's innovation is to proclaim that by comparing her to light, one can account for her physical entrance into his heart:

lo foco inchiuso poi passa di fore
 lo suo lostrore, sanza far rottura:
 così per gli occhi mi pass'a lo core,
 no la persona, ma la sua figura.
 vv. 9-12

the enclosed fire then passes without
 its brilliance, without breaking [the glass]:
 so through my eyes she passes to my heart –
 not her person, but her form.

It is the flame's brilliance, rather than the flame itself, that passes through the glass; so it is not the beloved's person but her *figura*, her "form," that enters the poet's heart. This conceptualization of the mechanics of love is made possible by Giacomo's sophisticated use of optical science. I cited above Giorgio Agamben's discussion of the conceptual parallels between Giacomo's sonnet and Averroes' gloss on Aristotle's *De sensu et sensibilibus* (see above, page 144; Agamben, 81-83 and 94-96). Giacomo draws on the theory of perception put forward by Averroes, known as *intromission*: the idea that visual stimuli impose their outlines on the perceiver's eye.¹ This notion is underscored by the poem's closing lines:

Rinovellare mi voglio d'amore,
 poi porto insegna di tal criatura.
 vv. 13-14

¹In the discussion that follows, I am indebted to Suzanne Akbari, who read this work in an earlier version and gave me invaluable advice on medieval theories of optics.

I wish to renew myself with love,²
because I carry the mark of such a creature.

The noun *insegna*, used in verse 14, was charged with courtly meanings. It, and other words semantically related to it, like *insegnamento* or *insegnare*, were used to describe the courtier's education, his training in the ways of chivalric culture: the lady imprints the malleable substance of the poet's consciousness with the stamp of chivalric culture, in much the same way that visual stimuli insinuate their images into the eye, according to intromission theory.

In this sonnet, Giacomo uses a contemporary theory of vision in order to organize his observations on the beloved and on the process of falling in love; he is much less concerned with the romantic ramifications of his data than with studying them and producing a detailed and intellectually responsible schematic of their functioning. His conceptually vigorous formulation of the physical description of the beloved is clearly designed for a public which values intellectual sophistication. It is this conceptual precision that allows him to use the sonnet form so effectively as a vehicle for the compact and elegant development of a single conceit, and that makes him an ideal spokesman for the kingdom in which he lived, an important center for translation and diffusion of scientific works from the Greek- and Arabic-speaking world.

The poem by Ibn Hamdis that I have chosen to compare to Giacomo's sonnet laments the torment of unrequited love, using images of vision to dramatize the beloved's power over the lover. The poem is short (it is probably a fragment preserved from a longer poem), and I reproduce it in its entirety:

You tortured me with the two elements: with a flame in my heart and water in my eye

You clothed me in sickness. I see that you [too] wear it in [both] eyes

My body is a phantom that approaches you, seeking what is owed me

²I accept Panvini's interpretation of what he affirms are "versi difficili" (Panvini, *Le rime della scuola siciliana*, 45). The alternative translation would be "I wish to remember love", i.e. "I wish to demonstrate my gratitude to love."

And I have been hidden by frightful pain, and so I am safe from the glance of the two secret enemies [i.e., the beloved's eyes]

But if I am safe from death, it is because he does not know where I am

Arabic text: Ibn Hamdīs, *Dīwān*, 492 (see Appendix, p. 186)

Water and fire, the two opposite elements named in the first verse, are often used in Arabic poetry to represent the lover's suffering, and they are often associated with the two organs, the eye and the heart. In the second verse, the poet develops the theme of duality by pointing out that he and his beloved both suffer from the same affliction, and by locating the symptoms of it in her (two) eyes. The second and third lines introduce another standard theme, an image inspired by a lyric convention that is a favorite of Ibn Hamdīs, who delights in representing love as a wasting disease that eats away at the lover's flesh until nothing is left of him. This conceit occupies the final two lines of the poem, as we have it: the lover has utterly wasted away, but this very fact protects him from the destructive glance of his beloved, who, of course, can't see him either. Even death – the culmination of this love that is like consumption – won't be able to find him.

We know that love consumes, and that the beloved's gaze is treacherous; Ibn Hamdīs has played these clichés out to their logical vanishing point. Along the way he has made fruitful use of an Arabic rhetorical figure: *libâq*, the use of two words of opposite meaning in a single line. Water and fire in the opening line, body and phantom in the third: these pairings introduce a preoccupation with duality, and the poem's careful rhyme-scheme reinforces the focus on duality. Every other word in a rhyming position – the final word in the first half of the first line, as well as the final words of the second and fourth lines: *'unsurayni*, *nâzirayni*, *kâshihayni* – have a dual ending; the remaining words end in diphthongs that sound the same as the duals, but aren't dual in form, with an attached first-person possessive pronoun (*'aynî*, *daynî*, *'aynî*). This symmetry seems to represent an effort on Ibn Hamdīs' part to create a certain rhythm, to stress reciprocal opposition, to produce a portrait in miniature of an amorous combat scene.

Ibn Hamdīs, like Giacomo, is concerned above all with isolating and exploiting elements from the familiar love-drama; and both poets conceive their descriptions in keeping with contemporary theories of vision. Whereas Giacomo describes the imprint that the beloved projects into the lover's consciousness, Ibn Hamdīs focuses on the beam which emanates from the beloved's eyes as she looks at the lover. In conceptualizing the beloved's gaze Ibn Hamdīs is drawing on *extramission*, a theory of perception established by Euclid and Ptolemy and developed by al-Kindī, which holds that a beam emits from the eye, encounters an object, and returns bearing its image to the subject. Theory of vision is not foregrounded in his poem, as it is in Giacomo's, but it is crucial to his formulation of the agency of the beloved's gaze: we appreciate the withering force of her glance much better if we are familiar with a scientific account of vision that theorizes the regular emission of beams from the eye. Like Giacomo, Ibn Hamdīs reduces the love-scene to a minimum of acutely observed details, and exploration of these details occupies his attention. It is, of course, likely that these five verses were the beginning of a longer *qaṣīda*, and that an anthologist edited it to its current length. But the dense, intricate nexus of images which the poet creates in the opening lines possesses a conceptual coherence – a vignette of the disappearing lover, implying a certain understanding of the physiological mechanics of perception – whether these verses were meant to stand on their own or were conceived as the introduction to a longer disquisition.

Ibn Hamdīs and Giacomo both use optical theory to characterize the operation and the power of love. The similarities between the two poets' approach can be framed by comparing their treatments to a similar passage in Chrétien de Troyes's romance *Cligès*. The hero is talking in tones of wonder about the blow that love has dealt him; while describing it, he discusses the physical process whereby love enters his heart, in language that is remarkably similar to Giacomo's. The passage is far too long to quote in its entirety – discussion of vision, the eyes and the gaze, by a somewhat subjective reckoning, occupies the poet from v. 702-762 – and this fact dramatizes the first distinction between Chrétien's

project and Giacomo's or Ibn Hamdis: whereas the Sicilian poets are writing lyric poetry characterized by minute observation and precise description, the French poet is writing an epic, a work driven by narrative and by focus on psychological detail. The size of his canvas allows Chrétien to be expansive, and invites his attention to stray. In the lines immediately preceding the passage I have bracketed, the lover complains that he has been wounded, and he affirms that the agent of his destruction passed through his eye, though it shows no sign of injury. I quote fragments of the argument that follows:³

li ialz n'a soing de rien antandre
ne rien ne puet feire a nul fuer,
mes c'est li mereors au cuer . . . (vv. 710-712)

the eye itself is not concerned with feelings and can do nothing on its own; rather, it is the mirror of the heart . . .

Donc n'est li cuers el vandre mis
ausi con la chandoile esprise
qui dedanz la lanterne est mise? (vv. 716-718)

For is the heart in one's breast not like the flaming candle within a lantern?

Ce meismes sachiez des ialz
con del voirre et de la lanterne,
car es ialz se fiert la luiserne,
ou li cuers se remire et voit
l'uevre defors, quex qu'ele soit . . . (vv. 732-736)

Know that that eyes are like the glass and the lantern, for through the eyes comes the light by which the heart sees itself and the outside world, whatever it may be.

The eye first acts as a passive recipient of the dart of love; then as a mirror of the heart; then as the glass through which the heart's light shines. This passage is followed by a discussion of the colors that the eye sees, and of the bad effects that deceptive eyes, and deceptive companions, can have on the perceiving lover. By reviewing the poet's subjects so rapidly I do not do mean to be dismissive, but simply to evoke them in their remarkable range and multiplicity. Whereas brevity and precision are of the essence for Ibn Hamdis

³The French edition I quote is Chrétien de Troyes. *Cligès*. 25-26. The English translation is from Chrétien de Troyes. *Arthurian Romances*. 131-32.

and Giacomo, Chrétien aims for, and achieves, expansiveness. And – as is clear even from this peremptory discussion – Chrétien is not striving for scientific or technical accuracy, but for moral realism: the scientific details are employed for variety and vivacity, but do not provide a coherent structure for the poet's description. His purpose is to evoke the emotional upheaval that the lover's heart undergoes, and highlight its moral ramifications.

Chrétien's expansiveness, the vagueness of his scientific terminology, and the precision of his moral and psychological vocabulary, provide an evocative contrast to the narrow focus, the articulation of poetic and scientific detail, and the comparative lack of moral or emotional depth in Giacomo's and Ibn Hamdis' works. The Sicilian poets were able to be more precise in their citation of scientific detail for the simple reason that they had access to relevant technical works which were out of reach for Chrétien. On the other hand, parallels between Ibn Hamdis' and Giacomo's framing-devices reflect the more awkward aspects of the Sicilians' position, caught between learned, classical traditions – the Latinate culture of the Christian world, the Arabic traditions of the Muslim world – and well-established revolutionary movements, represented by the troubadour and *muwashshah* poetry of Mediterranean Europe. Neither writes with the authority of a poet secure in his position as innovator or traditionalist, secure in his position in a powerful and culturally dynamic kingdom. Rather, denied these aesthetic and economic securities, both poets respond to their cultural marginalism by developing a mannerist style. They accept the conventions of the love-drama, separate its details from the social or religious context in which they often are cast, represent them in an exaggerated form, and use them as a focus for their own intellectual play. Hyperextension and manipulation of received literary conventions may have constituted, for both of these poets, a response to existence at the margins of the lyric culture of the Mediterranean.

Sicilian poetry during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries struggled to articulate its relation to the poetic traditions of the greater Arabic- and Romance-speaking worlds. Poets perceived a strong connection between themselves and literary ancestors in distant

mainlands; when they engaged in a dialogue with those literary ancestors, however, they spoke as Sicilians, and the island's unique cultural history and cultural situation was part of what they spoke about. The reading of brief love-lyrics by Giacomo and Ibn Hamdīs above demonstrates the centrality of the Sicilian cultural situation – in particular the Sicilian's access to the technical scientific learning of the Arabic-speaking world – to Giacomo's conception of his lyric love poetry. A similar parallel reading of works by Giacomo and al-Aṭrābanishī is more difficult to undertake, for the simple reason that we possess only one poem by al-Aṭrābanishī. Both Giacomo and al-Aṭrābanishī were closely associated (like the poets who were their contemporaries) with a strong monarch; both wrote works that were essentially conservative in style and in content, but embodied certain limited but forceful innovations. The most significant similarity between their works, for our current purposes, is their awareness of and even focus on Sicily's other population. Al-Aṭrābanishī addressed his panegyric to a Christian ruler. Giacomo's acknowledgement of Sicily's Muslim past is not so explicit, but if my readings in this study are accurate, he considered access to the learning of the Muslim world so important and so impressive that he made implicit reference to it a central component of his poetics.

Arabic and Italian poets alike were influenced by the unique cultural conditions of the Kingdom of Sicily during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries: by the problematic relations between Sicilian men of culture and the established cultural traditions of the greater Arabic-speaking world and of Latinate Christianity, on the one hand, and relations between the two Sicilian populations on the other. Siculo-Arabic and Siculo-Italian poets did not imitate each other simply because they had no reason to. One culture borrows from another only what it needs, and the needs of the Sicilian poets were limited indeed. Both Arabs and Italians had access to richly developed traditions that gave them the vocabulary and the set of themes they required for their purposes, and they manipulated those traditions to express their unique position as Sicilian poets. If the Sicilian literary record does not furnish examples of explicit Arabic/Romance borrowings, however, it does

demonstrate the traces of more aggressive, less transparent forms of cultural contact and cultural interference.

II News from abroad

With the exception of a meager handful of works, the versions of the Siculo-Italian poems that we possess all exist in Tuscan "translation." Preserved in manuscripts made in Tuscany, the Sicilians' poems went through a process of linguistic normalization that erased their Sicilian difference. Thus, the original version of the poetic tradition that stands at the origins of Italian literature has been lost. Or rather, there exist at the origins of Italian literature two originals: the one aggressively Tuscanized, and the other "other," a record of a language spoken in the Kingdom of Sicily some 700 years ago and now almost entirely lost. Scholars' attempts to reconstruct the lost tongue serve to further mark off the Sicilian literary tradition as *other*, as readings of medieval Sicilian poetry come to resemble phonetic or lexical studies, composed of descriptions of etymological difference, rather than proper readings.

The Tuscanization of Sicilian lyric was not, of course, a politically innocent act. I discussed above (pages 126-131) Dante's marginalization of the poetry of the Sicilians and the pseudo-Sicilians, his efforts to contain their activities in the past and to assert that a new poetry had emerged to challenge the Sicilians' poetic hegemony. The Tuscanization of the Sicilian poetic vernacular, and Dante's historical positioning of the Sicilian poets, are echoed in the treatment of the Sicilians in the most important manuscript preserving the poetry of *le origini*, the vast Vatican 3793.

The painstaking organization of the poetry included in this manuscript – what Roberto Antonelli terms "the extraordinary historico-cultural rigor of [its] arrangement" –

reveals "a historiographic design" (Antonelli, "Canzoniere Vaticano latino 3793," 30) developed along both chronological and geographical axes. The compiler of the manuscript distinguishes between Sicilians and Siculo-Tuscans, Bolognesi and Pisans, dividing their works into sections that commence with the earliest Sicilians, those associated with the Magna Curia, and culminate with the works of the Florentine poets of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century. Antonelli points out the similarities between the Vatican manuscript's reading of the Sicilian poets and Dante's treatment of them in the *De vulgari eloquentia*, stating that "Dante, in the last analysis, although he writes with a very different agenda, does not behave differently, even in a treatise on vernacular eloquence": Dante, too, "will provide a detailed historico-geographic scheme" for his linguistic analyses (36-7).

Dante, like the Vatican manuscript, distinguishes Italian poets in terms of regional difference and chronological order: his project, however, is more explicitly critical than the Vatican manuscript copyist's, his goal to illuminate the strengths and the weaknesses of the diverse Italian vernaculars. Antonelli parallels and distinguishes between Dante's approach to the linguistic details of the works he cites and the Vatican manuscript copyist's: "while Dante limits himself to theorizing his own 'eloquent vernacular,' recognizing it first in others' works, without obviously being able to impose it on his predecessors' actual poetic practice, the Vatican manuscript reduces all the materials transcribed to the Florentine norm, to the extent possible: this is absolutely normal in manuscript practice, but not for this reason less significant as the formal pretext of an anthology that inaugurates a new literary tradition" (37).

The Vatican 3793 frankly transforms the language of the Sicilian poets into Tuscan. While Dante does not edit the language of the Sicilian poets he quotes, however, it is important to note that his linguistic discussion of them is based on texts that he knew in a Tuscanized form. The Tuscanization of the Sicilians' poetic language, as well as their historical containment in the Vatican manuscript and in the *De vulgari eloquentia* as a

preamble to the works of the Tuscans, represent parallel attempts to subordinate the Sicilian poetry to the new Tuscan poetry. Pursuit of the motives behind this manipulation of the Sicilian tradition, beyond echoing Antonelli's simple acknowledgement that such is "absolutely normal in manuscript practice," may seem irrelevant at best and naive at worst; what may serve literary historians better is interrogation of the lasting results of this manipulation, once it has been accomplished.

What is known and knowable about Sicilian lyric – the texts that are preserved in the manuscripts and that appear at the beginning of all thorough modern anthologies of Italian poetry – is marginalized, while what was lost, the texts actually written by the Sicilians, is romanticized and desired. Thus, at the origins of Italian literature there are two antagonistic originals: the one recorded, and marginalized as literary "pre-history"; the other precious but unknowable, desired but lost. So, too, Siculo-Arabic poetry is lost, but for different reasons and in a different way. Medieval anthologists preserved the works of Sicilian Arabs accurately, but in fragments. The great anthology of Siculo-Arabic poetry – *al-Durra al-Khaṭīra min Shu'arā' al-Jazīra* (*Great Pearls from the Poets of the Island*), collected by Ibn al-Qaṭṭā' (d. 1121/2) – has been lost. 'Imād al-Dīn, whose anthology has become our primary source for Sicilian poetry, has an agenda: he represents Sicilian poetry in order to celebrate its beauty, but also to document and to condemn its difference. He declares himself, more than once, unwilling to repeat poetry written in praise of the infidels, a stance that – like the Vatican manuscript's and Dante's treatment of the Sicilians as preamble, like the Tuscanization of the Sicilian tongue – is "absolutely normal," but which can only frustrate modern literary historians.

At the origins of Italian literature there are two antagonistic originals: the one *the same*, the other *different*; the one familiar and accounted for within the structure of literary history, and the other *other*, alien, incommensurate. As there exists, behind the familiar Sicilian poems printed in anthologies of Italian literature, an unknown and unknowable original written in a lost Sicilian tongue, so behind that poem there exists

another original, upon which it in turn is based: the cultural vitality of early thirteenth-century Sicily, on which the Siculo-Italian poets drew in inventing the Italian love lyric. The Siculo-Italian poets' "translations" of Sicilian culture celebrated and preserved that culture, but they also (as literary historians may argue that any artistic representation does) compromised that culture, reducing and re-inventing it as they reproduced it. These "translations" were certainly not intended to be accurate in a twentieth-century sense; they were not conceived to be faithful reproductions of a valued and valuable original. Rather, they recast something of value, changing those things that needed to be changed in order to make it comprehensible and useful to a new audience. Thus, for instance, the pseudo-Arabic inscriptions on the coinage minted during the early years of Frederick's reign (see above, page 104) recall to the user's mind the era of Muslim domination in Sicily. But those inscriptions were not produced for an audience that could understand Arabic; they were pitched to the Christian merchants of the European mainland, who would have looked at them and been reminded that Sicily is the land where east meets west, at least economically.

Tuscan manuscripts preserve the works of the Siculo-Italian poets, translating them into another tongue in the process. The Siculo-Italian lyrics themselves celebrate and advertise Sicilian cultural vitality, translating the splendor of Sicily into the medium of courtly love lyric. Imâd al-Dîn's anthology simultaneously records and edits the production of the Siculo-Arabic poets. Al-Atrâbanishî's memorial to Roger's pleasure garden translates it into another medium, exalting it and polemicizing it. These "translations" are conceived both to stand in for and to memorialize their "originals": al-Atrâbanishî's poem, for instance, made the splendor of Roger's garden present even to those who were distant from the garden itself; the Tuscan versions of Siculo-Italian poems normalized their language while recording the poems for posterity. But while the "translation" supplants the "original," a memory of the original is embedded in the text, and the knowledge that the original existed is necessary for a proper reading of the translation.

The pseudo-Arabic inscriptions on Frederick's early coinage would be entirely devoid of meaning – their lexical content is nil – if the coins' users did not know that they made reference to an earlier era, when Sicilian monarchs produced coins with real Arabic inscriptions. These "translations" are monuments to a difficult past, which memorialize that past while simultaneously attempting to contain and normalize it, minimizing its ability to threaten the present.

Juan Andrés, in the passage that serves as an epigraph to this chapter, asserts that Arabic culture did indeed have an influence on European culture during the period when the Romance vernacular literatures were emerging. He states, however, that this influence was not the sort that could be traced by the traditional literary-historical methods used to gauge literary lineage: "It's not that the sources of our eloquence and poetry arose from Arabic schools, nor that their books were models for our poets and orators." Rather, Christian Europeans were inspired by the example set by Muslim Europeans "of writing poetry and of writing amusing things in a language native to and understood by all," and strove to do the same themselves. Again, in the second quotation that stands at the head of this chapter, Eliot Weinberger points out that periods of intense poetic activity have often also been periods of intense translation activity. "With no news from abroad," he writes, "a culture ends up repeating the same things to itself. It needs the foreign not to imitate, but to transform." Most of the "translations" that I have discussed in this essay could not technically be termed *translations*. They are substantially less sensitive toward their "originals" than the works that we call translations, and change those originals radically in the process of transmitting them; they are substantially less forthcoming about their agenda, their intentions and motives. In them one culture looks to another and responds to what it sees. The Tuscans react to the poetry of the Siculo-Italians, 'Imâd al-Dîn responds to the poetry of the Siculo-Arabs: in both these cases, the anthologist shares a cultural patrimony with the poets, but perceives certain significant differences between himself and the poets whose works he manipulates. In the most

positive, and most aggressive, examples of cultural contact, the contact has a transformative effect. Thus the Normans based their Sicilian state on a dynamic reading of the institutions of Muslim Sicily: the culture and the governmental institutions of Muslim Sicilians constituted "news from abroad" that the Normans received at a moment when they were in need of such stimulus, and could make fruitful use of it.

In these "translations," one culture strives to recreate a work, an institution, a cultural practice created by another culture, and recognized to be of value. The Tuscan poets acknowledged the importance of the poetic works of the Sicilians, and recorded them for their own purposes. The Norman colonizers of Sicily admired the institutions of Muslim Sicilians and adapted them to form the basis of their own Sicilian state. 'Imâd al-Dîn believed that Sicilian poetry had earned inclusion in his anthology, but excised the parts of it that he deemed unacceptable. The "translation" is not a mechanical reproduction of an original, but a reaction to it; it does not strive to reproduce faithfully the details of the original – or rather if the details are reproduced, that is secondary to the main purpose of the translation. Tuscan copyists needed to record those elements of Sicilian poetry that were of use to contemporary Tuscan poets; and so the linguistic details, and thus much of the melody, dropped away from the Sicilians' texts.

The "translation" is meant to replace the original for precisely this reason: because it is a reaction to a text, an institution, a cultural practice that is of value, and is conceived to lay claim to that object and to naturalize it so that it can be used as the foundation for similar, domestic productions. Such "translations" may not acknowledge their originals. In fact they may be designed precisely to overshadow or even disavow their originals. And yet the knowledge that the original existed may be necessary for an accurate and appropriate reading of the texts. I cited above the example of the pseudo-Arabic inscriptions on the coinage of Frederick's reign. A similar gesture can be discerned in the references to the gems of the Orient or the scientific learning of the Muslim world, in which unfamiliar names for familiar stones and abstruse natural philosophy confer a sense

of exotic value on poetic works. In all these cases, the reader is intended to recognize the source of the work or the object of value, but is not intended to infer that that source renders the work itself "Muslim." Rather, the "Muslim" elements incorporated into these texts signify to the reader that the work or artifact in question was once possessed by the Muslims, but has become Christian: the valuable Oriental sapphire has been superceded; Muslims' natural philosophy has been Latinized and Christianized. 'Imâd al-Dîn reproduces the Arabic poetry written for the Christian monarchs of Sicily, but takes pains to identify and contain its difference. The Sicilians once dominated Italian poetry, but their works have been recast as a footnote to the new poetry of the Tuscans.

Courtly culture was itself a prestige culture, flaunted by those who were wealthy and discerning enough to be able to produce it as a sign of refinement and sophistication. Arabic culture, too, during this period was a culture of prestige, a "trophy" culture. The Muslim sciences represented a pinnacle of learning to which Christian Europe aspired. Thus it is not remarkable that the Arabic source of Christian texts be simultaneously recognized and distanced, whether those texts be scientific translations, lyric poems, or less literal "texts" like government bureaucracies. The assertion that behind the work there stands an Arabic original conferred prestige on a scientific translation, and so it was boldly proclaimed by the translator. So, too, the dedicatory introduction of a thirteenth-century romance called *Sidrach* purports that the text was brought from Tunis and translated into Latin at Frederick II's request (Haskins, 254) – a claim that probably tells us nothing about the true origin of the work or about Frederick's actual communication with Arabic culture, but provides insight into the contemporary popular conception of Frederick's role as a hinge between Latinate Christianity and the exotic and alluring Muslim world.⁴

Frederick's coinage broadcasts the notion that his Sicilian state "translates" the wealth of

⁴It is interesting to note, however, that some modern scholars have believed that there may be some truth to the tales. Langley mentions that Rugierone di Palermo "may have been the friar sent by Frederick II to the King of Tunis to get the *Libro di Sidrac*" (471), though he does not give a reason for drawing this conclusion.

the Muslim world into a Christian realm, as Giacomo's poetry "translates" the riches of Islam, both material and intellectual, into a Christian vernacular. And finally the Tuscan versions of Siculo-Italian lyric translate the splendor of that tradition into a more familiar, less foreign tongue. The reader is meant to recognize these texts as different, yet the same; the alien provenance of the works is recognized and valorized, yet contained; the work retains the exotic value of another culture, but it is neither wholly *other*, nor yet entirely "domestic."

These parallel readings of works that I have metaphorically termed "translations" help to refine the shifting value of the notion of duality central to Sicilian cultural constructions during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In this study, I have traced the evolution of Sicilian duality from a relatively aggressive distinction between self and other to a containment and eradication of difference, and a naturalization of the other's culture. Indigenous Muslim culture was supported by Christian Sicilian rulers during the Norman era; Christian culture was encouraged as well, for instance in the production and decoration of churches, or in translation activities; and the two idioms were allowed to exist side by side. During Frederick's reign, however, Christian culture began to edge out Muslim culture, while striving to preserve and naturalize (or "translate" into a form that could be utilized by the Christian world) those elements of it that were of value. In much the same way, northern Italian reactions to the poetic revolution inaugurated by the Sicilians began with imitation, with "pseudo-Sicilian" poets from the north mimicking the Sicilian dialect, and ended with the Tuscan naturalization of Siculo-Italian poetry.

And these readings of metaphorical "translations," finally, serve to illuminate some of the points in more traditional literary-historical discussions of influence that need to be refined in order to account for developments in medieval Europe. Though they provide the invaluable service of identifying moments of cultural contact, the traditional philological methodologies are not geared to account for the value of such contacts. This does not necessarily indicate a failing in those methodologies; they were not designed to

answer the questions that have arisen only in their wake, as subsequent scholars sift through the evidence of contact that the philologists uncovered, and become convinced that old historical paradigms must shift in response to that evidence. As earlier scholars devised sophisticated and sensitive systems to track the incidence of cultural borrowings, so later generations of scholars must learn to read more accurately the uses that were made of those borrowings.

The Muslim-Christian cohabitation that occurred in Spain and in Sicily had a decisive and formative effect on the culture of Christian Europe. And the conditions of that cohabitation shifted significantly as both Muslims and Christians reacted to each other, and to their own response to the other – as they reacted to their culture's changing need for "news from abroad." Sicily, in some ways, anticipated developments on the Iberian peninsula: the translation activities at Salerno peaked during the twelfth century,⁵ one hundred years before the heyday of translation at the Christian court in Toledo; and the Sicilian "reconquista" antedated the better-known one that drove the Muslims out of Spain. The Norman state, of course, represented a first step toward Christian repossession of Sicily and southern Italy. And during the era of Frederick II the Muslim communities of Sicily were effectively eradicated. The final expulsion of the Muslims from Sicily was not accomplished, however, until much later. Lucera remained a Muslim city for the remainder of the thirteenth century; it still served as a haven for Manfred, Frederick's son and King of Sicily after his death, who took refuge in the city in 1255 during a struggle with the Pope (see Matthew, 366). The city was finally destroyed by Charles II of Anjou, who inherited the throne of Sicily, and its Muslim inhabitants killed or sold into slavery, in the year 1300, after almost a century of existence.

It seems appropriate to close this study by returning to the words of the scholar whose pleasing shadow – like the shade of al-Aṭrābanishī's palm trees – falls over any

⁵On translation activities in Salerno, see Gabrieli, "La cultura araba e la scuola medica salernitana."

student of Siculo-Muslim history. Michele Amari, discussing the question of Arabic influence on Romance vernacular poetics, agrees with the position taken by Andrés that such influence would have been general in scope and would not necessarily have left specific traces:

la moda sola, credo io, delle splendide corti musulmane della Spagna fece entrare ne' castelli cristiani dell'Occidente, insieme con altri argomenti di lusso, il sollazzo di ascoltare poesie in lingua volgare del paese: i premii e gli onori incoraggiarono i poeti nazionali a recitare nelle brigate principesche i versi che si sentiano per lo innanzi negli oscuri crocchi delle città e delle campagne; talchè la poesia volgare, meglio che nata, si dee dir emancipata e nobilitata in quel tempo.

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the manner alone – I believe – of the splendid Muslim courts of Spain carried into the Christian castles of the West, along with other luxurious notions, the pleasing habit of listening to poetry in the local vernacular tongue: prizes and honors encouraged national poets to recite in princely gatherings those verses that one heard before in the obscure street-songs of the cities and the country-side: so that vernacular poetry, more than *born*, one should say was *emancipated* and *ennobled* during that period.

This passage, of course, draws on the Romantic notion that the first Romance vernacular poetry was popular in formation, and arose from the "streets." More important to the present discussion, however, is Amari's succinct and complex characterization of the conditions in which the Romance vernacular tradition arose. The example of the Arabs, the inspiration of a pre-existing popular tradition, and a socio-economic situation which encouraged formal poetic production and performance converged to form the preconditions necessary for the emergence of a new literary tradition. None of these elements alone were decisive; all were crucial. Also important in Amari's thumbnail description of the birth of vernacular poetry is an element of mystery. The "obscure street-songs" which stand behind the verses of the courtly poets – like the lacunae embraced by the modern Sicilian writer Leonardo Sciascia: *I feel like I know the land even in its silences* (quoted above, page 1) – constitute a central but unrecoverable element in the literary history he discusses. Finally, Amari's account is illuminated by his

typical optimism. He does not linger over the murkier details of the question, the fine points that are irretrievably lost. Rather, he concludes by evoking those aspects of that literary history that invite celebration and – perhaps more importantly for subsequent literary historians – further scholarship and speculation. Rather than born, he states, the Romance vernacular tradition was emancipated and ennobled: thus urging literary historians to consider the methods by which early Romance poets distinguished their poetry from the diverse traditions from which it was emancipated, and the noble uses they made of the elements they acquired from those other traditions.

ابن هديس

عَذَّبْتَنِي بِالْعُنْصُرَيْنِ	بَاظِي حَشَايَ وَمَاءِ عَيْنِي
أَلْبَسْتَنِي سَقَمًا أَرَا	لَكَ لَبْسُهُ فِي النَّاطِرِينَ
جَسْمِي هُوَ الطَّيْفُ الَّذِي	يُدْنِيهِ مِنْكَ طِلَابُ دِينِي
وَلَقَدْ خَفَيْتُ مِنَ الضَّنَا	وَأَمِنْتُ أَحْظَ الْكَاشِحِينَ
وَلَنْ سَلِمْتُ مِنَ الرَّدَى	فَلَأَنَّهُ لَمْ يَدْرِ أَنِّي

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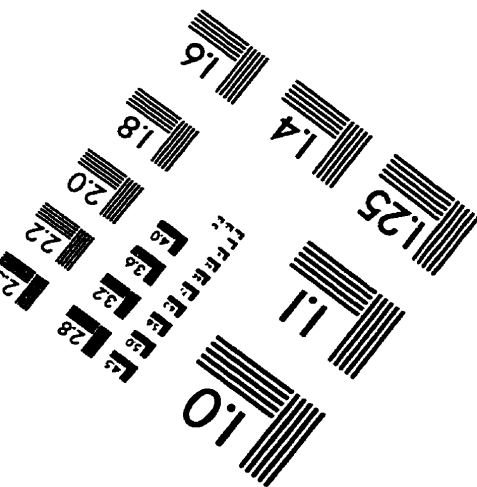
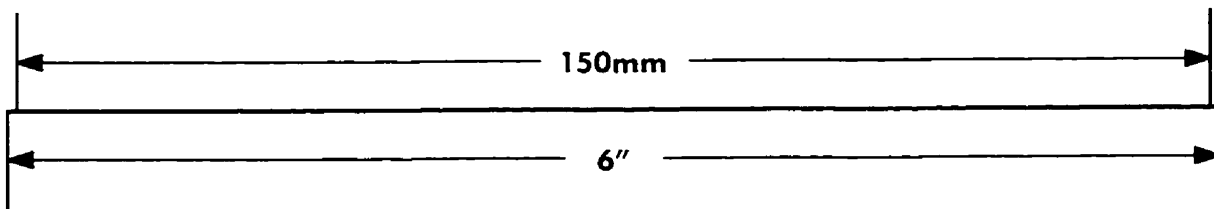
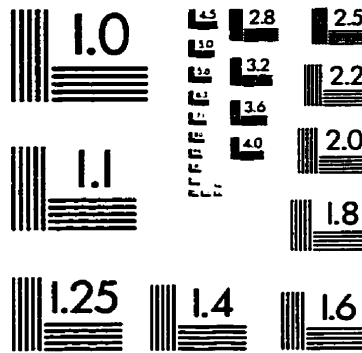
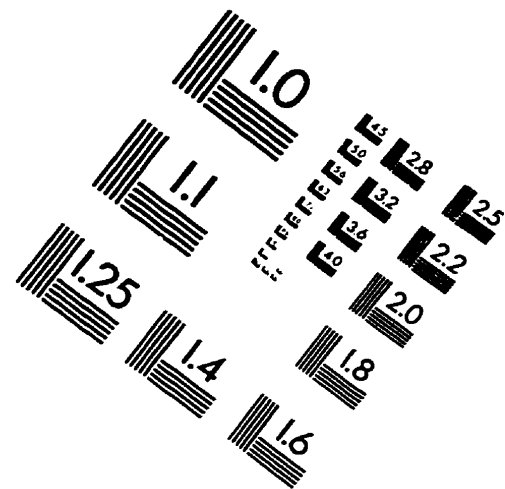
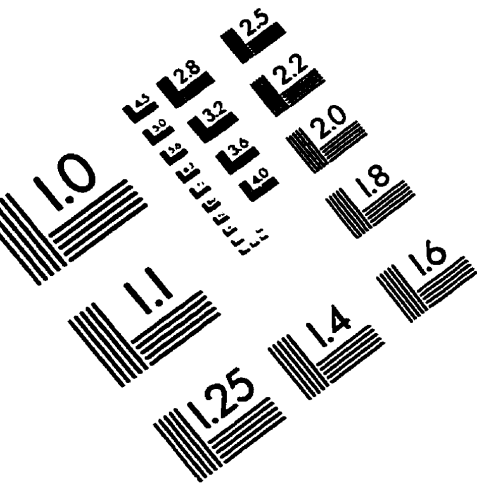
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