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Innocent II and the Kingdom of Sicily

By G.A. Loud

The kingdom of Sicily was a problem for Innocent II throughout his pontificate. Indeed, once he had secured general recognition by the majority of the western Church, the new kingdom of Sicily constituted *the* major problem facing the pope. Yet what we know of Innocent's policy towards the *regno* is surprisingly little, and more than somewhat opaque. Much of our understanding of that policy depends upon only two documents, a brief paragraph in the *acta* of the Council of Pisa in June 1135, in which the excommunication of King Roger was proclaimed, and Innocent's bull of 27th July 1139 proclaiming (or more properly confirming) the creation of the kingdom of Sicily. However, exegesis of these two documents, the purposes of which are diametrically opposed, is by no means straightforward.

Roger II of Sicily was, of course, the principal supporter and main political ally of the rival pope Anacletus II, and it was the latter who had first sanctioned the creation of the kingdom of Sicily in a bull, now surviving only in a late and mutilated copy, on 27th September 1130.¹ King Roger was not merely a supporter of Anacletus; he also had close ties to the latter's family, the Pierleone, who became his vassals in January 1134, in return for a substantial annual subsidy. This transaction was recorded in the most solemn form in a privilege, written in gold ink on purple parchment, and sealed with a golden bull – one of only two such 'quasi-imperial' privileges surviving from King Roger's chancery, which undoubtedly shows the importance the king ascribed to it.² Despite hosting a summit conference to find a solution to the schism at Salerno in November 1137, the king still did not withdraw support from Anacletus – the most he was prepared to do was to invite the supporters of the two rival popes each to submit a written memorandum outlining the legitimacy of their candidate's election, which he would then consider at his leisure.³ This looks like a classic delaying tactic – although the death of Anacletus three months later may

¹ Hartmut Hoffmann, 'Langobarden, Normannen, Päpste. Zum Legitimationsproblem in Unteritalien', *Quellen und Forschungen aus Italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken* 58 (1978), 173-5

² *Rogeri II Regis Diplomata Latina*, ed. Carl-Richard Brühl (Codex Diplomaticus Regni siciliae, Ser. I.ii(1), Cologne 1987), 98-101 no. 35. Cf. Carl-Richard Brühl, *Urkunden und Kanzlei König Rogers II. von Sizilien* (Cologne 1978), pp. 58-9; idem, 'Purpururkunden', in *Festschrift für Helmut Beumann zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. K-U. Jäschke and R. Wenskus (Sigmaringen 1977), 3-21.

³ *Falcone di Benevento, Chronicon Beneventanum*, ed. Edoardo d'Angelo (Florence 1999) [henceforth *Falco*], pp. 202-4.

well have rescued Roger from an embarrassing situation. Furthermore, while the eventual conclusion of the schism made a settlement with the ruler of Sicily more feasible, this dogged support of the anti-pope left a legacy of ill-feeling at the Curia, and there were significant obstacles, both ecclesiastical and political, to securing a solution to the ‘Sicilian problem’. Nor indeed, however much the king himself may have hoped it might, did the bull of 1139 mark an end to the difficulty, not least because of the circumstances in which Pope Innocent was forced to grant that privilege. The final resolution of the problems between the kingdom and the papacy came only with the Treaty of Benevento between William I and Adrian IV in 1156.⁴

It is not surprising therefore that Pope Innocent’s view of southern Italy was somewhat jaundiced. In July 1137, as he and his Curia accompanied the invasion of the *regno* by the German Emperor Lothar, he wrote to Peter the Venerable, Abbot of Cluny, that ‘from the city of Rome to Bari, scarcely any city or *castrum* remains that is subject and obedient to St. Peter’, and he expressed his wish to liberate ‘the Christian people suffering under the yoke of the tyrant of Sicily’.⁵ Here he concurred in the universal view of the king’s enemies, both within and without the *regno*, that Roger was indeed a tyrant, in that his rule was harsh and oppressive, but that also it was illegitimate. He had no right to the royal title, nor to rule over southern Italy as a whole, as opposed to his ancestral county of Sicily; and the creation of the kingdom in 1130 was the usurpation of a title which did not belong to him, and of lands over which others had a better claim. Such a view was most strongly expressed among German commentators, who considered that their ruler was the overlord of southern Italy, but was by no means confined to them. St. Bernard wrote to Lothar III that ‘it is against the interests of Caesar that anyone should make himself the king of Sicily’, while the anonymous Saxon Annalist said that in 1137 the emperor ‘flatly refused to negotiate with a semi-pagan tyrant’.⁶ While Innocent did not, as we shall see, share his ally’s view as to who was properly the overlord over southern Italy, equally he could not consider a kingdom sanctioned by his rival for the papacy legitimate.

⁴ For an extended discussion, G.A. Loud, *The Latin Church in Norman Italy* (Cambridge 2007), pp. 156-65.

⁵ *The Letters of Peter the Venerable*, ed. Giles Constable (2 vols., Cambridge, Mass., 1967), i.191-2 no. 62.

⁶ *The Letters of St. Bernard of Clairvaux*, trans. B. Scott James (London 1953), p. 210 no. 142. *Die Reichschronik des Annalista Saxo*, ed. Klaus Nass, MGH SS xxxvii (Hanover 2006), p. 608. See the classic study by Helene Wieruszowski, ‘Roger II of Sicily. *Rex Tyrannus* in twelfth-century political thought’, *Speculum* 38 (1963), 46-78.

Nevertheless, while the pope's view of the south Italian kingdom during the 1130s might seem clear enough, there still remain questions to be resolved. Thus, in 1135 at the Council of Pisa Innocent not only declared the king to be excommunicate, but extended this sentence to include

‘all those who in future shall bring merchandise by land or sea to Sicily or Apulia, that they might sell it there, and [on those] who shall travel there in order that they might serve the tyrant Roger ... until he shall return to the unity of the faith’.

In addition, he granted to those who fought both him and Peter Leone (Anacletus) ‘that same remission which Pope Urban decreed at the Council of Clermont to all those travelling to Jerusalem for the liberation of Christians’ – in other words, a Crusading indulgence – if one may use that anachronistic terminology.⁷

But although the king had been openly supporting Anacletus for almost five years, we have no evidence that Innocent had proclaimed his excommunication before 1135, whereas he had excommunicated his rival pontiff almost immediately upon his election, and this sentence had been repeated for a wider audience at the Council of Liège in March 1131.⁸ Even if he may have hoped for Roger's ‘return to the unity of the faith’, why had it taken so long for the spiritual sword to be unsheathed against him? One might surmise that the pope was hoping for Roger to repent and abandon his rival, but, again, there is no evidence that any diplomatic efforts were made to secure this change of heart before St. Bernard's mission to Salerno late in 1137. Furthermore, Innocent's close contacts with the leaders of the domestic opposition to the king surely argue against this supposition. Innocent and Lothar met the rebel chiefs, Prince Robert of Capua and Count Rainulf of Caiazzo, during their sojourn at Rome in summer 1133, and the prince was at Pisa with the pope over the winter of 1133-4, and again during the winter of 1134-5.⁹ As the notary Falco of Benevento, another enemy of the king, recorded: ‘Pope Innocent and Prince Robert of Capua were labouring with

⁷ Dieter Girgensohn, ‘Das Pisaner Konzil von 1135 in der Überlieferung des Pisaner Konzils von 1409’, in *Festschrift für Hermann Heimpel zum 70. Geburtstag* (Göttingen 1971), ii.1099-1100.

⁸ *The Liber Landavensis*, ed. W.J. Rees (Llandovery 1840), pp. 52-3 (3rd March 1130), to the clergy and people of England [I owed this reference to John Doran]; Palumbo, *Lo Scisma del MCXXX* (Rome 1942), pp. 349-50. Liège: *Annalista Saxo*, p. 593.

⁹ *Alexandri Telesini Abbatis Ystoria Rogerii Regis Sicilie Calabrie atque Apulie*, ed. Ludovica de Nava (Fonti per la storia d'Italia, Rome 1991) [henceforth *Al. Tel.*], II.36-7, pp. 40-1; *Falcone di Benevento, Chronicon Beneventanum*, ed. E. D'Angelo (Florence 1998) [henceforth *Falco*], pp. 155-6, 160, 170-2.

great effort and much danger to free us all'.¹⁰ Why therefore delay before taking the obvious step?

Yet seemingly, the pope did delay. When Bernard of Clairvaux wrote to the people of Genoa early in 1134 to reprove them for receiving envoys from Roger (to whom of course the abbot would only concede the title of 'Count of Sicily'), he warned them against accepting the latter's bribes, and of the discord within the city this might bring. But he did not warn them of the risks of dealing with an excommunicate – which he surely would have done had Innocent already placed the Sicilian ruler under formal anathema.¹¹

The reasons why Innocent decided eventually to excommunicate Roger at the council of Pisa are perhaps clearer than why he had delayed taking this step earlier. By this time, after his recognition as the rightful pope by the Milanese, Innocent was firmly in control of northern Italy. Indeed, the council at Pisa, attended by over 100 bishops, was a striking demonstration of the reality of Innocent's claims to be the rightful pope.¹² Furthermore, whereas in the previous year it seemed that King Roger had overcome the rebels on the south Italian mainland and was firmly in control of his kingdom, false rumours of his death early in 1135 had led to a renewal of rebellion, encouraged also by the arrival of Prince Robert with a force of mercenaries from Pisa.¹³ It must have seemed in June 1135 as though one last push would overthrow the rule of the count of Sicily (as he was in the eyes of his enemies) on the mainland. The excommunication and its accompanying indulgence – effectively a proclamation of holy war against Roger – was surely intended to encourage that (it was to be hoped) decisive effort.

In the event, it did nothing of the sort, and even as Innocent was proclaiming Roger's excommunication, the king and his army were landing at Salerno, and within two months mainland southern Italy was once more under the king's control, the Pisan fleet had withdrawn, and the remaining rebels were confined to Naples, which was closely besieged.¹⁴ Hence, at the end of 1135, Pope Innocent despatched the prince of Capua, along with the

¹⁰ *Falco*, p. 164.

¹¹ *Letters of St. Bernard*, pp. 200-1 no. 131.

¹² Palumbo, *Lo Scisma*, pp. 533-40.

¹³ *Al. Tel.* III.1-2, 5 pp. 59-62; *Falco*, p. 172.

¹⁴ *Al. Tel.* III.26-7, p. 73.

Count of Caiazzo's brother, and his own trusted lieutenant Cardinal Gerard of S. Croce, to seek renewed military help from the emperor.¹⁵

The five months which Innocent spent in southern Italy while accompanying the imperial army during the summer of 1137 reveal a number of his priorities, and how closely he was following in the footsteps of his predecessor Honorius II, who had been very much concerned with south Italian issues. There was, first, the question of overlordship. Quite what the intentions of Honorius were with regard to southern Italy after the death of Duke William of Apulia in July 1127 is unclear, but it appears that he envisaged a loose coalition of leading nobles and towns under papal suzerainty, before he was forced unwillingly to recognise Count Roger as duke of Apulia.¹⁶ Innocent was, however, faced with the claims of his ally Lothar, who regarded southern Italy as imperial territory. According to the contemporary chronicler Peter the Deacon, the emperor announced in a letter he sent summoning the abbot of Montecassino to him, that he proposed to hold a court at Melfi on 29th June at which he intended to appoint a duke.¹⁷ The result was a lengthy dispute, with both pope and emperor wishing to be the one who installed a new duke as his vassal, which lasted a month or more as the imperial army marched from the Apulia-Basilicata frontier to Benevento and then Avellino, before they eventually agreed jointly to invest Count Rainulf as the Duke of Apulia, with the pope holding the upper part of the banner used for the investiture and the emperor the lower section.¹⁸

Secondly, Innocent was anxious to re-assert his control over the papal city of Benevento. Here again he was following the example of Honorius. The latter had tried actively to impose his will on the city, which had led to an uprising in which his *rector* (city governor) had been murdered in September 1128.¹⁹ Subsequently the city had been riven by factional strife, and for much of the 1130s under the control of men loyal to Anacletus, and closely allied to King Roger – to whom Anacletus in his bull of 1130 had granted the right to call upon the military service of Benevento in time of war. When the pope arrived at Benevento with the army of Duke Henry of Bavaria in May 1137, he was at pains both to prevent the Germans actually attacking the city and ensuring that its citizens took an oath of

¹⁵ *Falco*, p. 174.

¹⁶ Loud, *Latin Church*, pp. 148-51.

¹⁷ *Chronica Monasterii Casinensis*, ed. Hartmut Hoffmann (MGH SS xxxiv, Hanover 1980), IV.108, p. 569.

¹⁸ *Falco*, p. 190; *Romualdi Salernitani Chronicon*, ed. C.A. Garufi (Rerum Italicarum Scriptores: Città di Castello 1935) [henceforth *Romuald*], p. 224

¹⁹ *Falco*, pp. 102-4

fealty to him, while he installed his own *rector*. Subsequently, when he returned to the city at the beginning of September, not only did he formally and ceremonially visit the city to take up residence in the Sacred Palace (the traditional seat of government) – which he had not done during his hurried stay in May – but he duly consecrated his own nominee as archbishop, to replace the Anacletan appointee who had fled.²⁰ And almost his first step after peace had finally been secured with the king in 1139 was to make a further visit to Benevento.²¹ Re-asserting control over this turbulent papal enclave in the south was undoubtedly a significant concern for Pope Innocent.

Equally important was to re-assert his authority over the south Italian Church. In the first instance, this meant removing men who had been loyal to Anacletus, such as Archbishop Rossemannus of Benevento, and the Anacletan *rector* of the city, Cardinal Crescentius, who was captured in May 1137, and eventually sent prisoner to a monastery.²² Innocent's treatment of those who had supported his rival, even those who eventually came over to his side, was consistent and implacable – witness the deposition and imprisonment of Archbishop Anselm of Milan in 1135, the deposition of Peter of Pisa and the other former Anacletan cardinals at the Lateran Council of 1139, and that of several south Italian archbishops whom Anacletus had consecrated in the years after 1139.²³ Similarly, when he came once again to Benevento in August of that year 'he quashed every ordination made by Peter Leone and Rossemannus'.²⁴ But a particularly telling example of this animus came during the southern Italian expedition of 1137 in his treatment of the abbey of Montecassino. His wrath was directed particularly against the abbot-elect Rainald, who had sworn fealty to King Roger, and who in doing so seems to have been considered also to have recognised Anacletus, who had earlier conferred the subdeaconate upon him. (Montecassino had anyway, like almost all the rest of the south Italian Church, publically acknowledged Anacletus before 1137). When the abbot-elect and a delegation of monks came to meet the pope and emperor, at the latter's orders, at Lagopesole in the Basilicata in July:

²⁰ *Falco*, pp. 182-4, 190-2.

²¹ *Falco*, p. 224. For Benevento at this period, the most detailed study remains that by Otto Vehse, 'Benevent als Territorium des Kirchenstaates bis zum Beginn der Avignonesischen Epoche I Bis zum Ausgang der normannischer Dynastie', *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken* 22 (1930-1), 87-160, at pp. 135-53

²² *Falco*, pp. 182-4, 190.

²³ Palumbo, *Lo Scisma*, pp. 538-40, 592-4. For St. Bernard's letter of protest about the treatment of Peter of Pisa, *The Letters of St. Bernard*, pp. 353-4 no. 283.

²⁴ *Falco*, p. 226.

‘Outside the camp they met messengers from Pope Innocent, who told the abbot-elect that the pope had given orders that, before he entered the camp, he and the brothers with him should with bare feet make satisfaction to the pope, and receive penance, for the obedience which they had shown to Peter Leone. They must confirm on oath that they would obey whatever instructions the pope gave them, and they should reject and anathematize Peter Leone and his followers.’²⁵

In the lengthy disputes that followed, the Montecassino chronicler portrayed the emperor as essentially sympathetic to the monks, while the pope and cardinals were bitterly hostile, reproaching them for their disobedience and association with the excommunicate (that is the antipope and his supporters). Eventually the pope and cardinals insisted on Rainald’s deposition. Innocent then sent his henchman, Cardinal Gerard, to force the monks to elect someone of his choosing, although in the end, under pressure from the emperor, he reluctantly allowed them to conduct a free election.²⁶ In this episode, Innocent was directly imitating the actions of his predecessor, who in 1126-7 had sent a succession of cardinals to Montecassino to force the deposition of two successive (and in papal eyes unsatisfactory) abbots and install a candidate who would be loyal to the papacy and would discipline the refractory monks.²⁷

The hard-line attitude adopted towards the partisans of Anacletus was extended to the king. Innocent must, of course, have sanctioned the negotiations at Salerno in November 1137, and at that point – with the German invasion of southern Italy having clearly failed – he was therefore still prepared to seek to win over the king of Sicily. Cardinals Guido and Gerard, who took part in these negotiations alongside Bernard of Clairvaux, were two of his closest associates (and indeed were to be his two successors as pontiff). They were even prepared to justify the legitimacy of Innocent’s election to Roger – a tactic which had otherwise long since been abandoned in favour of the simple assertion that almost all the Church supported Innocent, who was morally by far the better of the two rival popes.²⁸ But when, after the death of Anacletus, Roger seems to have sought a reconciliation with the by-now universally acknowledged legitimate pope, for example ordering his subjects, and the citizens of Benevento, to recognise him as pontiff, Innocent refused to accept his submission.

²⁵ *Chron. Cas.* IV.108, p. 572.

²⁶ *Chron. Cas.* IV.123, pp. 596-7.

²⁷ *Chron. Cas.* IV.88-9, 93-4, pp. 548-51, 553-6.

²⁸ Mary Stroll, *The Jewish Pope. Ideology and Politics in the Papal Schism of 1130* (Leiden 1987), pp. 93-9.

Indeed, he renewed the king's excommunication at the Lateran Council of April 1139.²⁹ Why was he determined to continue the conflict? In part, this may have been concern for his south Italian allies, Duke Rainulf and Prince Robert. Rainulf, however, died on 30th April, and thereafter the anti-royal cause in Apulia, already very much at a disadvantage, collapsed. Nevertheless, Innocent began an invasion of the *regno*. Once again the king offered negotiations, but these broke down over his refusal to contemplate the reinstatement of Prince Robert, upon which the pope insisted.³⁰ The consequences for Innocent were disastrous. His army was ambushed, and he and the cardinals were captured and brought before the king – 'loaded with insults', according to Falco. To secure his liberty, the pope reluctantly agreed to recognise the existence of the new kingdom, and 27th July issued his bull *Quos dispensatio divini* authorising its creation.³¹

The 1139 bull made of course no reference to its predecessor of 1130, and was issued as though it was an entirely new grant. Nonetheless, in fact its terms were very similar, even if not quite identical. It offered an elaborate justification for the creation of the kingdom, citing the services of Roger's father and uncle, Robert Guiscard, in serving the Church and propagating the Christian religion, and the investiture of Roger himself as duke by Pope Honorius as a precedent. The suggestion that Sicily had once been a kingdom, which was now restored, would appear to reflect royal propaganda – certainly the king's biographer Alexander of Telesse used this claim to justify Roger's royal promotion. In almost all its terms the king's wishes were granted: the kingdom was to be hereditary, it was to include the principality of Capua (where one of the king's sons had been installed as prince four years earlier), the same, very light, *census* as in the 1130 bull was stipulated, and while fealty and homage was required from the king, possession of the kingdom was not conditional upon the performance of these rituals.³² It was, therefore, a complete surrender, but it was also, potentially, the basis for a peaceful and long-term relationship between kingdom and pope.

Why then was this not the case, and relations between the Curia and the king remained problematic for the rest of Innocent's pontificate, and for more than a decade after his death? The king's close control over the Church in the kingdom was undoubtedly not to the pope's taste. In 1142, according to the Ferraria Chronicle (here probably based on the lost

²⁹ Falco, pp. 208, 214-16.

³⁰ Falco, p. 220.

³¹ *Contumeliis ditatum*; Falco, p. 222; Romuald, p. 225

³² Hoffmann, 'Langobarden, Normannen, Päpste', pp. 175-7. Cf. *Al. Tel.* II.1-2, pp. 23-4.

part of Falco's account), Innocent 'sent a message to the king that he had no right to choose the pastors of churches and he should desist from this presumption'. The answer was a flat refusal – 'this has always been the custom, from which I do not in any way wish to desist'.³³ Naturally neither Innocent nor his immediate successors were willing to confirm the structural changes to the Church on the island of Sicily that Anacletus had agreed in 1131.³⁴ Other issues that emerged in the early 1140s included the advance of the king's troops into the Abruzzi, a region over which the papacy had claims, and the position of Benevento. On the other hand, there are hints that the underlying problem was rather the legacy of the schism: a strong dislike for the king among most of the cardinals, heightened by the circumstances in which he had extorted the 1139 bull from the captive pope. Innocent's successor, Celestine II, apparently wanted to repudiate the 1139 treaty; while John of Salisbury later alleged that the papal refusal to allow the consecration of south Italian bishops during the 1140s was as punishment for the imprisonment of Pope Innocent, as well as a protest against royal appointments.³⁵

Yet even here there are problems. The years after 1140 were not ones of unmitigated hostility. The king sent Innocent timber for the rebuilding of the Lateran, and obtained porphyry from Rome, which was used for constructing his tomb at Cefalù cathedral.³⁶ Innocent was prepared to confirm royal measures to reform the monastery of Venosa in 1141, and the next year he personally consecrated a new archbishop of Amalfi, who was seemingly perfectly acceptable to the king. A new abbot of Montecassino, Rainald II, was made a cardinal in 1141.³⁷ Loyal allies and supporters of Innocent like Peter the Venerable could write oleaginous and flattering letters to the king, who now, allegedly, ruled 'a peaceful and most joyful kingdom like another Solomon'.³⁸ Similarly Bernard of Clairvaux could ask Roger, rhetorically, 'Is there a corner of the world to which the glory of your name has not

³³ *Chronicon Ignoti Monachi Cistercensis Sanctae Mariae de Ferraria*, ed. A. Gaudenzi (Naples 1888), p. 27.

³⁴ Loud, *Latin Church*, pp. 159, 225, 229.

³⁵ *Romuald*, p. 227; *The Historia Pontificalis of John of Salisbury*, ed. Marjorie Chibnall (Edinburgh 1956), pp. 65-6.

³⁶ John the Deacon, 'Descriptio Lateranensis Ecclesiae', in *Codice topografico della città di Roma*, ed. R. Valentini and G. Zucchetti, ii (FSI, Rome 1946), 348-9; Josef Deér, *The Dynastic Porphyry Tombs of the Norman Period in Sicily* (Cambridge, Mass. 1959), especially chaps. 7-8.

³⁷ Hubert Houben, *Die Abtei Venosa und das Mönchtum im normannisch-staufischen Süditalien* (Tübingen 1995), p. 438; *Italia Pontificia*, ed. P. F. Kehr (10 vols. Berlin 1905-74), viii.391 no. 15. Loud, *Latin Church*, pp. 158 note 87 (which discusses the date of Rainald's appointment), 160.

³⁸ *Letters of Peter the Venerable*, i.330-3 no. 131 (perhaps after Innocent's death), but cf. *ibid.*, i.230-2 no. 90 (c.1139/40).

penetrated?'³⁹ There are hints, therefore, that relations were rather better than the chroniclers imply. But the evidence for this period, and more generally for the relations of Innocent II with the kingdom of Sicily, still leaves a great deal to be desired.

³⁹ *Letters of St. Bernard*, pp. 348-9 no. 276. This letter, dating soon after 1140, was probably part of the protracted negotiations that eventually led to the foundation of the Cistercian monastery of S. Maria Requisita (later known as Sambucina) in Calabria, Pietro di Leo, 'L'insediamento dei Cistercensi nel Regnum Siciliae: i primi monastero cistercensi calabresi', in *I Cistercensi nel Mezzogiorno medievale*, ed. Houbert Houben and Benedetto Vetere (Galatina 1994), pp. 320-8.