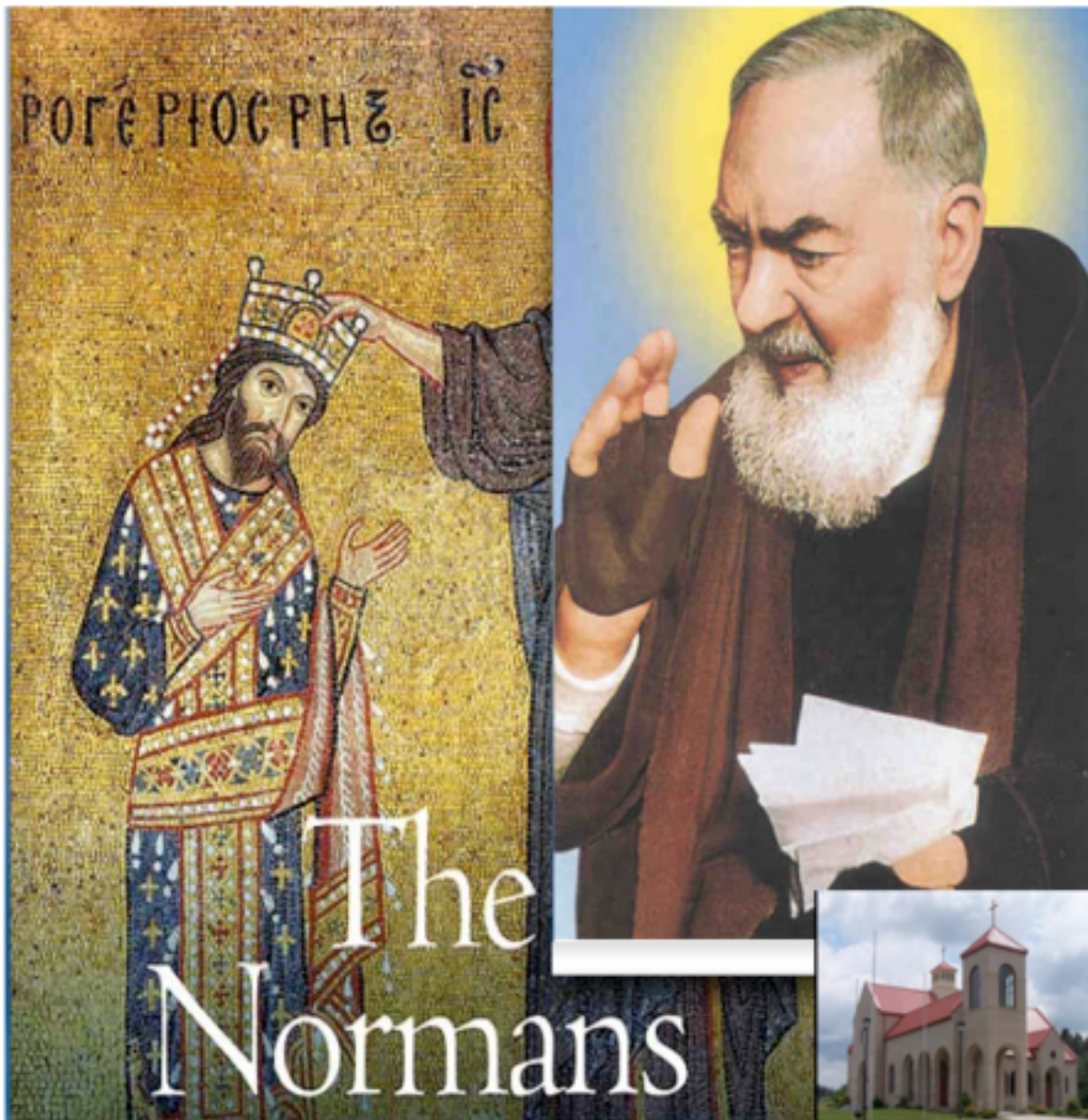




The Kingdom of the Two Sicilies: 11th Century Origin and 21st Century Ghost

Tom Verso (April 22, 2011)



The persistence of "Southern Question" issues, and the Padre Pio phenomenon suggests that the 'ghost' of the "Two Sicilies" state is still present in the form of the Patria Meridionale culture. The material state is dead. States are easily swept away by armies. But, a 1000-year-old culture will



haunt pretenders to the throne long after the armies return to barracks.

Introduction - Two Shrines

On the Adriatic coast of Italy, in the province of Foggia, there is a peninsula know as "Promontorio del Gargano. On this peninsula are two sacred Catholic shrines: the fifth century Sanctuary of Monte Sant'Angelo sul Gargano (sometimes called simply Monte Gargano) and the twenty-first century Shrine of Padre Pio in San Giovanni Rotondo. They are approximately 15 miles apart ("by way a crow fly's"- see Google map below).



Apart from their religious significance, from a secular social history point of view, the political and cultural implications associated with these shrines cannot be overstated, and their proximity to one another is fascinating.

Monte Gargano is associated with the coming of the Normans and the political unification of the Patria Meridionale (southern Italian/Sicilian homeland) state, which came to be known as the “Two Sicilies”.

The **Shrine of Padre Pio** may be considered a symbol for the Patria Meridionale culture; a culture persisting 150 years after the state was forcibly melded into the Italian nation state – the ghost of the Two Sicilies.

I. Origin of “Two Sicilies” – culture and state

A. Before the Normans –

Birth of the Patria Meridionale culture

After the fall of the Roman Empire, southern Italy and Sicily were disengaged and separated from northern Italy. Professor Barbara M. Kreutz, in her masterful source document history, “Before the Normans – Southern Italy in the Ninth & Tenth Centuries”, writes:

“...the lower half of the Italian peninsula, the portion lying below Rome, first became a separate and distinct geopolitical region in 774, with the Carolingian conquest of northern Italy...From 774 on southern Italy mostly pursued its own separate destiny until it achieve political unity late in the eleventh century under the Normans... (p.1 emp.+)

Similarly, the classical scholar and world historian Arnold J. Toynbee writes:

“...the geographic nucleus of Western Civilization consisted of what were in 775 AD the dominions of Charlemagne...[centered in] what the Romans had known as Gaul...with extension into the northern parts of Italy...” (A Study of History, vol. I, p.32 emp.+)

This division of Italy at the birth of Western Civilization was not simply or only a geographic division. More importantly, the division of Italy was an ethnic and political divide. Kerutz:

“The events of 774 not only drew a new boundary and set southern Italy apart; they also altered the dynamics of the ethnic and political forces within that region. (p. 1 emp.+)

Note: Prof. Kerutz refers to the “ethnic forces”. To my mind, this is significant because the different ethnic roots of the people respectively north and south of Rome imply significantly different cultural roots of Patria Meridionale vis-à-vis the North.

Ethnically, with the exception of the Lombard minority, the South was predominately, as it always was, a Mediterranean society with cultural roots tracing back into the ancient Mediterranean civilizations (Greece, Anatolia, Phoenicia, Egypt, etc.). Whereas, the Carolingian / northern Italian culture, was largely affected by people from the Eurasian Steppes, coming through the collapsing northern marches of the Roman Empire.

More specifically, between circa 774 until the Norman conquest circa 1100 A.D., the major social groups affecting the political and cultural development of southern Italy and Sicily were the Lombards, Byzantines and Arabs; whereas, north of Rome the papacy, Carolingians and Ottonians were the determining forces. Kerutz:

“For three centuries, Byzantium and southern Lombards would confront each other in the lower half of the [Italian] peninsula. Moreover, both would be profoundly affected...by the Arab conquest of Sicily...southern Italy [became] the graveyard of papal, Carolingian, and Ottonian ambitions” (p.1



emp.+)

Thus, we can say the birth of the Patria Meridionale culture occurred during this pre-Norman period, and that culture was ethnically different than the North – it was a Mediterranean culture.

B. The Normans –

Birth of the Patria Meridionale state “Two Sicilies”

Regarding the arrival of the Normans in southern Italy, there are conflicting accounts from 11th Century source documents. However, one description, given much credence by many very competent historians working with source documents, is that in the early 11th Century (circa 1016) forty Norman pilgrims, returning from the Holy Land, stopped to pay homage to Michael the Arch-Angel; the Norman patron saint and patron of the great abbey (and later great Gothic Cathedral) Mont-Saint-Michel. For example, G. A. Loud writes:

“William of Apulia said that the first Normans to come to southern Italy were pilgrims. They had gone to the shrine of St Michael on Monte Gargano. There they had encountered Melus who had begged for their assistance in his fight against the Greeks, and as a result they had gone home to recruit help, and then returned to Italy, met Melus and joined him in his attack on Apulia.”

“This account should not be underestimated because of the possible links between the shrine of St Michael on the Gargano and Mont St Michel in Normandy...Nor was the presence of Melus at Monte Gargan entirely impossible” (“The Age of Robert Guiscard – Southern Italy and the Norman Conquest, p. 61-62; 65)

While the first appearance of a mere forty Normans may seem innocuous, they soon brought prodigious numbers of marvelous fighting brethren to bear on the Lombards, Byzantines and Arabs. By the year 1091 the Normans defeated all. Thereby, unifying southern Italy and Sicily into a single political entity, which had been known in the ancient world as Magna Grecia and in the modern as “Two Sicilies.”

From 1091 to the 1861 Risorgimento, southern Italy and Sicily were essentially united, although, many revolts and wars resulted in periodic separations. For example, after the 1282 Sicilian Vespers the French Angevin overlords were driving out of Sicily but maintained control of the southern mainland.

“However, in 1416 Alfonso of Aragon took Naples from the Angevins and ...Sicily would now be referred to as one of ‘**two Sicilies**’, the Sicily ‘beyond the straits’ as opposed to the Sicily ‘on this side of the straits’...”

(Sicily: An Informal History, Sammartino & Roberts, p. 81, emp.+)

II. Ghost of the Two Sicilies

A. Southern Question

Throughout the more than 1,000 years of violent turbulent political history of the “Two Sicilies” state, its distinctive and differentiating Patria Meridionale culture evolved fairly homogeneously across the various communities (e.g. Sicily, Calabria, Naples, etc.).

Evidence of Patria Meridionale cultural homogeneity **and persistence** two or three generations after the Risorgimento can be seen in the America immigrant communities circa 1900. Even though these people came from various highly isolated sections of the Two Sicilies region, they showed a remarkable cultural commonality in mores, mannerisms, religion, food, music, mourning/lamentation, superstitions (e.g. evil-eye), etc. For example, various communities had special patron saints and had festival days to celebrate those saints. The Neapolitans celebrated San Gennaro, the Sicilians St. Joseph, etc.

Further Evidence of Patria Meridionale cultural homogeneity and persistence post-Risorgimento is the appearance of “The Southern Question” literature, and expressions like “Italy ends at the



Garigliano”, shortly after the Risorgimento and well into the twentieth century; clearly indicating that the Two Sicilies region south of Rome was (is) viewed as a single homogeneously differentiated social-cultural entity.

More recently, contemporary anthropological research indicates that the South is STILL a distinct homogeneous persistent cultural entity within the Italian state. See for example: Italy's Southern Question: Orientalism in One Country edited by Jane Schneider. Also, the scholarly works of John Dickie, Gabriella Gribaudi and other social scientist in Italian Cultural Studies: An Introduction” edited by Forgacs & Lumley. Of course, and perhaps most importantly, the political sociology of **“League Nord-esque”** issues and rhetoric cannot be ignored.

In short, the South could not be united with the North simply by (in contemporary parlance) “regime change”; i.e. kick out the Bourbons, substitute the Piedmontese, and presto Italy is unified. It may be unified politically, but not culturally.

The cultural ghost of Two Sicilies is still present!

B. Religion and culture

One of the most obvious and significant aspects of any culture is its religion. Accordingly, when considering the Patria Meridionale culture, religion is an important characteristic to take into consideration, and the role of Saints is particularly significant. Anthropologist Mia Di Tota agrees with Gramsci’s “Observations on Folklore”; he writes:

“Saint cults in Southern Italy constitutes an important aspect of a folklore tradition that Gramsci once characterized as a ‘reflex of the cultural conditions.

“Saint cults have political, social, and economic significance...political forces in mainstream Italian society have not been able to completely transform the cultural distinctiveness of the South...

“This attitude is apparent even TODAY in an Italy that is divided into two distinct parts: the industrially developed North...and the industrially undeveloped South which is referred to as ‘The South Italian problem.’ (“Saint Cults and Political Alignments in Southern Italy” -Dialectical Anthropology, 1981, vol.5 #4, p. 317, emp.+)

Saint Padre Pio

While Padre Pio is universally, as a matter of faith, acknowledged as a Saint by all Catholics, and the millions who throng to his shrine are not limited to southern Italians; nevertheless, I have found ‘oral’ evidence that southern Italians embrace his sanctity with a unique anachronistic (pre-Vatican II reform) fervor; a fervor that would be consistent with what historians and anthropologist report as characteristic of southern “Saint Cults”.

In Rochester, NY, recent southern Italian immigrants (i.e. post 1960) led a drive to raise two million dollars to build a five thousand square foot “Padre Pio Chapel”; more accurately, a ‘so-called’ Chapel. Paraphrasing Gertrude Steins’ Rose: “A Church by any other name is still a Church” - see picture below.





In grocery stores, shoe repair shops, etc. southern Italian merchants have Padre Pio's picture prominently displayed and donation boxes, always brimming with 'folding money'. When I talk to these recent "off the boat" merchants and their customers about Padre Pio, they speak in emotional terms and corresponding animated expressions reminiscent of my childhood in the 'Little Italy' neighborhood of my grandparents pre-WW I immigrant generation. Moreover, they report that friends, relatives, and neighbors in their hometowns in Italy (which they visit periodically) feel the same spiritual attraction (affection) for the man they think of as a "southern Italian Saint."

Put another way: a stigmata canonized German would not conjure the same outpouring of emotional response. There would be no 'Herr Pio' Chapel built. The fact that Padre Pio is a man, cleric and saint of the South motivates the southern Italian fervor I have observed in Rochester and heard reported about in southern Italy.

To my mind, the response to Saint Padre Pio is consistent with what Gramsci, Di Tota and other social scientist have reported about the significance of "Saint Cults" in the Patria Meridionale culture.

The cultural ghost of Two Sicilies is still present!

Conclusion

Approximately 1000 years after the Norman visit to the Monte Gargano sanctuary, and 150 years after the demise of the state they create, a second sanctuary stands just 15 miles away as a testament to the persistence of that state's Patria Meridionale culture.

The defiant cultural ghost of Two Sicilies looks north - "I will not yield!"

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