5 Orientalism, Mediterranean Style

THE LIMITS OF HISTORY AT THE MARGINS OF EUROPE

And you advise me to write history? To record the outrageous crimes of the men by whom we are still held down?

—MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO, “Letters to Atticus”

When Edward Said denounced the whole of Oriental studies in 1979 as “a conspiratorial system of domination and exploitation of the east” (Orientalism 1), the world of academia found itself divided, in Aijaz Ahmad’s rather unappreciative words, “between inordinate praise and wholesale rejection” (168). Many have since subscribed to Said’s hypothesis and investigated supplementary ways in which academic knowledges such as Orientalism frame, legitimate, and at times produce systems of dominance and power (e.g., see Marrouchi). Others have defended the field from Said’s “politicization” and insisted on at least some versions of Orientalism that are not “singularly informed by a colonial administrative objective,” but rather by cultural and literary interests (Rice 236).∞

It might be worth noticing, however, that such a divide has been scarcely noticeable in southern European receptions of Said, where Orientalism has instead most often been received with the highest degree of enthusiasm. Jane Schneider, editing a volume entitled Italy’s “Southern Question”: Orientalism in One Country in 1995, was quick, for instance, to declare that southern Europe, too, “was certainly affected by Orientalism” (5), and more eager still to adapt Said’s paradigm for the understanding of the southern European context. As if following Gyan Prakash’s suggestion that “it is up to the scholars . . . including Europeanists” to use the theoretical frameworks of postcolonial and subaltern studies (“Subaltern” 1490; see also Prakash, “Writing”), southern Europeanists seem to have found in Said a new lexicon to discuss the old facts of Europe’s internal colonialism. Franco Cassano’s Southern Thinking (Pensiero meridiano), 1996, opened with a clear echo of Said’s notion
of the “objectified” Orient: “Southern thinking means, fundamentally, to give back to the south its ancient dignity as subject of thought; to interrupt a long sequence in which the south has been thought as an object by others” (3). Also Franco Piperno, in Elogio dello spirito pubblico meridionale (1997), denounced the prejudice of southernism (meridionalismo)—its reduction of the south to a “premodern relic of the past” (13)—in a way that was quite reminiscent of Said’s indictment of the Orientalist prejudice that “primitiveness . . . inhered in the Orient, was the Orient” (Orientalism 231).

Historical reasons to see similarities between Said’s Orient and the European south are certainly not lacking. In chapter 2 of the present book, I have noticed the way in which nineteenth-century ethnographies of the European south (Lombroso, Niceforo, etc.) had been historically inspired by, if not directly modeled on, previous notions of what constituted the Orient. The Italian poet Giuseppe Goffredo has discussed a more recent Orientalism of the south, at work still in the European Union’s policies of the “two Europes” (two-lane, two-speed, and all variations thereof): “The Orientalists represent the South as an estranged fetish, crystallized in a chronic backwardness, arrested in a ruined present” (66). This has not necessarily been a European attempt at colonizing postcolonial studies, but a more genuine search to frame theoretically an old southern feeling (which precedes the development of postcolonial and subaltern studies), historically expressed from both the Left and Right of the political spectrum (Alianello; Galasso). It is this feeling that has made southern scholars seek in Said’s Orientalism a way to express and codify some of their own anxieties.

Admiration and usability, however, should not prevent us from understanding why a bunch of southern Orientalists who want “to separate themselves from their predecessors of the north” and who refuse to “align themselves with the European Arabists of the north” have started to sound frankly aggravated at that book, “in which both British and French cultural hegemony are affirmed in their relation to the Orient,” and in which all other Orientalisms are so cavalierly dismissed and “denied [their] rightful place” (Jubran 8). Let us refresh our memory with the beginning of Said’s book:

The French and British—less so the Germans, Russians, Spanish, Portuguese, Italians, and Swiss—have had a long tradition of what I shall be calling Orientalism . . . . The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is
also the place of Europe’s greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of this Orient is merely imagina-
tive. The Orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles. (1)

The fact remains that, despite having a shorter tradition, these other Orientalisms may have been just as important as the British and French ones to “help . . . define Europe (or the West).” They should, then, be important to me, at least, in the writing of a book called Europe (in Theory). This does not mean that politics and knowledge live on different grounds, but simply that other Orientalist traditions can give us a less reified version of such a relationship. Is it too simplistic to suppose that there may be a “bad” Orientalism (in the service of colonial exploi-
tation) and a “good” one that does not legitimate the structures of European domination, and dismantles instead its theoretical system? In addition, some of the minor Orientalist traditions that Said brackets away did live an Oriental identity that was all but “merely imaginary”: the Russians were the Orient of Europe, and may still be; the Spaniards fought against their Oriental self in 1492 to become Europeans; and southern Italians, as I will discuss below, lived an Oriental experience that in some sort of reevaluation of all values, was itself a system of domination and exploitation (sometimes enriching, sometimes merely brutal) from the east.

This chapter thus begins with a hypothesis and a paraphrase, both from Walter Mignolo’s Local Histories/Global Designs. The hypothesis is that, after all, “I am where I think” (both geographically and his-
torically speaking); the paraphrase, hence, is a question: How can you be a southern European Orientalist without twisting the very concept of Orientalism?

In truth, much more than Orientalism may be twisted in this southern operation: the very theory of Europe as antithesis to the east (discussed in chapters 1 and 2) and a theory of historiography that, according to Gyan Prakash, “projected [Europe] as History” (“Subaltern” 1475), may
come out irremediably perverted. This is not to suggest that an Orientalism from the south necessarily constitutes the antithesis of Said’s French and British Orientalism—a strategy of liberation, for instance. On the contrary, this intends to be an illustration of a problematic kind of “border gnoseology,” a “critical reflection on knowledge production from . . . the interior borders of the modern/colonial world system” (Mignolo, Local Histories 11). And since the interior border I will discuss here is not Mignolo’s Spain—displaced “from hegemonic position by England”—but Sicily—that had nowhere to be displaced from—it will be important to maintain an internal distinction even between Spanish and Sicilian Orientalisms. If the former was understood as “a branch of national culture” (Américo Castro, qtd. in Jubran 12), Sicilian Orientalism emerged ambiguously in the mid-nineteenth century (Marchianò) as a branch of nationalism, a branch or Europeanism, and as the crisis of both.

The following pages will be devoted to the work of Michele Amari—if not the founder, certainly one of the most influential and interesting figures of Italian Orientalism. Italy had a respectable history of Oriental studies before Amari. Already in imperial Rome, interest for the Orient was alive, and it continued uninterruptedly throughout the Middle Ages. The model for humanistic education in fifteenth-century Rome and Florence required the knowledge not only of Latin and Greek but also of Hebrew, Arabic, Chaldean, and Aramaic. The teaching of Hebrew, Arabic, and Chaldean was institutionalized in Rome in 1481, under the Studium Urbis of Pope Sistus iv. In the sixteenth century, Rome was the European capital for Oriental studies, and other languages such as Coptic and Armenian were taught in the university.

A figure of considerable importance for the knowledge about the Orient he provided to Europe was Leo Africanus. G. J. Toomer writes:

A Spanish Muslim who had migrated to Fez at an early age, and was moderately well educated there, he was captured by Christian corsairs in 1518, and brought to Rome, where he was handed over to Pope Leo X. After a two-year imprisonment, during which he was allowed to use the Arabic manuscripts in the Vatican Library, he was baptized, changing his name from al-Hasan b. Muhammad b. Ahmad al-Wazzan to Johannes Leo, in honour of his patron the Pope. After his release he lived in Italy for a while, where he taught Arabic to Cardinal Aegidius of Viterbo, before eventually returning to Morocco and Islam. He wrote a number of
works in and on Arabic, including a grammar. Most of these have not survived, but a version of his “Description of Africa,” which he composed in Italian, was republished many times, in Latin and other languages, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and long remained a principal source for European knowledge of the Islamic world. (21)

The presses of Italy were among the first in Europe to publish in Arabic. The first book printed in Europe with Arabic moveable types was the Book of Hours published in Fano in 1514. In 1538, the complete Koran was published in Venice, a city tied by an age-long commercial relationship to the Orient. In 1584, Giovan Battista Raimondi, a teacher at La Sapienza University in Rome, opened a press devoted to the exclusive study of the Orient, the Stamperia Orientale Medicea.

In the seventeenth century, the Vatican bought the Arabic moveable types of the Orientale Medicea—and scholarly interest in the Orient quickly transformed into missionary zeal. The Sacra Congregatio Propaganda Fide, founded in 1622 with the intent of spreading the Christian faith in the world, became probably the biggest European producer of books in Arabic, “but the types of literature published [by the Congregatio] were very circumscribed, being principally liturgical and homiletic. This was in accordance with the missionary and apologetic goals of those who controlled the presses; rigid supervision and censorship by the ecclesiastic authorities stifled any tendencies to further enquiry” (Toomer 24).

In the eighteenth century, interest in the Orient was not limited to the Arab countries. In 1732, the Collegio de’ Cinesi, or Chinese College, was inaugurated in Naples to become one of the very first centers of sinology in Europe. Italian Orientalism, at any rate, remained focused on the Arab world. In the meantime, however, British and French colonial interests in the east had made such investments in the study of the Orient that no Italian state could ever hope to match. While institutes and departments of Oriental study multiplied in England, France, and (for different reasons) Germany, no Oriental school was instituted in Italy until 1903, when Celestino Schiaparelli (1841–1919), a disciple of Michele Amari, would open the Orientale of Rome. Until then, Hebrew and Arabic were taught merely as languages in the universities, while Coptic, Chaldean, and Aramaic had but disappeared. When Michele Amari was appointed professor of Arabic at the University of Pisa in 1859, his intention was that of reforming completely not only the study of Arabic but
also that of Orientalism. Caught in some kind of Orientalism envy, Amari wanted to promote Italian universities to the rank of European ones: put bluntly, if Paris, London, and Berlin had their Oriental schools, a city in Italy also had to create its own. The kind of Orientalism Amari had in mind, however, was hardly one “informed by a colonial administrative objective.” Orientalism was not, for Amari, the study of a far-away object to be known, colonized, exploited, and administered. It was, rather, the study of his own history and a reflection on the place that his native Sicily, the most marginal and southern province, occupied in Italy and in Europe itself.

The General Law of Europe: Vienna, 1815

In the first half of the nineteenth century, Sicily was technically a Spanish colony. Practically, it was a European one. After the storm of the revolution and of the Napoleonic wars, the Congress of Vienna had opened, in 1814, with the stated objective of “restoring the general law of Europe” (Charles Maurice de Talleyrand, qtd. in Duroselle 313). The territories that had been “unlawfully” occupied by Napoléon were now to be returned to their legitimate sovereignties. These had to be found largely among the four main allies responsible for the defeat of Napoléon: Britain, Russia, Austria, and Prussia. Or better: it is not that legitimate sovereignties had to be found in Britain, Russia, Austria, and Prussia as nations. If one thing was clear to the participants in the congress, it was the necessity to declare the age of nationalism over. Careless of the protests of the nascent “German Nation” (Fichte), utterly uninterested in the “ardent[ly] love[d] fatherland” of the Poles (Rousseau, “Government” 31), and certainly impatient with Italian calls for national unification, the participants in the congress, in a “spirit of cheerful cynicism” (Davies 582), divided, shared, and exchanged among themselves the lands that the spirit of nationalism had conceived as one.

The logic of Vienna was simple: sovereignties, neither national nor popular, were legitimate sovereignties of the monarchic families that had ruled Europe for centuries before. In short, this is what happened: small kingdoms and principalities were preserved within their confines; the part of central Europe that once constituted the core of Charlemagne’s empire was divided and organized into a German confederation of thirty-nine states, of which four were free cities, and the rest belonged
to one or the other monarchic families of Europe; King Frederick William III of Prussia expanded his territories to Saxony, Westphalia, the Rhine, and a small partition of Poland; George I of the German House of Hanover, the ruler of England and Ireland, obsessed now with overseas colonies, was content with just the small islands of Malta and Helgoland (and with the promise that no one would interfere in his affairs in Ceylon, Cape Colony, and the West Indies); the Hapsburgs, the hosts of the Congress, got their share of Poland (the lot of it went to the Russian czar Alexander I) and most of northeastern Italy, which was divided among various branches of the family; the House of Bourbons, after Louis XVI had been guillotined, was sat back in France (Louis XVIII) and Spain (Ferdinand VII), and confirmed, with greatest consequences for both history and this chapter, as the ruler of both southern Italy and the island of Sicily.

Starting from Fürst Metternich’s assumption that “Italian affairs do not exist,” and from Count Angeberg’s assurance that Italy was but “a combination of independent states, linked together by the same geographical expression,” the congress had been less than charitable to the aspirations of the Italians. Not only had Hapsburgs and Bourbons divided between themselves most of Italy, leaving only Rome to the pope and Piedmont to the House of Savoy; moreover, the Bourbons had decided, trampling on any Sicilian feelings of autonomy, to unite the Kingdom of Naples (southern Italy) and the Kingdom of Sicily into the single Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, with Ferdinand its first king and Naples its capital. For the urban bourgeoisie of Palermo, until then the capital of the Kingdom of Sicily, the annexation of Sicily to Naples sanctioned by Vienna meant not only the loss of an independence that “had a long and jealously guarded tradition of political and administrative autonomy” (Riall 31); it also meant, more pragmatically, the loss of administrative jobs and an outflow of tax revenues. To make things worse for the Bourbons, middle-class resentment only added to the aristocratic one. Eager to keep under check the power of a distrusted aristocracy, the Bourbon reforms of 1815 aimed at creating “a new class of non-noble landowners in the countryside” (Riall 33) through the eradication of feudal and church property, the establishment of communal lands, and the redistribution of the estates. Such reforms had obviously fueled the hostility of the upper classes at a moment in which the loss of Sicilian autonomy prevented the middle classes to be euphoric about land redistribution (Barone, Benigno, and Torrisi 86). Last but
not the least, even the peasants, in part stirred up by the nobility, in part animated by grievances of their own (see Riall 57), were becoming part of the Bourbon problem.

Practical recriminations of Sicily’s various classes were, to say the least, amplified by a general attitude of dismissal and sufficiency that had become politically operative with Vienna (Natoli 252). Already at the congress, Sicilian requests were welcomed with utter indifference: in the words of a Swiss delegate, “One does not seem to be willing to listen to them, although they say that they can neither harm nor help the European equilibrium, and although they promise not to be ambitious” (qtd. in Straus 94). Immediately after Vienna, Sicilians had not been heard when their parliament was dissolved; their opinion had not been asked when their flag was abolished; and the fact that freedom of the press and assembly had been suppressed did not seem to be a concern, according to either Ferdinand or Metternich, for Sicilians themselves (Mack Smith 2:352–53). To paraphrase William Roscoe Thayer: Were Sicilians satisfied? “No. Had they been consulted? No. Did their dissatisfaction matter? No. That generous but deluded knight, Don Quixote, once mistook a flock of sheep for a hostile army; Metternich, the champion of the Old Régime, mistook the human populations of Europe for sheep” (121).

It is not altogether clear whether the Sicilian sheep really turned into an army. But on July 14, 1820, the fourth day of the celebrations of the patron saint Rosalia, a popular insurrection exploded in Palermo at the cry of “Long Live Santa Rosalia! Long live Sicily! Long live freedom!” Governmental offices were burnt down, officers killed, and their heads paraded around the town. The requests, unsurprisingly, were for a constitution like the one of Spain, and for the political autonomy of the Sicilian nation from Naples. Although the revolt failed to move outside of Palermo, Ferdinand’s fear must have been such that he sent a whole division headed by General Florestano Pepe to quench the insurrection; and then a second one, in February 1821, led by Pietro Colletta, who, incidentally, combined his military career with that of a historian.

The insurrection of 1820 was subdued on March 26, 1821: sixty people were tried, and eleven put to death. Only those who had participated in public lynching were executed, the others merely imprisoned. The hatred for Ferdinand of the Bourbons, and for the European order sanctioned by the Congress of Vienna, in the meantime, was growing: as one insurrection was being repressed, a new one was being prepared in Palermo, one that was supposed to take to the streets on January 12, 1822.
It was uncovered before anything happened, and on January 23, its fourteen organizers were arrested, tried, charged, and sentenced to death. The roster of the fourteen nationalists, an example in itself of the interclassist reach of anti-Bourbonism in Sicily after 1815, included priests (Buonaventura Calabrò, Vincenzo Ingrassia, and Giuseppe La Villa), menial workers (Giuseppe Candia, Antonino Pitaggio, Natale Seidita, Michele Teresi), a poet (Giuseppe Lo Verde), members of the middle class (Dr. Pietro Minnelli and the notary Gaetano Di Chiara), and noblemen (Salvatore Martinez, Gioachino Landolina, Gerolamo La Manna, and Michele’s father, Ferdinando Amari). The latter group would have their sentence commuted to life in jail—partly because of their social status, and partly because of some alleged collaboration with the police.

At any rate, not even these arrests could stop the Sicilians’ enmities toward the king, nor their opposition to the new European order sanctioned by Vienna. But in truth, Vienna was not the only obstacle for the Sicilians. Sure enough, Metternich could never allow Sicily—“a people, half barbarous, superstitious without limits, fiery and passionate like the Africans” (qtd. in Aymard and Giarrizzo 684)—to be considered at the same rank as a European state. The major problem, however, was that not even the European revolutionaries were ready to accept any part of Italy, let alone southern Sicily, as a modern European nation.

Ideas of freedom, brotherhood, and equality soon arrived from revolutionary France, and proliferating Masonic lodges had made Jacobinism a presence all over Italy. Yet the aspirations of the Italian Jacobins soon met the skepticism of the European Jacobins themselves. On November 19, 1792, the Republican Convention of revolutionary France had published a declaration granting “fraternity and help” (qtd. in Woolf, “Storia” 153) to any people fighting for liberty. Revolutionary France had been eager to help the patriots of Belgium, Holland, and Renania in their respective struggles for self-determination. It had been even more eager, later in 1822, to help the “descendants of the wise and noble peoples of Hellas, we who are the contemporaries of the enlightened and civilized nations of Europe” (Greek patriots, qtd. in Woolf, “Construction” 91).

French revolutionaries, however, had been more reticent when considering whether to encourage French ideas of freedom and nationality in Italy too. The citoyen François Furcade, in 1790, had recommended “not even to think about making Italy a Republic. Its people is not disposed in the least to receive liberty—nor would it be worthy of it” (qtd. in Venturi, “L’Italia” 1127). In 1796, when the French foreign minis-
ter Charles de Gontant Delacroix asked his agents in Italy about the possibility of encouraging a revolution there, he got back a unanimous answer: the Italians were not mature enough for freedom. One of the agents, François Cacault, wrote: “One should not trust at all the extreme petulance of the vivacious youth of Italy, moved and transported by the ideas borrowed from our revolution, and who want to stir up a new state of things without knowing how, without knowledge . . . . One would need, coming to Italy, men truly mature for liberty. But the evaporated men [l’homme évaporé] of this country are just stupid” (qtd. in Woolf, “Storia” 158–59). The curious metaphor of evaporation was in fact plainly understandable, in this context, for anyone who had Montesquieu under his belt: how could one expect men from the heated south to be mature enough for freedom? So when Napoléon came to liberate Italy in the spring of 1796, liberation was achieved through military conquest and military control over the territory. “We have given you liberty,” proclaimed publicly Napoléon (qtd. in Woolf, “Storia” 162). Privately, however, he concurred with the judgment of his council: “All information we have gathered about the spirit of the Italians, announces that they are not mature for freedom” (qtd. in Woolf, “Storia” 178).

If maturity was lacking in Italy, it was certainly nonexistent in its southernmost part, which, by the time Ferdinando Amari was arrested, had been labeled by Hegel’s philosophy as the “immature” part of world history (see chapter 4). Between 1794 and 1795, the dispatches of the French diplomats in Italy continuously remarked on how much worse southern Italy was than the north: “Its people are more corrupted . . . and more prone to crime”; the south is a “very vicious country”; in short, it is no material for freedom and revolutions. Sure enough, as Jaucourt had written under “Sicile” in the Encyclopédie, “all the revolutions that Sicily has suffered make the history and the description of this island interesting” (Diderot 15:165). But the word revolutions, in the Encyclopédie’s pre-1789 contest, merely meant, as it is clear from Jaucourt’s short history of the island, nothing more than a continuous change of dynastic successions (on the vague use of the term before 1789, see Goulemot, Masseau, and Tatin-Gourier 185–86). At any rate, even those revolutions were history now: “Sicily has nothing of interest today, except its mountains and the tribunal of the Inquisition” (Diderot 15:165). Or, as Alexis de Tocqueville put it in a less known work on revolutions and democracy, “You [Bourbons] have bastardized her [Sicily’s] heart, replacing her desire of fame with courtly ambition, her
desire for merit and courage with the power of favoritism” (Voyage 158). Sicily, “denatured by oppression, [its national character] crushed,” is no place for a revolution; it is no nation either (59). Whether because of its southern climate or because of its history of oppression, Sicily hardly qualified as a revolutionary subject in 1820. As the northern Italian Francesco Trinchera observed: “It does not take much intelligence or insight to understand that a people that is so profoundly degraded . . . cannot think seriously about freedom, cannot understand it, want it, die for it” (qtd. in Moe 145). The Milanese Gian Rinaldo Carli, a collaborator of Il caffè, reiterated the point by going back to the origin of the dichotomy in Della disuguaglianza fisica, morale e civile fra gli uomini: “As Montesquieu has judiciously remarked, northern men are more courageous than southern men” (qtd. in Berselli Ambri 175).

No understanding of freedom, no understanding of nation either. Was not a nation, after all, the by-product of a people’s revolution—like that of 1789—that had broken with the past of monarchical inheritances and restituted the state to the free sovereignty of the citizenship? Had Sicily ever had such a revolution? Were not sectarian interests—such as, for example, the split between Palermo and Messina in 1820—the symptom of the Sicilian inability to agree on a specific political project for a revolution (on this issue, see Aymard and Giarrizzo 675–83)? The Sicilian historian Francesco Renda, almost apologetically, recounts the ways in which the avowal of a Sicilian nation was reiterated “as a peculiar way for the island to participate in the profound movements of renovation and freedom, common at the time in a great part of Europe” (Storia 31). Nicolò Palmeri, writing about the Sicilian vesper in the Saggio storico-politico sulla costituzione del Regno di Sicilia (1817), had mentioned a “nation recomposing itself” already at the time of the Angevins; Giovanni Evangelista Di Blasi, in 1821, had presented his Chronological Storia of the Viceroy of Sicily as a tribute of “love for the country and the nation”; and Rosario Gregorio, in the Introduction to the Study of Sicilian Public Law, published five years after the French Revolution, had reiterated the existence—since the time of the Normans!—of a Sicilian nation (qtd. in Renda, Storia 27–28). So much insistence was meant to respond to the accusations, for instance, of the anonymous French pamphleteer of 1804 quoted by Benedetto Croce, who found that people in the south “do not have a national character, and possess instead qualities diametrically opposed to it.” It was to counteract the idea that, in the south, “the concept of nation, in general, has no political consistency” (Giuseppe
Maria Galanti, qtd. in Croce, *Storia del regno* 278–79). Yet insistence notwithstanding, the commonplace was well set: Sicilians, stolid in their heated climate, were unable to prepare a modern revolution. Ergo, Sicily and nationhood remained oxymoronic terms in the thesaurus of revolutionary Europe.

So while father Ferdinando languished in the royal jails of Palermo for having taken part in a nationalist revolution that few Europeans were ready to accept as a national one (or, for that matter, as a revolution), the son Michele, at age twenty-six, was working hard trying to solve the problem that had obsessed him since the night of the arrest: how to promote an undeniably Sicilian revolution—without, of course, ending up in jail.³ The solution adopted was, so to speak, a generational one: with the increased police control brought about by the repression, the Sicilian revolutionary youth could only opt for either the underground or for the “participation in literary circles that were, apparently, not immediately political” (Banti, *Nazione* 27). The second alternative had the unquestionable advantage of being less risky; perhaps more important, it was also capable of imagining, even for people who had not read Benedict Anderson, the symbolic elements necessary for the different communities of, say, Messina and Palermo to feel part of one nation. The tactic had already started having impressive results on the peninsula: Ugo Foscolo, just writing novels (*Jacopo Ortis* is from 1798) had done more to inspire the patriotism of the likes of Giuseppe Mazzini than any Bourbon abuse (Banti, *Nazione* 38). Not to speak of Vittorio Alfieri, whose fiery *Rime* of 1789 made for compulsory reading for the cadres of the Italian resistance.

Also in Sicily, the questions of Sicilian patriotism and independence had to become, at least for a while, less a matter of throwing stones at the police than of singing Sicilian patriotism with epic tones. Lionardo Vigo had written, for instance, about Sicily’s preeminence in southern European history (*Atlantide*, unpublished), and, more poignantly, about Sicily’s love for freedom and independence (*Ruggero*, 1822). Following the same route, young Michele Amari thus determined he would serve history, to use his expression, by becoming a “hero of ideas,” and not, like the unfortunate father, one of deeds.⁴ Put bluntly, in 1832 Michele Amari had decided to bequeath to the written word the responsibility to deliver revolutions—a less hazardous way of doing politics in Sicily, indeed, and a respectable compromise between revolutionary hubris and instincts of self-preservation.⁵ A translation in Manzonian decasyllabic blank verse
(!) of Walter Scott’s *Marmion* was Amari’s Trojan horse, a Maussian gift surreptitiously published in the citadel guarded by the unsuspecting Bourbon censorship.⁶ From the outside, *Marmion* was the usual great-literature stuff—bouncy couplets, profundity galore, and the loftiness of so-called universal experience: “And come he slow, or come he fast / It is but death who comes at last.” But inside this hollow belly, the true and insidiously revolutionary meaning resided, ready “’T’ invade the town, oppress’d with sleep and wine” (Virgil 2:347): not only was Walter Scott the token of a new liberalism that reconciled Voltaire and Rousseau to David Hume, William Robertson, and Lord Byron (Amari, *Appunti* 16).⁷ Moreover, the Scottish patriot and bard had written *Marmion* in 1797, while organizing a resistance against the French . . . . Get it? The problem is that actually no one, with the possible exception of the biographer in search for the usual early signs of a committed youth (for example, Bonfigli), ever got it.⁸ The Sicilian cultural jet set, including the Bourbon one, even accorded Amari a respectable position in society (Amari, *Appunti* sheet 21). In spite of all this success, it did not want to be a book for “that cancer of the barons” (quel canchero dei baroni), for the “aristocratic scum” (canaglia aristocratica), and not even for “middle class libertines, who wanted bigger reforms and were swindled or swindlers by the word freedom” (i libertini del ceto medio i quali aspiravano ad una maggiore riforma ed erano ingannati o ingannatori col nome di libertà). *Marmion*’s ideal reader, at least in Amari’s hopes, had to be the popular masses, the people, the revolutionary “third estate” (terzo stato; Amari and Palmeri xxix) that Augustin Thierry, by then sick and blind, would only later theorize in the *Essai sur l’histoire de la formation et des progrès du tiers état* (1853). This people was a more secular entity than the multitudes of Mazzini, always driven by God’s Providence; and most certainly it was not the Francophile middle class that François Pierre Guillaume Guizot, in his courses at the Sorbonne, was theorizing in those years as “the spark of European civilization” (qtd. in Verga 39). The antithesis of a bourgeoisie “with a big belly, rosy-cheeked, with champagne and pâté de foie gras in their hands, and a constant fear of socialism” (Amari and Palmeri 18), Amari’s people was the Romantic idea of a potentially revolutionary subject that alone could construct the nation still to be realized (Peri 39–42). The problem, and a serious one at that, was that this third estate did not have the foggiest idea of what, politically speaking, *Marmion* was supposed to mean. Untrained in the art of allegorical reading, it could scarcely imagine that, mutatis mutandis, Scott’s
French stood for the Bourbon colonists and Scotland’s freedom was to mean Sicily’s. In other words, Marmion was no popular success.

It was not a political success either. For that, a more explicit subject was needed. Amari’s friend Salvatore Vigo, with arguable wisdom, “advised me to drop poetry and all the Marmions of the world” (Amari, Il mio sheet 28), and pushed Amari, instead, in the direction of political pamphleteering and political historiography. So Amari tried with some scholarly Observations against the Neapolitan historiographer Giuseppe del Re (1833)—they only “gave him some trouble, also from some liberal circles” (Tommasini 288); with a history of the 1820 revolution—obviously too risky and aborted (Peri 31–32); with the Sicilian Political Catechism (1839)—all too explicit about independence, published underground, anonymously, and a big distribution hassle. In sum, Amari was starting to realize that he had to find the very delicate balance between getting to the people and avoiding censorship at the same time—or, as he once put it, to hail revolution without getting caught (“gridare la rivoluzione senza che il vietasse la censura”; Amari, Guerra 1:xxvi).

With this end in mind, he was left with, roughly, one possible topic, and two options on how to deal with it. The topic—of this, at least, Amari was certain—could no longer be allegorical. If Amari wanted to speak to, or simply move to action, a potentially revolutionary Sicilian third estate, he could not talk about Scotland and Celtic lore. The topic had to be a Sicilian one. The so-called Sicilian Vesper of the twelfth century was a famous-enough Sicilian revolution, so that deciding to write about it must have proven a relatively easy choice. The story was already a best-selling topic, avidly consumed by both Italian revolutionaries and Sicilian autonomists:

[Fausto] Niccolini wrote about it in 1831, in Giovanni di Procida . . . but already in 1822 Francesco Hayez had represented the scene of the rebellion in a painting commissioned by the Marquise Visconti d’Aragona, second wife of the Marquis Alessandro Visconti d’Aragona, who was investigated for the Milanese plot of 1821 . . . . The painting had been replicated in 1835 by Hayez for a commission of Francesco Arese, who had just been liberated from the Spielberg jails after a sentence for his participation in the insurrection of 1821; the painting was then replicated once more in 1844–46. (Banti, Nazione 84)

Once the topic was chosen, what remained now to decide was how to write about it. Given the advice “to drop poetry,” only two options were
left to Amari: “The form of the historical novel was the one he chose at the beginning. Francesco Domenico Guerrazzi had used it to write his relevant *Una grande epoca della storia italiana*, which celebrated the resistance of Florence against the invader. Guerrazzi had said: ‘I wrote this book because I could not fight!’ Amari, similarly, wanted to write a book that could amount to a battle” (Tommasini 289–90). Brandishing historical novels had other illustrious precedents: the usual Scott, but also Alexandre Dumas, the hero of the Parisian revolution of 1830, who had recently come to Sicily to cure himself from some disease or another, look for action, and bring the message of revolutionary Giuseppe Mazzini’s Young Italy to the island (Bonfigli 4–5). It had also the advantage of being a popular-enough genre to read: it converted historical reality, as Georg Lukács famously said, into “mass experience” (23). It was pedagogically useful for the education of the masses.

The second and last option was to write a straightforward history book. The advantage would have been its closer adherence to facts. A “greater quantity of historical circumstances” (Manzoni 2:1737), in other words, could render the pedagogical message of the book, rhetorically at least, more credible. Leopold von Ranke was already discrediting the novel’s “fantastical reconstructions” to the point that writing novels always ran the risk of making one’s work less relevant in political terms. That is why in revolutionary Italy, fostered by ideals of national independence, there was a clear tendency “to professionalize history, historiography, and historians” (Verga 48–50)—to sell the words and messages written in a history book as hard, undeniable facts; and, possibly, as examples for the future. History was thus being subdivided in the Italian academy into various hyperprofessionalized and hyperspecialized fields. The number of specialized journals was multiplying accordingly. The institution of the *deputazioni di storia patria* (the first in Turin in 1833), which were ministerial think tanks devoted to collecting national documents and to publishing for the glory of the country, was making abundantly clear the impressive strength of historiography in concocting national myths—no matter if the nation in question was Piedmont, Italy, or Sicily. It is not that the belles lettres, and the historical novel in particular, were being completely dethroned: Massimo d’Azeglio, for instance, a rather institutional figure in the future Piedmontese parliament and already a promoter of Italian unification, kept publishing best-selling and outright patriotic historical novels still in 1833 (*Ettore Fieramosca*) and 1841 (*Niccolò de’ Lapi*). Also Francesco Domenico
Guerrazzi and Silvio Pellico—to name only people from what has been called the canon of Italy’s insurrectional youth (Banti, *Nazione* 45)—were staying the course of the historical novel. Yet the epochal trust in the superior relevance of history seemed to have made the decision for Amari: “It is well known that the author of the *Vesper* pondered seriously whether to write a novel or a researched history. The second option was chosen in the end: although Amari held in high regard works of imagination, he considered history now as the knowledge of the people’s consciousness to be achieved through the research of a collective memory” (Marcolongo 8). In short, Michele Amari found himself a historian.

The Europeanization of Sicilian History

> Europe invented historians and then made good use of them.  
> —FERNAND BRAUDEL, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th–18th Century*

> The greatest of Italian historians is Amari.  
> —HENRY FURST, “A Controversy on Italian History”

> But history was not his purpose.  
> —ILLUMINATO PERI, *Michele Amari*

As he began his new book, Amari then made his intention quite explicit: he wanted “to make history, not novels” (*Guerra* 1:xix). This did not mean that the temptation of the historical novel had completely disappeared. After all, as Alessandro Manzoni had written in a letter to Monsieur Chauvet, historiography had the despicable tendency of erasing the point of view of the vanquished ones, and of registering only the actions, not even the thoughts, of those who have won: “All that is sacred and profound in defeat [*sventura*]” escapes historiography (qtd. in Raimondi 107). Accordingly, it was not certain that history, *magister vitae* for some, could be the best teacher in downtrodden, subaltern, and ultimately colonized Sicily: the Manzonian thoughts, hopes, and the disillusionment of the Sicilian people had to be reconstructed, whether archival evidence was enough or not.

Literary and narrative in its style and concern, the history that Amari published in Palermo in 1842, initially titled *Un periodo delle storie siciliane del tredicesimo secolo* (*A Period of the Sicilian Histories of the Thirteenth Century*), was arguably a hybrid narrative attempt, still under the
shadow of *Waverley* and *Queen Margot*, to translate revolutions into a popularly accessible mass experience: “I have, then, decided, being Sicilian, to narrate the change of domination that happened in my island at the end of the thirteenth century, in the face of an excess of tyranny that very rarely one has seen the like” (Amari, *Guerra* 1:2). In narrating his *storia*, in presenting himself as a character with thoughts, hopes, and disillusionments, Amari constantly supplemented the archive with flights of rhetorical fantasy—as in the reconstruction, for example, of the climactic scene:

> On the eve of Easter, the streets of the capital [Palermo] were covered in mirth; the porticos, the temples, the palaces adorned with different designs of gold drapes and silks; the lamps spread the light of day on all quarters; in the cathedral, where the vespers was being celebrated, the dazzle of endless candle, as big, writes Speciale, as columns, was blinding; the noise of trumpets, horns, and drums, symbols of the war that deafens peace, was won by the harmony of more delicate instruments and by the cheerful songs of the people. They were to spend the entire night in such amusements. At the break of the day, which was the twenty-fifth of March, Fredrick was anointed and crowned king of Sicily. (2:288–89)

Amari’s story, which closed on March 25, 1296, with the coronation of Fredrick III of the house of Aragon, had begun at the hour of the vespers on March 30, 1282. At that highly symbolic time when the sun sets, sparked by the offense of an Angevin soldier who had begun a legendary body search ending in the breasts of an abundantly virginal and most beautiful woman (1:194), a popular insurrection broke out. It was the end of the tyrannical rule of Charles I of Anjou, who had taken Sicily away from the Hohenstaufens (who had replaced the Normans, who had conquered the Arabs . . . ) and subjected it to Frankish rule. The above-mentioned notoriety of the episode within insurrectional circles; the pathos of the Italian (or Sicilian) honor trampled on by the foreigner; the epic of the popular revolt—these elements had made the history of the vespers a very attractive topic for the engaged historian. What better subject than this already realized Sicilian revolution to celebrate and salute popular revolts to come! After all, this was an event that had “shaken the whole of Southern Europe” (Amari, *Guerra* 1:5); it had had a much better ending than the 1820 insurrection; and it even illustrated the necessity to take that most serious business of revolutions away from
disorganic intellectuals and give it back to the people, “sole foundation for equality and a free life” (1:6), Romantic Volk giving foundations to the putative Sicilian nation: “Sicily owes to its people, not to its dominant classes, that revolution, which saved her in the xii century from extreme shame and misery” (1:xix–xx).

What better subject than this, indeed! As Amari once reminisced, “One could not find a better subject for my goal: it had five centuries of antiquity to oppose to censorship; yet it illustrated the way to prepare, I believed, a terrible and victorious revolution” (1:xxvii). Moreover, by depicting the Spanish Fredrick III as the liberator of Sicily against French brutality, Amari could well hope the Bourbons would mistake a call to arms against them for the historical praise of their past service to Sicily. In sum, the same rhetorical translatio that in Marmion had substituted the Scots for the Sicilians and the French for the Bourbons, was, in part, still at work here: the evil Angevins of the Vespro were to be read as metaphorical precursors of the Bourbons; but the historical subject of the revolution—the Sicilian people—was here historically coinciding with the real thing. The message was clear: the Sicilian people had a glorious revolutionary past. It was now time to recall it with historical precision, without rhetorical artifice.

As history, Amari’s book was an unprecedented success. Its author must not have regretted the Marmion left behind. Unhindered by tropes or “fantastical reconstructions,” and not dulled by too many flights of belles-lettres, the true meaning of the work came across, this time, loud and clear (Marcolongo 70; Giuffrida xvi; Tommasini 298): popular revolution was the only way to Sicilian freedom.

The Bourbon police, unfortunately, soon noticed the clarity of the message, too: “Palermo, October 24, 1842. Dear Don Leonardo [Vigo], my work has been prohibited; the copies of the book have been requisitioned; I have been suspended from my clerical duties and called to Naples to be interrogated; the three censors who had licensed my book have been fired” (Amari, Carteggio 3:11). Amari, who knew well the ways of the police, never went to the “interview” in Naples and fled to Paris instead, where he rented at 48, rue de Luxembourg. There he was canonized—the first Sicilian, perhaps, to make it big in Paris—with the French translation of his book. With the translation, the title changed into La guerre des vêpres de Sicile (The War of the Sicilian Vesper), and the sense widened considerably to become a manual not for Sicilian insurrections only, but for Italian and even European ones.
The first revolution the book meant to prepare was, obviously, the one against the Bourbons—and a manual to prepare terrible and victorious revolutions the Vespro certainly was. It taught lots of very useful things—such as how to organize an informal army for a war of maneuver; ways to isolate the enemy militarily and politically; the art of strategic alliances with foreign powers; and the bitter necessity, too, of violence and death (Amari, Guerra 1:219). Above all, however, and from the very first words (echoes of Machiavelli), the book was a celebration of the people’s power: “The reputation of strength, through which the sovereign controls the State, is a very delicate balance; it therefore happens that, at the very moment in which control of public life seems to be lost, power is restored, either by the virtue of the prince, or by the impetus of the people. Then, great events will shine: injurious foreign ties will be broken, corrupt political orders will crumble, and the State will strengthen itself through healthy reforms” (1:1). The power and strength of the constituted order, in other words, is all “reputation,” in the eyes of the beholder: the people can break that balance. And, with an echo of the discussions on natural law that had fired the eighteenth century (Hof), sometimes the people ought to break it through revolutions, for example, when sovereigns failed to operate “healthy reforms” and break the social contract with their subjects.

The central role of a revolutionary people in the events of the vesper seemed to be, in fact, the very point of Amari’s book. Until now, Amari suggested, historiography of the vesper had confined itself within a simple plot:

John of Procida, for love of country and personal revenge, decides to take Sicily away from Charles of Anjou; he offers it to Peter, king of Aragon . . . ; conspires with Peter, with the pope, with the emperor of Constantinople, with the Sicilian barons. When all is ready, the conspirators give a sign; kill the French; raise Peter to the Sicilian throne. This has been, more or less, the history of the Sicilian Vesper. In truth, some modern historians, mostly from the other side of the Alps, have doubted such a vast, secret, and successful conspiracy; but this theory of the Vesper has always been the prevalent one, and the majority of the historians, especially the Sicilian ones, have repeated it over and over again; and history has built on the conspiracy. (Guerra 1:xix)

Refuting the theory of Sicilian historians, and building instead on the skepticism of a few historians “from the other side of the Alps,” Amari’s
book then rewrote the old story by making courtly conjurors and “individual protagonists shrink, and the people grow bigger” (1:xxx). 14

It may be easy to understand why historians, “especially Sicilian ones,” may have insisted on the theory of the vespers as a war of dynastic succession. After all, these were intellectuals coming from, and writing on behalf of, the baronial classes of Sicily (Casarrubea). They had no sympathy, obviously, for insurrections beyond their class’s control. A more European perspective was thus needed by Amari to rinse Sicilian history from its baronial legacies. Yet as Denis Mack Smith suggests, “Some people [other than Sicilian historians] had an interest in maintaining that John of Procida and Aragon had been the chief actors all along: the Angevins needed to ascribe their defeat to more than a civilian mob, and it suited the Aragonese to take credit for everything” (1:73). European historians, in other words, were still looking at the vespers not as a revolution, but as a war of dynastic succession. For Amari, instead, the fact that the betrayed vespers ended with a dynastic succession, and yet another colonization of Sicily, did not mean, post hoc, ergo propter hoc, that dynastic succession was the motive of the revolution: “The revolution was born from the people, and popular was its beginning; as soon as the aristocracy infiltrated it, the old laws of monarchical restoration came back” (Guerra 2:479–80).

What seems at stake here is not only the political question of whether a “civilian mob” can become the “people” and subject of its own destiny but also the geopolitical question of whether the Sicilian mob in particular could ever conceive of the idea of freedom or concoct a revolution. 15 Could it be casual, for instance, that the hero of historians, “John [of Procida,] was an Italian from the mainland” (Mack Smith 1:71), and not a Sicilian? There can be little doubt that Michele Amari, in the reevaluation of his people, was yielding to a certain provincial pietas. Yet it is my impression that he was also doing a little more than that. To start illustrating this “little more,” I will begin from the end of the Vespro. In its concluding chapter—the one supposed to “show my political and philosophical beliefs” (Amari, Guerra 1:ix)—Amari implied that this Sicilian event of the thirteenth century may have not only anticipated the “storm of the French Revolution” but that it should have—though it did not—helped Sicilians to “correct” (correggere) that storm when it came to Italy (2:490). In what sense could the experience of the vespers, retold by Amari, correct the French Revolution? Amari’s very insistence on the people, and his lack of squeamishness vis-à-vis revolutionary violence
certainly do not authorize an interpretation of this correction in anti-Jacobean and conservative function (see Bollati 62–70; Marcolongo 8).

It seems to me that what Amari was doing when elevating an episode of Sicilian history to the status of national revolution, and, even, as an “example for Scotland, the Flanders, and Switzerland” (Guerra 2:484), was not so much writing a history of a revolution or a theory of revolutions in general. Rather, he was operating a true revolution—a correction indeed—of theory. I am referring, of course, to that theory of Europe that we have been trying to follow since chapter 1 of the present book. According to such theory, freedom is the genius of Europe: “In Europe, the natural divisions [between states] forms, year after year and in the perpetuity of the centuries, a spirit of Freedom. On the contrary, a spirit of servitude reigns in Asia, and never quits that region” (Montesquieu, Oeuvres 2:24).16 If freedom is the ultimate goal of universal history, imagined, for instance, by Immanuel Kant as the teleological approaching of “a perfectly just civic constitution” (Our History 16), then Europe is also the very subject of universal history.

Montesquieu’s theory of freedom, as we have already seen, coincides with a theory of Europe. But Europe, in this theory, is a difference between a positive north, “free and independent” (Montesquieu, Oeuvres 2:793), and a negative south incapable of the “daring action” that fosters revolutions and engenders freedom (2:475). Freedom, in this sense, remains the spiritual endowment of Europe’s north—a north, that is, with Paris at its center. As the Italian revolutionary Giuseppe Mazzini, once noticed: “Today we judge freedom, equality, and association on the sense given to these words in France. At the origin of such prejudice is the idea, which we believe is false despite its almost universal hold, that France is the mover of the European continent” (Opere 2:550–51).

Montesquieu’s theory of a Europe moved by French freedom is not subverted, but only supplemented, by the myth of the French Revolution as the epiphany of progressive freedom—the latter being, as François Cacault wrote, one of those “ideas borrowed from our revolution,” and that no alleged other revolution could have envisioned before. Bertrand Barrière made it clear: France was the origin of European freedoms, and French language “that which first consecrated the rights of man and citizen, the language whose task is now to transmit to the world the most sublime thoughts of freedom” (qtd. in Hazard, Révolution 121). Cacault’s and Barrière’s is the theory, as James Blaut calls it, of “diffusionism”: events (modernity, revolution, liberation, etc.) like history originate in
Europe, and are then “diffused” from there as from the center. What we may add to Blaut, is that Eurocentric theory is supplemented by yet another internal center, an ideal north, where all originates and from where all is diffused. Sicily, in this supplementary theory of Europe, is margin and periphery.

It is according to this theory, arguably, that a contemporary historian of the stature of Denis Mack Smith, like the historians against whom Amari revolted in 1842, still needs to deny the vesper as a “political revolt.” Against the very cosmopolitan spirit that animated the philosophes, the vesper, for Mack Smith, is expression of the “most violent feelings of xenophobia [vis-à-vis the French],” lacking all constructive aims. In the end, Sicilians remain spiritually incapable of Montesquieu’s daring actions: they “submitted without difficulty to the rule from Spain”; and “this proves that the rebellion of 1282 cannot have been against foreign domination as such” (Mack Smith 1:71, 1:75). For Mack Smith, in conclusion, nothing else than chauvinism has “made it possible for a horrible massacre to be magnified [by Amari] into the most glorious event in Sicilian history” (1:72). Not altogether differently, Amari’s interpretation of the vesper as a popular revolution is for Steven Runciman the sign of the chauvinism of the Sicilians, “a proud and not a modest people” (291).

Sure enough, Amari’s gesture can be said to be exaggeratedly chauvinistic, embodying even a sense of the cultural superiority of Sicily (first true revolutionary of Europe) vis-à-vis the rest of the world. But is this sufficient to dismiss the whole of Amari’s gesture, as if the puerility of this intellectual from the margins who evokes his own version of origins were not comparable to the puerility and chauvinism of a hegemonic center resting on the unquestioned certainty of being the origin of all? The fact remains that such a gesture, chauvinistic or not, is quite more radical than Mack Smith and Runciman are willing to acknowledge. Besides claiming a Sicilian origin for revolutionary Europe, it also aspires to contextualize such a revolution, well beyond “Sicilian history,” as a glorious event in universal history—exemplary indeed, beyond Sicily, “for Scotland, the Flanders, and Switzerland.” Antonio Gramsci had already grasped this tension between “local history and universal designs” (to paraphrase Mignolo, Local Histories) as the very kernel of Amari’s sicilianismo. Is Sicily a subject of universal history or is its history, as Croce famously put it, “not ours, or ours only in small part” (qtd. in Gramsci, Risorgimento 169)?

In other words, Amari intends here to claim Sicily as a place in which
freedom originated independently from the French version of it, which equals to say that Sicily is for Amari neither the past nor the immaturity of European history, but rather an integral part of its modernity. Freedom, to begin with, is not immanent to Europe, but rather “suffocated by Europe’s political order” (Amari, Guerra 1:xxiv)—a political order that clearly refers to the Congress of Vienna. Besides denying the French Revolution the status of origin (diffusionism), Amari engages Montesquieu’s Franks, reduced to the evil caricature of the tyrant Charles, in an intertextual game whose stake is the very relocation of freedom. For Amari, reminiscent here of Juan Andrés, freedom did not originate among the Franks, but in Sicily. Not so naive to “forget the imperfections of those ancient parliaments” (Amari, Guerra 1:102), Amari saw in the Sicilian constitution prepared after the vespers exactly what Montesquieu had located up north—balance and separation of powers directly resulting from the division of property:

In the old Sicilian constitution, principality and aristocracy balanced each other; barons did not have unlimited power on people, nor on their livelihoods; peasants were less serfs than elsewhere—no country worker was a serf; bourgeois and city dwellers, also those from feudal lands, felt their freedom, and protected their immunity. Judicial power, depending directly on the prince, did not serve all the wants of feudalist barons. Taxes were acceptable; services were mild; universal levies were very rare; and only parliaments could impose them. (1:67–68)

A division of power had thus been realized in Sicily—thereby making the island a part, if not the origin, of the European sphere of freedom. The constitution, albeit “imperfect” and still relying on the good will of the prince, was “unknown in the continent, while it had existed in Sicily for seven centuries, until the Bourbons stole it from our parents, giving them in exchange Napoleonic despotism minus Napoléon’s power and glory” (1:xxiv).

From quotations such as this, it already becomes clear that the strength of the Vespri is also, however, its major limitation. In creating the image of a constitutional, revolutionary, freedom-seeking Sicily, Amari was clearly trying to counteract the (Montesquieu-like) commonplace of a savage, backward south, which preunification Italy knew well from the pages of Augustine Creuzé de Lesser, who claimed, in 1806, that “Europe ends at Naples and ends there quite badly. Calabria, Sicily, all the rest belongs to Africa” (qtd. in Moe 37). Against such claims, Amari’s inten-
tion was to give Sicily a bond with the rest of Europe (see Peri 37)—both methodologically, by using the methods of documentary historiography, and ideologically, by measuring its degree of civilization on the constitutional standards set by Montesquieu, Voltaire, Edward Gibbon, and Hume. Far from being local history, the story told by the *Vespro* was one of Anjou and Provence, of Aragon and Catalonia, France and Spain, and of popes and emperors from the east and west. This Sicilian story was not only an example for Switzerland, the Flanders or Scotland; it was a paradigmatic tale for a whole Europe that, after a revolution, the Terror, and Napoléon, was still reflecting on the themes of political freedom, despotism, and national and popular self-determination.

Echoes of the European debate on democracy (see Mastellone)—from Alexis de Tocqueville’s *La démocratie en Amérique* (1835–40) to Giuseppe Mazzini’s *Pensieri sulla democrazia in Europa* (1847)—are felt in Amari’s discussion of liberty and freedom. The stress on constitutionalism, far from being incomprehensible outside of Sicily, was common currency in a Europe more and more disillusioned about the prospects of enlightened absolutism and moving already toward forms of liberal representation. The epic of a people erupting into terrible and just violence against tyranny, moreover, breathed the same European air as did Thomas Carlyle’s *French Revolution* (1837) or Jules Michelet’s *La peuple* (1846), which had made of revolution the best-selling topic of the age. Even the question of a putative Sicilian nation was very much in line with a general European feeling, moving beyond Voltaire’s cosmopolitanism into an era of “imagined communities” (B. Anderson). This was a story, in other words, focused on Sicily—but about and for Europe. Benedetto Croce, for one, understood it very well: the *Vespro*, he wrote, was “the first [Sicilian] work that, at the time, seemed worthy to be placed near foreign ones” (*Storia della storiografia* 228).

And placed near foreign ones it was—in the French Librairie Européenne: the flair of the revolutionary who had defied censorship first, and later the panache of the exile, had given Amari a European notoriety that no other Sicilian writer had ever enjoyed before. Amari, in sum, made it to Europe. The problem, however, was that Amari and his Sicily were joining the European table as the parvenu, the Giovannino-come-lately at an already busy banquet. Or, to put it more earnestly, Sicily was entering universal history, but only because it was said to have reached some standards of freedom and civility that were set, judged, and measured, as Mazzini had noticed, “on the sense given to these words in
France.” I am not thinking so much of Gyan Prakash’s “foundational” traps here—that Amari, namely, failed to “displace the categories framed in and by [European dominant] history” (“Writing” 399) and legitimated them instead. I am talking of the much simpler desire of the wannabe—to imitate and please, and shun difference from a putative standard as the worst of shames.21 As his friend Salvatore Vigo once wrote to Amari, “foolish is that nation that, in Europe, does not take part of Europe’s modes and orders” (qtd. in Amari, Carteggio 3:65). And, lest Amari’s Sicilian nation would be taken for foolish, the writer of the Vespro had made it part of such European modes and orders. Sicily was part of Europe because it was proved to be a national Volk like Herder’s Germany; because it had a revolution not altogether different than the French one; because it had now a history of its civilization (Amari’s) comparable to Voltaire’s Age de Louis xiv; and, last but not the least, because its political order had been as good as the much celebrated English model theorized by John Locke’s Two Treatises of Government (1690) and hypostatized as exemplary (suggests Hof 195) by Enlightenment Europe: “Both the English and the Sicilian constitutions had a common origin [i.e., balance of power], and the Sicilian was reformed on the basis of the English one in 1312” (Amari, Guerra 1:xxiv).

Especially this last point had already been rehearsed by another Sicilian, the legal historian Rosario Gregorio. In Considerazioni sopra la storia di Sicilia dai tempi dei Normanni sino ai presenti (1805), Gregorio had proposed the theory that the Normans, after “freeing” Sicily from the non-European Muslim domination, had established an administrative organization on the model of the system of William the Conqueror of England: Norman Sicily’s system of taxation, the duana de secretis had consisted of two divisions, one supervising accounts and the other collecting taxes and paying expenses. This structure was seen as fundamentally similar to the organization of the exchequer of England, which consisted of the upper and the lower exchequer. Gregorio’s thesis had achieved some authority in Europe, and even in England (see Takayama 61–62). It is thus understandable that Amari, at the epoch of the Vespro, was still willing to stick to it as a way of granting Sicily its passport as a modern European nation. The problem of Gregorio’s thesis as inherited by Amari, however, was that it made the prerequisites for Sicily’s dignity still dependent on a putatively northern wind of freedom. In fact, the whole reevaluation of Sicilian history that operated in the Vespro depended on notions of constitutionalism deriving from northern enlight-
enment: the civility of a people had to be measured on the basis of its historical progress toward freedom, which, in turn, was based on its capacity to generate a revolution. Answering the sort of revolution envy that had haunted Europe after 1789, Amari, like Nicola Palmieri before him, could then propose that “the maturity of France only came one century after the English one, around two centuries after the Dutch, and five centuries after the maturity of the Sicilians” (qtd. in Giarrizzo 356).

Yet it was not *iuxta propria principia* that Sicily had acquired dignity on the European scene, but because it was shown to fit a theory of revolutionary Europe that saw civilization as political maturity, progress toward the liberal freedoms of the rights of “man,” and readiness for a revolution (on the fundamentalism of liberal principles, see Cassano, *Pensiero*). With the Vespro, Amari was thus widening the confines of Europe to include his Sicily, but he was not widening a theory of Europe.

He might have achieved exactly that in his next major historical work, when, against Gregorio, he argued, for instance, that Sicilian constitutionalism, and the *duana de secretis* in particular, had little to do with the exchequer or other forms of European constitutionalism: it derived, instead, also etymologically, from the Arabic administrative organization of Sicily, and specifically from the *diwân at-tahqîq* (Amari, *Storia* 3:324–31). Before Amari could look outside of Europe for new symbols of Sicilian dignity, however, a disillusion with Europe had certainly to occur. In 1848, exiled in Paris in the revolutionary days of the fall of Louis Philippe and the creation of the Second French Republic, Amari had followed with renewed hopes the events of the coeval Sicilian revolution, which had begun on January 12 (King Ferdinand’s birthday). The revolution was not limited, this time, to Palermo, but involved the whole of Sicily, cities and countryside alike. With joy, he had read in the French papers about the provisional government of Palermo, and of the efforts to adopt the Sicilian constitution of 1812. With republican pleasure, he had learned from his friends’ letters that the new government had de-throned King Ferdinand II, and crowned and sworn to the constitution Alberto Amedeo of Savoy. But then, on May 15, 1849, the mood of the news swung like a pendulum: the Sicilian armies had been defeated by Ferdinand’s, France and England had refused to help, Catania and Messina were in rubble, the parliament had been dissolved. And then, on December 2, 1851, the eighteenth Brumaire, the imperial mantle finally fell on the shoulders of Louis Bonaparte, and the epoch of revolutionary France was closed once and for good. It was at this climax of disappoint-
ment that hopes in French models—revolutions, constitutions, and the like—seemed to wane. Amari grew “weary of walking in the boulevards rather than in Montepellegrino; of attending soirées rather than hunts; of drinking tea rather than wine; of speaking French or English, not Italian; and of living in a country from which we expect generous political thoughts, and where we find only the idiocy of the market, or worse” (Carteggio 3:55). At this point, when all over Europe the forces of the restoration came back triumphantly and with a vengeance, Amari needed to look outside of France, and perhaps outside of Europe too, in order to find a feasible model, or perhaps a founding myth, for the hope of a democratic Sicilian nation. In other words, the issue that was to legitimate a Sicilian revolution could no longer be the insistence that Sicily, too, was a European nation; but that Sicily, exactly because Other and not merely European, may have the seed to escape the history of Europe’s present barbarity. In the prophetic words of the Vesper: “While in the rest of Europe the northern brethren had lost the virtues of the barbarians, and preserved their vices only, Sicily, like Spain, lived under the domination of the Arabs, who were at least learned if not civilized” (1:9). What learning did the Arabs leave to Sicily, and to Europe as well, to oppose the ultimate failure of European civilization?

The Other Europe of Michele Amari

And all rulers are the heirs of those who conquered before them.

—WALTER BENJAMIN, “Theses on the Philosophy of History”

The idea to write “of the wandering of Sicilian Arabs, and of other Arabs that navigated the Mediterranean, too” (Amari, Carteggio 3:28) had come to Michele Amari around 1843, while he was living at number 48, rue de Luxembourg (Henry James, living in the same street at number 29, wrote instead of one navigated American in 1875). It would take eleven years for Amari to publish the first book of what he already thought would be his masterpiece, and eighteen more years (no tenure clock ticking, obviously) to issue the last, and fourth, volume in 1872.

Historically, a book about the Arabs of Sicily would have reconstructed pretext and context for the revolution of the Vespro: the Angevins, after all, had been given Sicily by Pope Clement IV (in 1266), who wanted to Christianize an island that still “looked Muslim to all the good Christians
of the West” (Amari, *Storia* 3:731). Politically, a book about the Sicilian Arabs might have worked as the continuation of the *Vespro*’s celebration of the people; it was to suggest, also, a revision of the previous autonomist tendencies. By pointing to, for instance, the Muslims’ disunity—tensions among Arabs, Berbers, and Persians—as the very cause for their decline (3:150), Amari wanted to suggest the need for unity between Sicily and all the rest of Italy.

Much had happened, in the twenty-nine years between the conception of this work and its final conclusion, for Amari to be able to keep the idea of Sicilian autonomy at play. For one, the failed revolution of 1848 must have convinced autonomists that a strategic alliance in the name of Italy’s liberation (from Austria in the north, the pope in the center, and the Bourbons in the south) had become a political necessity. Finished was the viability of fragmented resistances carried out for the sake of some identity politics. On February 20, 1848, when things were still going well for the revolutionaries, and the Bourbon King was ready to grant them a constitution fashioned on the French one of 1830, Giuseppe Mazzini, arguably the most authoritative voice of the Italian revolution, had warned Sicilians of the dangers of autonomy in an open letter to their leaders: “Local individualism,” he wrote, would eventually let “Europe decide for you” (*Opere* 2:372). When a restoration of European powers—the balance of Power—punctually happened, and the Sicilian revolution was crushed once again, it became quite difficult for Amari and the autonomists not to swallow Mazzini’s pill—“you belong to us [Italy]” (voi siete nostri)—and to accept that “only a religion of Unity can give glory, mission, and purpose to Sicily . . . in Europe” (Mazzini, *Opere* 2:370–71).

According to Mary Poppins’s principle that just a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down, Amari had thus gulped Mazzini’s unity down with the sugar of its eventual success, which he remembered in 1872, concluding his magnum opus: “I started this hard toil as a Sicilian yearning freedom for a small State. I conclude it hoping that all Italians will become one bigger and bigger family; hoping they will see in unity and liberty the well-being and honor of all and each one” (*Storia* 3:922). Accepting the process of national unification, and the promotion of Sicily to an Italian province in Mazzini’s Europe, did not mean, however, that Sicily was to accept passively the modality in which such an imagined community was built. A tension between the historical necessity of unity and the will to difference opens up for Amari after 1848 (and
explains, perhaps, the contradictions noticed by Peri). It is perhaps the very abandonment of political autonomism, in fact, that exasperates the need to assert cultural diversity: whereas the Vespro had claimed a European place for Sicily as a modern constitutional nation, the new work was now to insist on the difference that Sicily marked in any preconceived ideas of Europe. The criteria for a composition of Europe could no longer be identity with a set of standards, but the acceptance of difference. Sicily’s culture and history, in other words, had to become part of an amended theory of Europe capable not of assimilating Sicily, but of recognizing it in its difference.

The story that Amari started telling in 1843 was quite straightforward, almost classical in its simplicity: one place (Sicily) and one (Braudelian!) long time spanning from the seventh to the thirteenth century. The action—a kind of national-popular mixture of historical and detective novel framed by the documentary evidence of philological historiography—was that of the Arab conquest of Sicily (year 827); of the establishment of a very rich Muslim civilization on the island (next century); of the decline and fall of the Muslim colonial power by Norman hands (1060–91); and of the survival, maybe flourishing, of Muslim civilization in Sicily still at the court of Fredrick II (1197–1250). The detective-like spin concerned the way in which the annals of history had completely lost the memory of these five centuries of Muslim presence in Europe, five centuries that—as Andrés had already suggested to us, and Amari will never tire to repeat—were in fact fundamental for the creation and establishment of European civilization itself.

The Mystery of the Missing Muslim, à la Eugène Sue or Arthur Conan Doyle, would have made for good sales. But Amari, despite being unemployed, almost destitute, and supported financially by his friends, was certainly not interested in financial success: “Readers will judge if my work stinks of market,” he wrote in the preface to Ibn Zafer’s Political Consolations (Muhammad ibn Abd ix). He found academia, instead, less stinky, and trying to land a job in either Pisa or Florence, he opted for the arguably more bookish title of Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia (History of the Muslims of Sicily). The result, despite a misleadingly academic title, was the greatest Sicilian epic ever.

Amari’s epic, however, did not begin in medias res. Sicily, after all, had been a land of conquest long before the Arabs had arrived there. Amari thus began with the Greeks, good colonists (with some recorded exceptions), who had made the island glorious and magna; and then the
Romans, who had exploited it as if it were their “big estate” (Amari, *Storia* 1:108); after that the “Northern barbarians,” who had finished transforming it into a wasteland with no social institutions, and nothing, alas!, worth mentioning (1:117). The Byzantine Empire had but continued this long litany of abuses, until, a little tongue-in-cheek, redemption had come from high for the battered Sicilians:

If we were to rely on pious local legends, Christianity had early and splendid beginnings in Sicily. Saint Peter, so we are told, quickly sent to Sicily bishops from Antioch in the year 44. And all those bishops, persecuted and persecutors alike, tear down pagan temples, silence oracles, kill dragons; the Bishop Marciano, hiding in the subterranean labyrinths of the capital, builds an altar with the image of the Virgin Mary, and is strangled by the Jews. Mary and Teja face martyrdom in Taormina to defend their chastity; and near their tombs is erected the first monastery for women in the whole Christian world. (1:119)

Despite the anticlericalism he had learned from Father Quattrocchi, a “revolutionary and atheist,” and from his other teachers, “all unbelievers and liberal priests” (Amari, *Il mio terzo esilio* sheets 7–8), Amari was not trying here to dismiss Christianity, but rather to recognize its historical (albeit secular) relevance as the carrier of moral, social, and political aspirations of the people (*Storia* 2:264–65). Besides dragon hunting and virginal ecstasies, Amari meant, Christianity’s original role in Sicily had been that of “fighting the lively strength of principality, aristocracy, and learned classes; all these social groups together, feeling threatened by the new power that was rising in the world, did all they could to combat it” (1:121). Early Sicilian Christianity, in other words, had been a popular mass movement from below—not altogether different than the one of the vesper—rebelling against the barbarity of the powerful, the privileged, and the courtesan intellectual.

With the writing of the *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia*, Amari, at the same time, was trying to go beyond the mere writing of historical events. His attempt was to organize the disparate facts of history into some kind of unitary vision—into a universal or philosophical history, namely, that would avoid, however, the pratfalls of Montesquieu’s theory of progress from an ancient south to a modern north. He had thus started looking at the past from within the intellectual frame of Vico’s philosophy of history, which offered the clear advantage of undoing the teleological line of positivist historicism (which divided the universe and Europe between
backward and modern nations), through “the famous corsi e ricorsi that are Vico’s form of the cyclical pattern of the succession of civilizations” (Berlin 85). As a matter of fact, not only in Vico, but also in Ibn Khaldun—“who widened the scopes of the philosophy of history even more than Giambattista Vico” (Amari, Storia 1:180–81)—Amari had found a cyclical vision (or philosophy) of history that was capable of undermining the foundations of Montesquieu’s linearity of progress. Civilization, for Vico and Ibn Khaldun, was not a teleology that moved from south to north, but rather a cycle that repeated itself in every place, north and south alike.

From Vico and Ibn Khaldun, Amari took the idea of the three stages of every civilization. The first was an age of barbarity (Ibn Khaldun) or “of the Giants” (Vico), in which force ruled and poetry was the form that gave sense to the world: “Common vices are superstition, preying, revenge, and cruelty; everybody possesses quick intelligence, clever words, propensity to eloquence and poetry” (Amari, Storia 1:143). There were, after that, heroic ages (1:145), when chivalrous heroes—Muhammad for Ibn Khaldun, the princes for Vico—instituted the law. Finally came human and democratic ages, in which natural equity naturally reigned in the free commonwealth. After that, the cycle began once again. Invariably, the return of barbarity coincided for Amari with a newly formed ruling class betraying the people. In the Vespro, a revolution “born from the people” had become monarchic restoration (the dynastic succession of the Aragons to the Anjou) “as soon as the aristocracy infiltrated it” (2:479–80). In the case of Christianity, not altogether differently, an initially popular fight against “the lively strength of principality, aristocracy, and learned classes” came to a halt as soon as a new hierarchy—new principality, aristocracy, and learned classes—was formed from within the same once-popular church: “As the Sicilian church grew old, a hierarchy emerged from it. Hence, the ecclesiastical order shaped itself in the image of the empire’s administrative order. And we clearly see, by the beginning of the fifth century, that the bishop from Rome exercises metropolitan power on the island” (Storia 1:123).

Realigned with Byzantium, the church restored social hierarchies; landed property reemerged; Sicily, which had freed itself from its subjection to metropolitan Byzantium through the church, became again a margin of the metropolitan center of Rome; and the old Byzantine estates were shared among the church’s high officers.

Through Vico and Ibn Khaldun, a first tenet of European historiogra-
phy, progress, was thus denied. At any rate, it was in this Christian Sicily, ordered in the image of the empire, hierarchically divided, and preyed on by the new barbarians in papal robes, that the Arabs came to inaugurate a new heroic age that would, slowly but surely, lead up to the *ricorso*, a new cycle of democracy. It would have been “a frightening challenge to Christian Europe” (Mack Smith 1:3). Christian Europe, however, was too busy to notice: “It was busy arguing a very subtle and otiose theological question: if the works of God made man in Jesus Christ were led by two wills—one divine, one human—or by a single will, which Monotelites called ‘teandric,’ meaning divine-and-human-at-the-same-time” (Amari, *Storia* 1:188).

Between Christian distraction and the vagueness of Arab chronicling (1:195), the only thing certain is that the Arabs must have made it to Sicily on a morning, approximately between October 31, 649, and June 17, 653:

At any rate, the extant writings of Pope Martin and the accounts of the Pontifical Book that are not unacceptable by criticism, confirm without doubt the incursion, which must have happened between the end of October, 649, and June 17, 653, or actually between 650 and 652, because the first and last year should be eliminated, since it is not credible that a thousand men would venture on a naval expedition in a season other than the summer. And the year 652 sounds quite convincing. (1:194)

The battle which took place on that morning without a certain date had to be the first in a long series, which, after more or less one century and a half, would finally give Sicily to the Muslims. Their victory would eventually free a “people whose mind suffered between the chains of the monks and those of the emperor, and whose body under the whip of emperor and militaries. In one word, Sicily had become Byzantine in and out; sick with the phthisis of a decaying empire. So, when we look at the poor conditions of this people, we cannot complain about the Muslim conquest, which shook and renewed Sicily a bit” (Amari, *Biblioteca* 349).

The similitude between this Muslim conquest and the history of the vesper is worth noticing. Once again, canonical historiography had read the Muslim invasion of Sicily as the story of a courtly plot (Amari, *Storia* 1:367) aimed at nothing more than a dynastic succession (this time with some more exotic characters). Sicilians, now as always, were incapable of Montesquieu’s freedom and only gave themselves to this or that ruler in
some kind of historical variation of the game of musical chairs. Also Arabs, incidentally, were incapable of real conquests according to the canonical historiography that Amari had consulted: history, after all, was the history of European aristocracy and principalities determining the fate of the world. Once again, Amari refuted these canonical interpretations and proposed one in which popular resentment, not courtly or invisible hands, prepared the conditions for the new Muslim regime to come. What Amari saw in Sicily at the eve of the Arab invasion was a true popular ferment that determined the fall of Byzantium’s rule.

Arab domination, in turn, became a continuous alternation, according to Ibn Khaldun’s and Vico’s cycles, of barbaric rule (Ibrahim ibn Ahmad, 875–901), popular insurrections (the Palermo uprisings of 912, 913, and 1019), and attempts, like Ibn Qurhub’s in 913, “to order Sicily into a legitimate and stable government, with all the liberty that was conceivable for orthodox Muslims” (Amari, Storia 2:175). After that, it is yet more cycles of counterrevolutions (916), barbarity (the sack of Palermo in 917), and joys. The latter climaxed, in the year 351 of the hegira (962 a.d.), in the Great Circumcision staged with due pomp and circumstance in the public square of Palermo: “Starting with the son and brothers of the emir Ahmad, and then on from the nobles to the lower classes, reaching a total of fifteen thousand circumcised boys” (2:295–96).

The Arabs, too, then fall into that pattern of universal history that Amari had drawn from Vico and Ibn Khaldun. The fact would be in itself relevant, but what it actually signals is that history, in this case, no longer coincides with, or is limited to, Europe. In European history, “Islam is confined to the past and qualified as ‘oriental’ which means antihistoricistic, while the West proves through this acquisition its entry into modernity, a lay modernity based on historical becoming” (Scarcia Amoretti 172). In Amari’s Storia, instead, the “Orientals” are agents and subjects of history too. In fact, when compared with the Byzantine-Christian cycle, the Arab one seems definitely more fruitful for the history of Sicily: “As the population grew, and the wars of conquest ceased, learned studies began to grow, and even to put some leaves and fruits. Research was favored also by a more familiar contact with the vanquished population, by a more liberal education and doctrine that the African Muslims had brought, and by the example set by the jurists sent to order the judicial system in Sicily” (2:253). And, ah!, what wonders these Arabs brought to the desolate island that had once been of the pope! Far from being the barbarians depicted by many, and despite
the Montesquieu-like “scorching climate and a dried-out soil” (Amari, *Storia* 1:134) from which they came, Amari’s Arabs land in Sicily as the bearers of civilization. They give Europe, contrary to any theory of European diffusionism, and long before Montesquieu’s celebrated Franks (who, after all, brought only Charles to Sicily), a spirit of the law, the sharia or Islamic law, “of the same kind as the European one of many centuries later” (1:152).

In Ibn Khaldun’s *Muqaddimah* (1377), which translates as *Introduction to History*, Amari had found, first and foremost, a way to correct Montesquieu’s climatology. In the second prefatory discussion to the *Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun, following Aristotle through Averroës and Ptolemy, had divided the known world into seven zones—*iqlîm*, from Greek *klima*, or climate—going from north to south. The Mediterranean, in the fourth and median zone, blessed by a temperate climate, was the very Aristotelian middle between nature and civilization:

The north and the south represent opposite extremes of cold and heat. It necessarily follows that there must be a gradual decrease from the extremes towards the center, which, thus, is moderate. The fourth zone (i.e. the Mediterranean) is the most temperate cultivated region . . . . Therefore, the sciences, the crafts, the buildings, the clothing, the foodstuffs, the fruits, and even the animal that comes into being in the [Mediterranean] are distinguished by their temperate character. The human inhabitants of these zones are more temperate in their bodies, colour, character qualities, and general conditions . . . . They avoid intemperance quite generally in all their conditions. Such are the inhabitants of the Maghrib, of Syria, of the two Iraqs . . . as well as of Spain . . . . The Iraq and Syria are directly in the middle and therefore are the most temperate of all. (Ibn Khaldun 1:167–68)

Although Ibn Khaldun’s geometric sense of the world had omitted to mention another country “in the middle,” Sicily, this was enough for Amari to declare that in the Mediterranean, not in the north, was to be found the true cradle of civilization.

Reminiscent of the southernist polemics that had crossed Italy in the late eighteenth century, and which I have recalled in chapter 2, Amari summons up Juan Andrés’s Arabist theory and adds that a genius of their language (Amari, *Storia* 2:610) made philology and poetry flower among the Arabs (1:147, 2:526). Coming from Asia, Africa, and Al-Andalus, the Muslims gave Sicily, therefore, the honor of developing a new form of
troubadour poetry, rhymed and sung, that would later “infiltrate the whole of Europe” (3:729–31). Amari, in fact, is quite close to believing that all sciences flourished with the Muslims of Sicily in an age when they were getting lost in the rest of medieval Europe. For instance, “as the darkness of barbarism fell, geography became idiotic in Europe, like every other science; it was reduced to shapeless scribbles, to summaries of summaries” (3:683). Idrisi’s Garden of Civilization, with its most compelling descriptions of Sicily, was “the first book worthy of the name ‘general geography’” (1:49) ever published in modern Europe. More important, Ibn Khaldun, “the most ancient writer of the philosophy of history, properly speaking” (1:84), gave Europe that first theory of history.

Amari saw his book on the Muslims of Sicily not simply as local history but as a veritable history of the origin of modern Europe. As he later explained to the German Orientalist Friedrich Arnold Brockhaus, “the age of Muslim Sicily was one of the causes of the rebirth of sciences and letters in the whole of Europe” (Amari, Carteggio 119). In this regard, “the Muslim wars in Sicily from the seventh through the twelfth centuries can be divided into two orders of events: one is the material for a local history, but not the other” (Amari, Storia 1:29). In other words, if the conquest of Sicily was material for local history, the civilization of Muslim Sicily, on the other hand, was material for nothing less than a universal *storia dell’umanità*—a history of humankind (1:178).

Besides giving modern Europe its arts and sciences, its first geography and philosophy of history, Muslim Sicily, as opposed to Montesquieu’s Franks, introduced in the continent a new spirit of the law, the “basis of any civilization” and the very cause of “European civilization” in particular (2:255). The law, in fact, had such devout followers among the Muslims of Sicily that, for instance, “professor Abù Said Luqman ibn Yusuf, martyr of exegesis, is said to have died of a wound he grew on his chest from the corner of the desk where he used to write his commentaries” (2:257). No wonder jurisprudence had in Islam “greater civic and literary influence than in either the heathen or the Christian West” (2:255)!

Besides greater influence, the law had in Islam “wider borders” (2:255) than in Europe, as it covered not only the (national) citizen and the powerful but the foreigner and the weak as well: “A Qurayshi [i.e., someone belonging to one the leading families of Mecca] had taken
away, with no qualms, all the goods of a foreign merchant. Many generous people, among whom Muhammad, still twenty-five years old, gathered and tried to devise ways to protect, in the city of Mecca, the weak, the foreigner, free men and slaves—anybody from anybody else, from whatever family they were” (1:152). It is from this law protecting the weak from the powerful, not from the French Revolution with its rights of man caring for citizens and private property only, that true democracy and freedom, suggests Amari, originated: “It was social democracy, as we would call it today. Its form fit quite well the fundamental principles of Islam: equality and fraternity. It was the realization, rare in the world, of a sovereign people” (1:171).

Amari’s thesis is clear: Sicily has nothing to learn from the northern nations and has known liberté, fraternité, égalité from Islam—long before any other European country. The first problem with such a thesis was, of course, that it ran counter to the historiographic doxa: that the revolution of 1789, namely, “was really the first time that a state, embodying the entity called ‘the nation,’ issuing from a clean political break with the past, produced a novus ordo seculorum: democracy or the government of the people” (Englund 89). Such doxa, for Amari, who might as well have had in mind Walter Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” was but an act of suppression that the victorious Norman chroniclers had perpetrated against the vanquished Muslims: along with a “true and grim religious persecution” of the Arabs (Amari, Storia 3:444–47), Amari wrote, Christian chroniclers had operated another, “concealed and slow” form of persecution (3:541): they had cleansed European history from the Arab presence.

In short, to argue that Sicily did not need the benevolent authority of Europe to know democracy, historiography was, at best, insufficient. At most, it was the obstacle. To remove such obstacle, and recuperate what had been cleansed and concealed by history, Amari thus resolved to supplement “those few studies that Europeans have done so far” about Sicily (3:863) with nothing less than the work of “our . . . Orientalists” (2:17): Orientalism was called on to compensate for the deficiency of historiography; Orientalism, not history, singled out in Islamic law—a mixture of prescriptions from the Koran, pronouncements of the Prophet, and corollaries of the doctors—the very reason for an Arab (as opposed to a European) propensity for liberté, fraternité, égalité. Orientalism, moreover, could be capable of demolishing the whole edifice of a
European philosophy of history—with its prejudices, presumptions, and half truths—in which freedom was theorized as a “climate” frankly and ultimately unattainable for Sicily.

Through Orientalism, finally, those same words—liberty, fraternity, equality, democracy—which had defined modern Europe since at least the French Revolution and which had, in Mazzini’s expression, the “sense given to these words in France”—could acquire a new and original meaning. Relying on the archive of the Oriental writers themselves, the Storia not only erected Muslims Sicily as the origin of those concepts but retheorized them as well. Montesquieu, for instance, had famously made freedom—the pillar of Europe’s identity—coincide with the “individual right to own the property that civil laws give him” (Oeuvres 2:768). The European notion of freedom, if not “entirely derived from this concept of possession . . . [was] powerfully shaped by it” (Macpherson 3). Freedom as freedom to property had been the basis for the two revolutions that had shaped the very identity of the modern West in the eighteenth century—the French (Barnave) and the American (R. McKeon). The Declaration of the Rights of Man, cited here in Thomas Paine’s translation, summarized the principle in its third article: “The end of all political associations is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man; and these rights are liberty, property” (115).

Amari, on the contrary, saw an inescapable contradiction between the right to liberty and the right to property. Freedom began for him with Islamic law’s kind of social democracy—with the alienation of property, that is, onto the figure of the transcendent that grants the true rights of man. Human beings are not the owners of natural resources. God has simply entrusted them with a “viceregency” (khilafa) of his creation (see Moosa 196). Summarizing the point that Ibn Khaldun had made in the twelfth discussion (on Islamic jurisprudence) of his introduction, Amari made community, cooperation, and shared property—that is, asabiyah (for a discussion of the term, see Baali)—the pillars of the perfect Islamic society: “For sure, since Muslims admitted the existence of a Creator, they had to make Him lord of his own creations; but they thought He had left the land, and also water, air, fire, and light for universal use to all his creatures—not only to Muhammad, and even less so to the caliphs that were his successors” (Amari, Storia 2:18–19). The palimpsest of John Locke’s Second Treatise of Government is still readable here: “If it be difficult to make out ‘property’ upon a supposition that God gave the world to Adam and his posterity in common, it is impos-
sible that any man but one universal monarch should have any ‘property’ upon a supposition that God gave the world to Adam and his heirs in succession, exclusive of all the rest of his posterity” (Locke 5:115). Yet Locke had concluded that “to make use of [property] to the best advantage of life and convenience” God had let individuals “appropriate” nature for the benefit “of any particular men” (5:115–16); Amari, instead, left property public, as the very foundation of a sort of collective state. This did not mean, incidentally, that the Arabs lacked the famous idea of property, which just as famously Locke (like Rousseau after him) had conceived of as the beginning of civil society. It meant, rather, that the Prophet “tempered with wisdom and sometimes with humanity the exercise of that beastlike right” (Amari, Storia 2:21).

Whereas Locke had posed an unenforceable limit to private property, coinciding with a vague notion of personal need—“as much as any one can make use of to any advantage of life before it spoils” (5:117)—Amari celebrated instead the Islamic system of taxation that redistributed the benefits of private usage among civil society as a collective entity:

Koran and Sunna recognize the full property of cultivated land, as they recognize the use property of any other assets. Property is taxable: ten percent on the produce of the land, and two and a half percent on cattle and other assets. Muhammad had the sublime idea of calling this tax sadaqāt, that is to say, goodwill offer; and zakāh, which is translatable as “purification”: purification, he meant, of the sin that the rich would be judged for if he were to let the poor die of hunger, and the State treasury shrink. (2:19)

It was a kind of purification, indeed, which could redeem society from that very Marxian original sin that is accumulation. At any rate, once community rights overruled private property rights, as Amari suggested through his reading of Islamic law, the rights of man as formulated by Paine seemed now less universal and more the historical product of Western needs and circumstances. Aside, or even against them, another kind of rights of man, drawn from Islamic law, could in fact be imagined (similar controversies are recently addressed by Arkoun 106; Moosa; An-Na’Im).

If freedom was the essence of Europe, this essence, first of all, came from the Orient. More important, from the Orient came also the necessity to redefine that very essence of Europe, and to disentangle it from the structures of private property. In other words, Europe, like freedom,
could now be retheorized anew through the archives of Orientalism. As a matter of fact, not only freedom but also the notion of identity—be it a European or an Italian identity—had now to be retheorized starting from “Oriental” Sicily. If a politics of identity—Sicilian national identity; identity of Sicily with the norms of Europe—had been the goal of the _Vesper_, the _Storia_, instead, seemed now weary of exactly that notion.

Just as the Normans had forced the populations of Sicily to Christianize, says Amari, their historiography had Europeanized Sicily: a sense of ethnic identity, in other words, was thrust on Sicily; the island’s plurilingual (Amari, _Storia_ 1:322–24), plurireligious (3:541–43), and plurietnic (2:458) vicissitudes were erased, along with any trace of its Arab and Jewish history. The memory of the Oriental past, at best, was kept as a memento of a fundamental Sicilian imperfection that only European intervention, in the form of blonde warriors “whose language, complexion, and social order confirmed their Germanic origin” (3:18), could be capable of correcting. Sicily, corrupted and de-Europeanized by the Muslims, was at the receiving end of history—the history of freedom that, as in Montesquieu, was diffused from a Germanic north. To understand the forcefulness of this rhetoric of Europeanization concocted by early Norman historiography, and to imagine the resilience of such a rhetorical unconscious in the historiography of the island that spans across the centuries, it is enough to remember what Rosario Romeo, the authoritative historian of Sicily, would still write in 1950: “During the High Middle Ages, Sicily remained almost completely extraneous to the life of the West. What operated, instead, was . . . Arab influence . . . . Only with the Normans’ intervention Sicily was reconquered to Europe; in fact, . . . the reconquest was achieved only some centuries after the Saracens were expelled from the island” (_Risorgimento_ 11).

Amari’s interest in making of Sicily a proper subject in the history of the West, and of relegitimating it to Europe, however, had ended with the _Vesper_. The stake was now higher: Sicily was part of Europe and universal history not because it has been reconquered to it, but, simply, because it was. The original laboratory of social democracy, the experiment of some kind of exchequer of Muslim Sicily, the island had little to envy or to learn: it required to be part of universal history not because it adhered to some putative European standards, but because of its unique history and its difference.

Although Amari’s Sicily declared itself ready to join the Italian revolution, and although it sounded eager to enter Europe as a free subject—
one that had known freedom since the Arab conquest—Sicily did not join as sameness. Like Mazzini in “The Present Conditions and the Future of Europe” of 1852, Amari also believed that “the map of Europe must be redrawn” (Mazzini, *Opere* 2:521)—at the very least, to include Sicily as subject, not object, of continental politics. Yet whereas Mazzini believed that European “unity is necessary,” and that “unity of faith, of mission, of intents” had to be reached within Europe (*Opere* 2:545), Amari’s redrawing of the map shunned any such concept of unity: “Contrary to the Byzantine society that left Sicily, the Muslim one that took its place brought elements of activity, progress, and discord” (*Storia* 2:1). It was this element of discord that a theory of Europe had to be made to accept: discord in the sense of Attilio Scuderi’s “physiological cultural conflict,” which is not the intolerance of ignorance, but the “only way to construct multiple identities.” The *Storia* thus introduced, as facts, the multiethnic presence of Muslim Sicily as an element of discord in the Europe of standards. Methodologically, Orientalism, supplementing history, sounded a quite discordant note in the otherwise monotonous theorizations of Europe’s freedom. In the end, Orientalism, not history, could make of Sicily a part of Europe, and claim, at the same time, its difference. Or could it?

**A Sicilian Muqaddimah**

The day Amari woke up to find himself an Orientalist, he was an exile in Paris. His Orientalist education had been suspiciously French and imperial—under “the living legacy,” as Said would have it, of Antoine Isaac Silvestre de Sacy and his disciples. Noël Des Vergers’s 1841 French translation had introduced Amari to Ibn Khaldun; the classes of Joseph Toussaint Reinaud, the successor of Sacy at the École des Langues Orientales Vivantes, to Arabic; and the Bibliothèque Impériale to the archives. Yet the *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia* had very little intention of continuing any legacy at all—nor had its author the usual timidity of the parvenu in a new academic field. While declaring himself “forced,” with sarcastic confidence, to having to reject the usual authorities (Amari, *Storia* 1:18), Amari entered the field of Oriental studies with the clear intent of subverting it—the same way he, “hero of ideas,” had been wanting to subvert the Bourbon monarchy for years. The intention was not lost on his readers. The Italian Orientalist Isidoro Carino, in a review
for the *Archivio storico siciliano*, 1873, soon noticed that “Amari rejects the authority of this writer [Rampolli, author of the *Muslim Annals*], which on the contrary had been fundamental for the critical works of his predecessors; he lends authority, instead, to more than eighty Arabs, whom he studied in their printed works and in the manuscripts they have left in various libraries; he then compares them to Western chroniclers” (224–25). Pace Carino, what Amari was doing was nothing more than what many Orientalists and historians suppose they ought to be doing: work the archives and compare the sources. He had announced quite candidly: “I compared the texts [of Western scholars] with the original codes; I collected historical fragments, geographical descriptions, biographies, and both the prose and the poems of the Sicilian Arabs, or at least the titles of the works that had been lost—all that had been written in Arabic” (*Storia* 1:19). But of course one does not need to beg the authority of Said to realize that Amari was really not doing what Orientalists used to do: for the latter, the Muslim was a document, not a historian. A Muslim voice had been silenced by European Orientalism as the voice of an exotic Other so alien to the logic and rigor of (European) scholarship that it could only be studied and catalogued like the flora and fauna, but not engaged in conversation. In short, using Oriental sources as *historical subjects*, as writers (not merely objects) of history, or as a perspective on historical facts, was nothing short of a theoretical revolution for Amari and his public.

Just as European historiography had obscured the Arab as an accident and obstacle in the giddy progress of universal history, so had Orientalism obscured the Muslims of Sicily as something that could disturb the predetermined image of absolute difference and exoticism that any Muslim was supposed to embody. For Orientalism, in short, Muslim Europe could not have possibly ever been: “Despite all the intellectual culture the Muslim colonies of Spain and Italy contributed to European civilization, it has happened that their history has long remained obscure and neglected, as if it were the history of barbarian people” (Amari, *Storia* 1:1). As Carino noticed for us once again, Amari, after supplementing history’s deficiency with the knowledge of Orientalism, was now operating a “complete rewriting” of Orientalism itself (277).

In Amari’s privileging of the “eighty Arab writers” there was, therefore, not only a retheorization of historiography but also a retheorization of Orientalism in which the Arab had undergone a quite radical
transformation—from object of study to subject of history, from document to speaker. The authorities that Amari was challenging, in the last analysis, were those of instituted Orientalism itself. If, so far, the Orient, the Oriental, and “Orientalism belonged . . . to European scholarship” (Said, Orientalism 130), it started looking as if Europe, for Amari, could now belong to Arab historiography.

As I reach this felicitously subalternist conclusion, I would like to take advantage of the sense of accomplishment I have thus acquired and go back to that murkier and most ill-defined morning between the years 649 and 653 when the first Muslim battleship approached Sicily. This is an important morning, quite obviously, as it stages a first encounter between Sicilians and Muslims, between Europe and the Orient. But it is a morning of which we still know next to nothing: How was this first intercultural experience? Was it love at first sight? Certainly not on European accounts: “European memoirs all agree that they irrupted with great fury” (Amari, Storia 1:216). Benedictine monks, exaggerating as usual, “made the Muslims invade Sicily one century before Muhammad, and savagely kill Saint Placid along with thirty monks and nuns who lived in his monastery in Messina” (1:220). No doubt, according to Amari, we should not rely on European history. And we cannot rely on Orientalist scholarship either. On the other hand, Arab memoirs say—nothing. They do not really seem concerned with what was seen, from Muslim eyes, as yet another military triumph. In a variation of the Catholic “tell the sin but not the sinner,” they sometimes mention a victory, but not the vanquished (1:217), so that, were we to rely on them, we would never be sure whether we were reading a history of Tripoli or of Syracuse.

What Amari figures out is that Sicily, in truth, was not a major goal for the Muslims. At most, after the conquest of Spain (after 711), they looked at Sicily as a potential bridge with the African colonies. Here, some very pesky Berbers were keeping the Muslim war machine so busy, and the Arab chroniclers so focused—one relentless insurrection after another—that any conquest of Sicily could neither be accomplished nor narrated for a few centuries still. Even long after 652, when Byzantine Sicilians and Muslims seemed more and more divided by religion, and kept together by commerce only (1:359); when warfare between the two nations became a daily affair; when the possibility to colonize the island, taking advantage of the people’s unhappiness with Byzantium, seemed close at hand—even then a conquest of Sicily was not on Arabs’ minds:
In early 827, the Muslim forces discussed the utility of a Sicilian campaign. When another faction proposed to raid Sicily without remaining there and creating colonies, one Sahnûn ibn Qâdim got up to dissent: “How far is Sicily from Italy? he asked. “You can go back and forth two or three times from dawn to sunset,” was the answer. “And between Sicily and Africa?” And the answer: “One day and one night travel.” “Oh, even if I had wings, I wouldn’t fly to that island,” concluded Sahnûn, punning on his name that is given in Africa to a very cunning bird. At any rate, the witticism did not work. The majority, speaking in one voice, deliberated in favor of the war. But it had to be a war for the booty, not for a colonial conquest. (1:390)

Not only was Sicily nowhere to be found on the Muslims’ strategic plans; the battering of Sicilians was not in their chronicles either:

In the end, Sicily endured an incursion, of which we only know it happened in the year 204 of the hegira (between June 28, 819, and June 16, 820); that the attack was led by Muhammad ibn ‘Abd Allâh ibn al-Aglab, cousin of the Aghlabite prince Ziyadat Allâh; and that the Muslims, once they made enough prisoners, went back to Africa. It must have been, then, just a raid, or the venting of religious rage in some kind of punitive mission. (1:359)

So, comme un boucher, like a butcher, with no particular hatred or intention but a vague desire to “vent religious rage,” these Arabs, these future saviors and bearers of a new heroic age, would hit Sicilians, take them prisoners in Africa, and enter barely enough information in their chronicles to satisfy ordinary administration.

When the Muslims finally do conquer Syracuse in 827, helped by “a disgruntled general in the Sicilian army who led a mutiny and asked for help from the Aghlabids of Kairouan” (Mack Smith 1:3), the nonchalance of Arab chroniclers is only comparable to the partisanship of the Europeans. The latter, led by Tommaso Fazzello, a Dominican monk who wrote in 1560 the most voluminous Sicilian chronicle ever—De rebus siculis decades duae—were certainly eager to highlight the infidels’ ontological inhumanity. They reported with self-righteous indignation, for instance, of how “Halbi (that’s how they misspelled names and confuse chronology) would have sent forty thousand Saracens to Sicily, led by Fazzello, upon landing in Mazara burned his own ships, and conquered Selinunte, captured its citizens, and, to give an example to the
whole of Sicily, cooked them in copper cauldrons. As evidence of such events, Fazzello mentions Muslim annals and Leo the African, but does not explain who wrote, who translated, and who published such annals’’ (Amari, Storia 1:360–61). Leo the African, on the other hand, writing his memoirs at the court of Pope Leo X, to whom he had been given as a gift by some pirates from Djerba, was not the most reliable source either. Part of it was that he had to please Christendom, to which religion he had recently converted (until he had enough of popes, Eucharists, and holy cities, converted back to Islam, and disappeared from Europe forever). Even if he had never written a line about the cooked people of Selinunte, his writings had the newly convert kind of bias. Worse, the only documents he could find in the pope’s library were in fact Christian ones—hardly an alternative point of view to European histories. To supplement those documents, the well-learned Leo only had his Muslim memories—the ones from before the pirates, the abduction, and the holy water. And this is what really annoyed Amari about the African: in those memories, much like in Arab memoirs, there seemed to be no place for the conquest of Sicily. Here is Amari:

It is likely that Leo, mixing up clear memories with murkier speculations, must have heard the name of Alcamo while in Rome. Or perhaps he heard it from the Berbers. In any case, he must have put that name together with that of Assad—the only name he was certain had something to do with Sicily, so little had he read about it. As proof of the fact he knew that little about the Sicilian conquest, suffice it to read the short paragraph where he mentions it en passant. (1:363)

These “few lines” that Leo knew about the conquest of Sicily were not so much proof of the African’s scholarly negligence as of the fact that there was next to nothing in the whole of the Arab chronicles, the ta’rikh, the histories, or whatever you want to call them, about the conquest of Sicily. Sure enough, Amari the historian compares imperial compilations with Arab sources (this was his trademark Orientalist retheorization of historiography, after all). He even finds Oriental records more “genuine” (1:373) than the European ones. And yet, even forgiving the Orientals for relying sometimes on second- and thirdhand sources (1:376–77), or for exaggerating things “with the excuse that ‘so is said,’” (1:377) how can one ever excuse the sated nonchalance with which they mistake the day that forever changed Sicily and Europe—and the blood, and death, and Sicilian suffering—for “yet another one”?
Our heart was trembling—an Arab chronicler writes—trembling for old captain Assad, when, after praying, he suddenly turned to us: “These are the same barbarians you have found in the northern coast of Africa. They are your slaves! Do not fear them, oh Muslims!” So, he ran down the middle of the battlefield, and found himself soon caught up with the enemy. He came out of it all drenched in blood, blood dripping from the spear, blood through the arm, blood down to the armpit—so tells us the narrator, astounded by the bravery of the old warrior! The bravery of all other Muslims, courage being such an ordinary virtue among them, is never mentioned. All the chroniclers have to say is that this was a day like hundreds of others: heavy fighting, God on our side, great Muslim conquest, excellent loot, exemplary massacre of the Infidels. (1:398)

The Muslim conquest of Sicily, the event that Amari wants to inscribe in the annals of universal history, is but “a day like hundreds of others”! The whole chronicles of the conquest repeat this gesture of marginalization over and over again: “Byzantine chroniclers say nothing of the event, for fear of shame; the only record is preserved by the Arabs, but brief and vague” (1:469). From a different perspective hinging on the Arabocentrism of someone who “condemns as physical and moral vices all characteristics that are unusual to him” (2:353), the geographer Ibn Hawqal “pontificates: Palermo has no intelligent people, no learned men, no wits, no religion. There are no dumber people in the world, nor more odd. They are utterly uninterested in virtue, and quite eager to learn more vices” (2:351). But he does not even take the time to understand—in Amari’s historicist variation of Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach’s “Der Mensch ist was er isst” (A person is what he eats)—that “at the roots of so much iniquity is the fact that they are reduced to eat uncooked onions, lunch through supper, whether they are rich or poor” (2:351).

Ibn Khaldun does not do better, either, writing five centuries later, when he overlooks again the exploitation and poverty of the Sicilians and remembers one abuse “with hurry, as customary” (Amari, Storia 1:199), another massacre “briefly and vaguely” (1:440n). So, “lucky the one who can find a reference to the situation of the people of Sicily during the Muslim domination” (2:33)!

One starts understanding the frustration of Amari: the history that he is trying to rescue from obliteration has been caught between the rock of European falsifications and the hard place of Arab satiety. It is a history
lost between two dominances—the old Arab and the new European one—that, to draw from Ranajit Guha’s arguably parallel experience, ruled Sicily without hegemony: their histories, in other words, did not need to create any consensus about either domination in Sicilian consciousness (see Guha). The question is: How to write a history of such consciousness lost in the memory of all who conquered? How to write the story of “a bunch of men who, after all, could devote themselves to culture for one century or so, were subjugated as soon as they would start harvesting their first intellectual fruits, and then persecuted and cast away the next century. What is astounding is that, after all this, little bits of literary memories of them exist at all” (Amari, *Storia* 2:527). And how to find, in those “little bits of literary memories,” the traces for a history with no center and no ethnos, made by “the ferment of the many heterogeneous elements that together formed the people of Sicily, and above all of Palermo: many races; Islam and latent or living remnants of Christianity; unequal civil rights, wealth and misery, war and industry; tower of Babel where arrogance, resentment, abjection, and endless social sores would grow” (2:353)?

All these questions, once the Orientalist supplement had revealed itself to be insufficient, had to remain unanswered by Amari. His *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia* was, then, more than a history, the narrative of an impossibility. The Mediterranean perspective on universal history that Amari’s Orientalism had introduced certainly looked at things from a different angle than the one of hegemonic European historiography. Sicily could now even be claimed as a discordant part of Europe. And even the concept of Europe, at this point, could be retheorized again, to make it not the antithesis of the Orient, but an integral part of its history and civilization. This was thus a good story to tell. Yet even such a Mediterranean perspective could hardly give a history and an image to subaltern Sicily. It could, at its very best, summarize its disappearance between Europe, on the one hand, and the Orient, on the other. “I conclude,” Amari wrote at the close of his book, “moved by an irresistible urge to look into obscurity” (4:921). As if the history of Europe from the perspective of the *pigs*, in the end, could not possibly be told.